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Reasserting Theory in Professionally-based Initial Teacher Education

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Abstract

Conceptions of theory within initial teacher education in England are adjusting to new conditions where most learning how to teach is school-based. Student teachers on a programme situated primarily in an employing school were monitored within a practitioner enquiry by their university programme tutors according to how they progressively understood theory. The tutors meanwhile also focused on how their own conceptions of theory responded and evolved in relation to their students' changing perceptions. This resulted in the students retrospectively identifying and developing theoretical and analytical capabilities. University sessions became a reflective platform from which to critically interrogate the emergent story of what it is to be a teacher in a school. There are implications for schools and universities about what it is to learn to be a teacher.

(132 words)

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Keywords

Theory, Employment-based, Initial Teacher Education, Subjectification, Apprenticeship

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Introduction

How does one conceptualise theory within the context of initial teacher education? As teacher education programmes within England have been reshaped and restructured to meet new priorities and resource constraints, erstwhile conceptions of programmes having distinct practical and theoretical components have been disrupted. Theory/ practice splits have been progressively replaced by conceptions of practice that integrate situated conceptions of theory responsive to the needs of practice. And many re-conceptualisations of teacher education have privileged practical components to the detriment of theory and analysis. This paper is centred on the question of how theory might be re-asserted in this new scenario. Yet in tackling this theme there is a recognition that the practices that theory serves are in a state of constant evolution. Theory itself must adjust to new circumstances. Indeed the very provenance of the term theory is at stake within contemporary educational practices. It can no longer be seen primarily as a mere state of affairs, or the outcome of past research now available to the new generation seeking guidance from their antecedents. Rather theory needs to be asserted as cutting edge analytical engagement with new situations. And the very people experiencing newly formatted educational contexts might be best placed to carry out this reformulation of theory. In this reformulation, theory would become *the production* of new analytical strategies created by those with specific interests in securing professional agency in changing professional landscapes. Teachers themselves need to be equipped with the capability to create and own the theoretical and analytical resources that are up to the task of the teachers asserting their professional agency in the face of multiple demands on their practices.

By observing groups of student teachers negotiating entry in to the profession through professionally situated routes this paper observes the opportunities that might be available to rethink theory. This entails some experimentation with strategies targeted at enhancing critical capability within university elements of training. The paper is centred on an initial teacher education programme designed in accordance with governmental ambitions. Firstly, in an attempt to extend the range of modes of entry for teachers, the programme offered a route for mature entrants preferring not to return to higher education. The programme was presented as having a practical emphasis where the student teacher was employed in schools rather than being a student studying at university. Secondly, the programme provided an alternative mode of entry, locating the governance of teacher education outside of the higher education sector, providing an employment based route across two schools avoiding problems with earlier (licensed teacher) schemes that centred on training in one school. In the new scheme there was a greatly reduced role for university input. School staff members were responsible for everyday training supervision. The paper examines how this model changed conceptions of the role of higher education in the training of teachers. It builds on an earlier paper documenting conceptions of theory evident on such courses (Smith and Hodson, 2010). This present paper goes further by asking how the dual roles assigned to schools and higher education have resulted in a re-positioning and reconstruction of the theoretical and analytical dimensions of practice. It also examines the opportunities this reconfiguration to training model offers to university tutors displaced from their former role of overseeing both practical and theoretical dimensions of the training programme. And the paper records early attempts by tutors to respond to changing understandings of theory.

These concerns have emerged through our practical involvement in changing patterns of teacher education in England, consequential to educational standards having become a high profile national issue in recent years. Successive governmental directives have sought to ensure for schools a more central role in administering teacher education. This earlier resulted in many universities developing *partnerships* with their local schools that were later legislated to bring conformity and precision. The regulations dictated not only minimum lengths of time that student teachers were required to spend on placement in partnership schools, but also transferred responsibilities for practical training to them. The government had asserted a simplistic depiction of the student teacher developing practical skills in the school and subject knowledge in the university. Many university providers argued that the changes had “reinforced the hierarchical relations and a clearer demarcation of practice in schools from educational theory” (Dunne, Lock & Soares, 1996, p. 41). These new arrangements introduced a range of concerns: the equity of the relative distribution of resources, control, quality assurance, penalties and accountability (Taylor, 2000, p. 55). Our interest here however is directed at how these structural changes have now led to a reconfiguration of how theory is currently understood. But also we consider how it might be reconfigured. More generally we examine how the generic skills of becoming a teacher might be approached. We situate our analysis in a programme where the move of teacher education into schools has been taken one step further.

What is theory?

Our scenario comprises rapidly evolving conceptions of teacher education. Changes in England are partially motivated by cost cutting measures disguised as locating teacher education more in schools settings, where the real business of teaching is seen as taking

place. Yet a route in to teaching that enables rapid professional immersion motivates many potential students, especially mature entrants. And it will be suggested that this motivation can link to an occasional antithesis to what the students call “theory”, associating theory, as they sometimes do, with a detachment from the real world of practice. In the emergent “professional” models of teacher education students are obliged to get up to speed fairly rapidly in a rather brutal initiation into the bustle of every day work as a teacher. This results in the brief stints in university being regarded as something of a respite from this intensity. The intellectual space this provides opens an alternative door to thinking about the role of theory in terms of how it might support practice. Yet what do such students know of theory and how it relates to teaching? It would seem that the demarcation of practice as distinct from theory was mirrored in the students’ early media-driven fantasies of what it was to be a teacher, as well as in the succession of government initiatives reifying the professional space in those terms (cf. Hanley, 2007, 2010).

Their experience of school during their early days on the course primarily relates to their own youthful experience as pupils, maybe many years ago, from where theoretical perspectives may not have been immediately forthcoming. Their rapid placement in schools puts them on the other side as it were. Yet their preparation for the new vocabulary is rather slight. The apprenticeship model, of doing the same as the other teachers, does not readily provide the analytic capability required to develop generic skills to span a range of institutional settings. And the limitations of placements with one teacher in one school for extended periods soon emphasise the student teacher’s individuality and of the need for an approach to teaching that suits his or her more specific aspirations. These pressures result in students approaching university sessions as a space in which these wider issues might be encountered and addressed. In meeting with other student teachers the focus shifts for the

individual from “what works for me” in my present school to “what works for teachers” more generally. The image they sometimes held of university theory as a found object written in books is sidelined towards addressing the more pressing demands of building a technology for articulating practice. Theory, if that is what it is to be called, emerges from an unexpected place, and it is needed, urgently. That is, the students’ felt need for generic capability circumscribes the very space of theory.

An early motivation for entrants to the course was the declared practical emphasis. As many students had experienced other workplaces there was a strongly expressed attraction to remaining in employment and learning on the job as far as possible. As mature entrants there was also a commonly expressed disinclination to be re-assigned as a student at university doing theory. Theory was widely understood as reading books rather than getting on with the practical task of learning to teach. It was this somewhat limited conception of theory that provoked the student teachers into a quest for a more practical orientation. Yet it was this somewhat impoverished starting point that opened the door to university tutors whose value and support became clearer once the student teachers quickly established the need for capabilities that extended beyond those required for specific locations. In particular, developing the capacity to make personal professional decisions rapidly became a strong motivator after having encountered guidance from school-based colleagues espousing their own particular preferences.

Yet this theory is not necessarily what university tutors had in mind. Finding themselves employed on a new teacher education route, they have been rather displaced from their own earlier models of practice. There is some attraction to being in the vanguard of models that the government wishes to implement more widely. But there is a lack of familiarity with the new demands they themselves are encountering. They had had what had seemed to be a

perfectly adequate conception of what theory in the context of teacher education, as they had known it. Now there seems to be some question as to whether that conception is in any way sustainable in this new venue. One, however, needs to question how much that earlier version of theory was itself merely context specific. It had been an understanding of theory fit for purpose in those earlier conditions, with its specificity shielded by its familiarity.

Theory can manifest itself in many ways. Given that we do face new conditions is it perhaps time for us to think what theory is more generally within teacher education? What do we want it to be in the new conditions? And how might we make it become that?

Since the conditions are new, neither students nor their tutors yet know what theory is to become. They might not yet recognise it even if they saw it. And the tutors were cognisant of the risks of supposing they knew too early on in the process what they were looking for (Lather, 2007; Pirrie and MacLeod, 2010). Yet might this new uncertainty as to what theory is be the very space in which the intellectual demands of teaching can be negotiated? Now that universities are to be released from supporting the everyday survival of student teachers in schools it might be suggested that they have a clearly defined challenge of negotiating a new role for theory, a negotiation that doubles as a new form of university teacher education. This model would be centred on providing a platform from which practices in school might be contemplated from a distance towards the creation of analytical apparatus supportive of immediate practice demands.

Method

Two groups, each of about twenty students, were included in this study. One group comprised student teachers focusing of primary education, the other on secondary education. Each group was taught for the university element by one of this team of authors.

The university element comprised a mere seven days attendance over the course of the academic year (09/10). The remainder of time was spent in schools. Various devices were employed to secure the collection of data. These included regular discussions in university sessions centred on students reflecting on their experiences in schools. There was a particular emphasis on how they understood the generic skills of teaching as opposed to mere techniques that worked in local situations. For example, all students were employed to train in at least two schools to broaden their experience. This enabled comparisons to be made between issues specific to one school and those concerns of relevance across both schools. These discussions were supplemented by regular requests for the student teacher to produce reflective notes documenting current concerns and attempted resolutions to perceived challenges. Again these notes were periodically reviewed to enable student teachers to pinpoint and mark key aspects and features of their on-going training experience. This also permitted review of past perspectives, a history of how things had been successively and variously seen. Aspects of these discussions were recorded so that students were able to revisit statements that they had made in earlier sessions. This review of earlier discussions encouraged students to reflect on how they had shifted in the location of their concerns and on how they understood broader changes to their conceptions of their own educational and professional objectives. The inventory of past reflective assessments could later be sequenced to provide an account of how the student saw themselves at successive stages (cf. Brown, 1996; Brown and Jones, 2001). Yet these “‘reflections’ are performative, not mere neutral reflections. They represent engagement in the social life being reported. ... (and) can also be seen as performative or generative of the reality (they) seeks to depict.” (Brown, 2008, p. 422). A particular research focus was on how the student

teachers revealed their emergent analytical capabilities and increasingly saw the need to develop these capabilities, but in so doing they changed who they were.

During this process the two course tutors created their own analytical diaries documenting their own evolving perspectives of their role on the programme. This documentation included regular evaluations of how the student teachers represented their experience on the course in discussion and in reflective writing. This evaluation considered student teacher experience from the point of view of how tutor inputs might be adjusted to further challenge and develop student teacher conceptions of teaching and in particular analytical aspects of these conceptions. Their self-imposed research brief was to monitor how theory was understood by the student teachers, as a notion, at successive stages of the course. They also sought to monitor their own conceptions of theory since the specificity of this programme obliged the tutors to rethink their role as tutor given the shifting academic parameters of the training model. But also as practitioner researchers themselves the tutors considered the material collected from the perspective of how it functioned as data in terms of being revelatory of student teacher experience. There was a persistent ambition to improve the quality of data by finding strategies that better enabled student teachers to construct their experiences in more vivid terms, both for their own benefit as trained teachers, but also for the benefit of their tutors' motive centred on building new conceptions of theory congruent with this training model.

Theoretically, we depict the students' progression as the adoption of successive subject positions where the students identified with particular discursive accounts of their emergent practices as a teacher (Walshaw, 2007). We suggest that successive identifications with particular ways of being teachers were only made possible once experiences permitted the recognition of particular analytic frameworks and understandings of themselves. And as

Convery (1999, p. 139) reminds us “identity is created rather than revealed through narrative”. We see the narratives through which the students account for their changing perspectives as formative of their professional sense of self. Through saying it, they become it. Or as Walshaw (2008, p. 135) puts it more precisely: “In the telling of the teaching accounts ... the construction of an identity is spoken into existence and lived in relation to processes and relationships operating in social spaces ... it is continuously evolving, and structured through language and inter-subjective negotiations”. And in seeking to pinpoint how identities are spoken in to existence with reference to the discursive apparatus available we further attempt to capture the experience the individuals have of that discursive immersion towards building self-knowledge (Butler, 2005).

This perspective is crucially different to many conceptions of apprenticeship or identity that fuel conceptions of “legitimate peripheral participation” in “communities of practice” (Delamont, 2010), which, in its original articulation, does not “consider movement across multiple activity settings” (Timmons Flores, 2007, pp. 398-399) and the consequential fragmentation of identity. Niesz (2010) has explored this difficulty in relation to legitimate peripheral participation and how differences between settings might be generative of identities, practices, cultural forms in situated activity. The very conception of apprenticeship often prominent in such models derived from Lave and Wenger does not sit well in the teacher education model to be described here where “apprenticeship” is being promoted by a cost –cutting government to limit university input.

The approach adopted in this present paper, more widely draws on Foucault’s notions of subjectivity and Butler’s account of how individuals experience such subjectification “in terms of simultaneous mastery and submission” (Davies, 2006, p. 425). The paper portrays self-knowledge as being distributed across a multitude of discursive domains that can phase

in and out of prominence according to time, perspective and modes of identification. Such discursive generation, however, has a propensity to police the activities it describes (Foucault, 1990). Yet more recent conceptions of subjectivity (e.g. Butler, 2005; Žižek, 2008) detect the spaces that such regulative discourses fail to mop up towards opening new spaces for action.

We commence by providing a staged presentation of data that documents the student teacher's evolving account of their perceived professional and training priorities. This comprises accounts of student teachers talking and writing reflectively at different stages of the programme, combined with later reflection on the student teacher's perceptions of their own learning trajectories. The data reveals evidence of student teacher immersion in a model that produces particular understandings of what it is to be a teacher. Later data also more directly focuses on the student teacher's explicit engagement with their perceived need for analytical and theoretical strategies.

Analysis of student teacher data

The Significance of Practice

At the commencement of their programme of employment based training, student teachers were asked amongst other things, how they were presently making sense of their learning and professional development in the university and in the school. Not everyone was able to respond to this particular enquiry. A review of the collected written responses to the question reveals unsurprisingly that the development of professional skill and knowledge to enable them to teach is central to the student teachers' concern at this time:

[The programme will provide] the skills I need...practical on the job approach is an ideal way for me to learn... You are constantly learning on the job. [It] gives you a unique chance to develop relationships with children... [School] will develop my behaviour skills in order to become an effective teacher.

The school setting and, in particular, support and learning from “excellent teachers” is seen directly or indirectly as key to addressing professional skill and knowledge development. This is indicative of the students being centred in the world of work, where the school-based component and its practical demands swamp any reflective dimension. Expertise is located in the teachers they encounter, where mimicry of such teachers provides an effective kind of camouflage (Holmes, 2010). The role for the university in this early perspective is more muted and general. Where a role for the university is specified, it is drawn in terms of facilitating development to teach, in broadening understanding of pedagogical strategies or of children’s learning. It is seen explicitly by one or two students as personal professional development with a hint of the student teacher’s own role in creating a professional identity (cf. Walshaw, 2008): “This experience is forcing me to look beyond being a student teacher and instead presenting myself as a professional ... giving me the responsibility.” “Ultimately, it’s down to me.” Yet it must be remembered that at this stage the students have only had one day in university to make any assessment of what university sessions might contribute. And the tutors had seen the priority of this first session to make an assessment of where the students were in their conceptualisations of the professional challenges that they faced. The more pressing demands of their school location, where they had been for most of the time, insisted on immediate practical functionality, which dominated thoughts at the time. The students still occupied the fantasy of university being the place that offered theory, something that they did not particular value at the outset. And even this expectation was not being met at this early stage.

The identification of Generic Teaching Capabilities

As the student teachers began to move through their programme, and at the second university session, the feedback from the earlier review of collected responses, which showed a “muted” role for the university, was shared with them. Afterwards, student teachers were asked, once again, if school was so eminent in the general picture they had initially presented, and how they viewed the place of central university training in their development. They began, in discussions noted by the tutor, to offer a more explicit vision of the university as space to share ideas about school experience and to rehearse thoughts on practice. There was also opportunity to bring coherence to their training through making more generic connections across practice in schools, and between such generic connections and “theoretical information” covered at the university, which gave them “more powerful access to lessons”. The overwhelming theme for student teachers at this stage was of the university being a place of respite and reassurance, one in which confidence could be gained from mutual certainty and uncertainty. When the feeling of being “unsafe” at school was probed further, student teachers confirmed that, for example, in central university training “we’re all learning together; it’s OK to be wrong ... because no-one here is perfect.” This was further supported by a common view that they did not feel pressured by professional expectation, or at least, not in the same way as they did by colleagues at school. University allowed opportunity for student teachers to celebrate small successes, which in school would be taken for granted by more experienced colleagues, for example, succeeding in certain aspects of behaviour management. Apart from seeing schools as places which were often too busy to offer time to address their learning needs, student teachers voiced the view that colleagues in school were operating at a different “level” and

that in order to appreciate the student teachers' viewpoint, "needed to go back a level". The finding was reemphasised in a reference to a question e-mailed to student teachers by their tutor, following a surprising enquiry by one student teacher at a session about practice in her lead school. This asked why student teachers might not be placed to ask questions of school practice whilst they were at school. The question prompted responses ranging from "why make it harder for yourself?" to a diplomatic acceptance of difference in competing conceptions of "what works". A dominant emerging theme here was one of it not being the student teachers' place to question practice in school:

I think that I feel as an unqualified member of staff that I do not know as much about school policies and what works and what doesn't ... and so would not want to argue with [more experienced members of staff] them? I also think while we are in our schools that we do not want to be seen as trying to 'rock the boat'.

The university environment had the effect of allowing student teachers opportunity to develop ideas and a voice, or as one student teacher put it, "to figure things out for myself." That is, the university sessions provided an external forum for *critical* engagement with the issues they encountered in school, since possibilities for critique were tempered within school. For example, notions of being at a particular "level" and the authority that certain "levels" afforded clouded from view the benefits that might be derived from the novelty of pursuing alternative perspectives or interests. Apprenticeship models can have built-in blinkers to vision that result in apprentices following the master to the detriment of their own more fulsome participation in cultural renewal, understood and expressed through their identifications with new agenda, perhaps unknown to the master. Yet further, the specificity of issues in the particular school setting could be translated in the university sessions as wider issues relevant to teaching more generally. That is, the discussions were predicated

more on building analytical apparatus fit for purpose, or even multiple purposes, rather than merely solving specific problems.

The Emergence of Conscious Analysis

Approximately one third of the way through the programme, the student teachers' growing need to devise strategies that supported their own professional aspirations led to an enhanced ability to articulate conceptions of their own teaching. In university sessions, during group discussion tutors increasingly probed the student teachers on responses they had previously offered. This provided a site for shared student/tutor constructions (cf. Enosh, Ben-Ari and Buchbinder, 2008). When asked what "figuring things out" meant, student teachers spoke about feeling supported to articulate their thoughts: "discussion helps me to understand what I *do* know myself." For some, discussion was held to "grow" answers in that "throwing around ideas" led to a conclusion, or developed a "theory". Typically, university training enabled ideas to become more refined, *as* ideas. Student teachers were able to articulate changes in the direction of their thinking and had realised that skills they had learned were transferable. In addition, there was a greater awareness of what they needed to learn. They seemed to be becoming aware not only of their success in development so far, but also of the next steps in their progress. That is, they were becoming better able to conceptualise trajectories for their own professional development and make them happen (Brown and Roberts, 2000). The shift in their personal coordinates permitted re-evaluations of the past that opened new trajectories to the future, less troubled by earlier anxieties. A crucial point here is that time is not seen as linear, trajectories are not seen as continuous. A move to new subjective coordinates rewrites the past where "this retroactivity is inscribed into reality itself" (Žižek, 2010, p. 28). Discussion at this point

suggested that the student teachers were developing a sense of agency, making things happen, crafting the space in/on their terms, rather than merely doing what they were told. They reported knowing “what was expected” of them and argued that university sessions were beginning to offer explanations, showing why certain actions have impact in the classroom. Consequently, student teachers felt more “in control”. Asked about the meaning of being more in control, they talked about not simply doing things, but *consciously* adopting ideas, knowing why things were done, and seeing the relevance and impact of ideas to better link practice with theory. For example, one student teacher previously employed as a teaching assistant suggested that as a teaching assistant they would “do things” whilst now as a student teacher, they “knew why”. Specific actions were being read against, and contextualised by, the student’s own discursive structures, rather so much as scripts being followed subserviently. Another instance of how student teachers articulated the impact of ideas explored at university on their practice details this process particularly well:

Found this [technique] a successful way of the students sharing their knowledge & teaching with each other. Also, the session made me more aware of how much, or little, I talk in lessons. I have made a conscious effort to allow the students to make a more active/ lead role in discussions. This allows the teacher to check students’ learning and understanding.

A point was made by one student teacher that being given “good” ideas at university did not necessarily change their views. This could signify an, as yet, unconscious awareness on the part of such student teachers about how changes in practice can lead to changes in thinking. Or more precisely, practical problems encountered in school that are tackled *as* practical problems, could be aired as descriptions in university sessions that reconfigure the

original conception of the practical problem. The problem could now be understood with respect to emergent forms of analytic apparatus rather than just as a practical problem.

Explicit Awareness of Theory as Acquired

As student teachers travelled through the second term of their three-term programme, some student teachers began to articulate theory/ practice relationships explicitly when prompted:

For me theory is something I have acquired so far in my young career, whereas I see practice as how I use this and adapt this. I suspect this will change though, coming full-circle so that my own experiences and reflections shape my own theories, which again will be adapted. I believe we will get a chance to question the theory wherever we are as [student teachers]. In-school obviously perhaps gives us the most opportunity, where we can observe and adapt ... The central training gives us opportunities to reflect on our own and our colleagues' practices and adapt this way; whereas university sessions perhaps give us mostly theory to be adapted, although again it offers a forum to discuss this.

This more explicit, but positive articulation of the relationship between “theory” and “practice” is seemingly fraught with contradiction. On the one hand theory is acquired almost as an externally defined object, mainly at the university and then adapted more directly, in practice. On the other hand, classroom experience is used to shape his ideas, which then, in a sense, get reified as theory. But experience can also come from peers at the university and be adapted from here. Another explanation might be that it shows the significance of how the two angles interact through the student teacher's agency to give meaning to the situation in which he finds himself. Yet this very awkwardness opens a pedagogical opportunity. To tease out what this student means would be to extend the account towards the student thinking differently, as a result of working through his thinking a little further. Another explicit interpretation taken from e-mail correspondence between

tutor and student teacher illustrates the difficulty she faced in taking on theoretical ideas, not borne directly from practice:

To be honest, I struggle to make links between the theory I learn at the [university] sessions and practice at school. I find listening to others ideas and sharing ideas and advice is incredibly useful, but I struggle to put into practice ideas we learn about through theory.

The provenance of theory is unclear. It appears to be understood primarily as *something* to be learnt from others rather than being a process of developing analytical capability through her practice. When probed on the difference between the two, she added:

I also find the theory work that we do in these sessions extremely interesting but this is where I struggle to make the link between theory and practice. I always find it easy to put practical advice like ‘try this...’ or ‘have you thought of ... into my practice upon returning to school. However, this is not the case when looking at theory such as research or case studies. I think the problem is that I struggle to make these connections on my own and identify where I can use it in my own practice.

For this student teacher, relevance is heightened by the immediacy between ideas and practice and clearly, there are implications for teacher educators in assisting such student teachers in connecting the two. An analytical framework that makes explicit opportunities to discuss, link and learn from different practice situations is one way of realising such connections. It is in the very process of realising such connections that “theory” becomes embodied. Or more strongly, it is through such processes that theory comes in to being. The search for it produces it. This process echoes Žižek’s (2009, p. 128) account of a man desperately trying to express his love in a letter where “his oscillations, the letter’s fragmentation, etc” reveal the love that would be less convincing if it could be conveyed in

a smooth delivery. Likewise, theory would be more authentic if it is not a mere re-discovery of an earlier conception. Britzman (2009) has characterised formal education as encounter with “an avalanche of certainty”, an encounter with certain knowledge, with tests and measures of success and failure. Bibby (2010, pp 5-6) argues:

To begin to make sense of this and other education-based contractions, of these reductions and minimizings, we will need to think differently. To not get sucked into the naming and measuring, the acting and blaming, the swapping of this constraint for that restriction, to step aside and think about *why*, at some level, we feel compelled to collude and perpetuate it, requires a different set of tools and a different language.

“Theory” might be more effective if we do not know what it is, but rather we maintain towards it an attitude of enquiry and experimentation.

Theory as an Analytical Process

In the final stages of the programme, most student teachers had begun to realise that theory was something they created. It was no longer seen as off-the-peg advice found in books or simply acquired from “out there”. Theory, however, was still largely taken to mean ideas, which were acquired and seen to have wider value. For example, generality was thought of highly when it had been generated within the student teachers’ university group. Some student teachers, however, talked about more abstract research ideas allowing them to “short circuit” the need for personal or shared group experience. For others, theory was only worthy of consideration if it worked. When these student teachers were asked to think further about whether there was any sense in which theory could be useful if it could not be successfully applied, those who responded used analogies from their practice to articulate their thinking:

My opinion is to become an effective teacher is not to be afraid to make changes to the “plans”. For instance I wanted to challenge one of my year 9 lower-ability [classes] with a demanding starter. I realized that the result was not what I expected: the pupils struggled and felt frustrated. So I turned this activity into a whole class activity, which was more productive. Everybody needs some theory in order to apply in a certain situation. If a theory is not working with one of my classes that does not mean that this theory is irrelevant. It simply means that this theory is not appropriate for this situation or I may not use it [correctly]. Theory is effective in a sense that I know it contributes to ... better self-examination.

Tutors in university sessions proposed that theory had a utility value as a tool to provide reference points and to aid thinking and lesson planning. Thus university training provided a focal point for testing ideas, particularly those ideas borne of the student teachers’ shared teaching experience. Student teachers communicated a clear sense of a shared group experience and of being allowed space “to think”. The group experience was seen as essential to reviewing their practice and developing their professional autonomy. This they saw as contrasting with their school experience where they were persistently challenged “to do”. Tutors offering specific content or more abstract ideas within the sessions were seen as less important:

Sessions are very much reflecting on your own experience, as opposed to discussing what’s going to happen and generating ideas...what we’ve experienced as a group...coming together as a group...this [university course] has been the opportunity to question [existing] ideas.

Asked what the training experience would have been like without the group discussion sessions, several student teachers were quick to respond, some quite emotively: “Hell. It’s not just what’s being taught here [at university]...we are on our own [at school]...learning for ourselves and learning from each other and bouncing ideas [at university]”. The same

student teacher, in response to a question about whether this group learning fitted with any idea about “theory”, replied: “Yes...because you are always discussing pros and cons, even if you don’t realise it.” Prompted as to whether ideas might have been just as well discussed by meeting as a group without the input of the university or its tutor, student teachers typically talked about the university providing structure and direction for the sessions. Moreover, the university tutor’s approach was seen, by many, as significant to their learning: “You [tutor] would need to be there”. “You encourage us to reflect”. “You offer further challenge”. “You make us approach things from different angles”.

It must be acknowledged, however, that a significant minority of student teachers either did not contribute openly to discussions or respond to e-mailed questions. Some apologised for this, as if acknowledging a lost opportunity, or what they saw as the efforts of the tutors involved to encourage debate. This did not mean that they had not found listening helpful. Others wrote negatively in an evaluative questionnaire about the impact of the feedback provided on perceptions of their development on their professional learning. For them, the time “would have been better spent *learning*” (our emphasis). It is perhaps not surprising that in a demanding employment-based training programme, some simply are not able to use the space to think provided when the next day’s practice and needing to *learn* specifically for that is ever pressing.

Conclusion

In summary, data collected over the year suggested that the student teachers had developed an ability to both generate and to identify analytical apparatus. This analytical engagement with new situations was sometimes described as “theory”. They demonstrated a willingness to articulate the processes in which they were involved, both in their school-based training

and in university sessions, which were beginning to secure for them some professional agency. They were able to variously identify with the differing ways in which the two elements of their training contributed to this agency.

Summarising the school-based training as driving the ability “to do”, they were able to see how their daily performance in the classroom was informed by the demands being made upon them to continually extend and develop their individual interactions with learners. In school, governed as they were by discourses of performativity, they were being expected to develop their understanding of the curriculum, their ability to plan, teach, evaluate and assess ever-extending areas. They recognised the requirements for them to control behaviour, raise standards and to uphold the aims and values of the school. In this context, they were also able to identify that they were expected to operate within parameters laid down for them by others. In these busy and demanding situations there was an absence of time, opportunity or encouragement to act with autonomy. As student teachers, they were expected to operate in an environment over which they had only rudimentary control. Indeed, they spoke enthusiastically of “becoming a real teacher” when they felt many of these constraints would be removed. They were aware that the school environment presented little opportunity for them to question experienced professionals or to extend their own reflection. And in this recognition of these actual constraints they *conceptualised* a space outside of these constraints where they might be able to *act* differently.

In contrast, they saw the university-based sessions as challenging them “to think”. Here they were encouraged to understand the reasoning behind their actions. They recognised that university sessions focused less on the specifics of practice and offered the opportunities to generalise thinking. They appreciated working with other student teachers at a similar stage in their professional development. They identified this opportunity as

helping them to develop their thinking. Working in the university community, as a group, lent them energy, enthusiasm and support to do this. They also spoke of the way in which the requirement to articulate their thinking and to enter into dialogue with others often led to changes in their views. However, they also identified that community alone was not enough to generate this process. The presence of structure and the leadership provided by university tutors were, however, felt to be vital in ensuring development. And this structure echoes the ways in which we all collectively make sense of what it is to be a teacher, but a structure that allows each of us to produce our conceptions differently.

From the perspective of a university tutor there is clearly some disappointment to be expected relating to the reduced space assigned to the analytical dimension of the teacher's profile within this new model of teacher education. And without doubt, the opportunities for students to build analytical capability are fewer than would be the case in courses located more firmly in the university setting. This paper should not be read as a case for introducing such models of teacher education that have many limitations. Yet there are opportunities associated with such models directly arising from the student teacher's situation in a professional location that might inform teacher education practices more generally. Students quickly realise the need to develop personal resources that give them professional autonomy and university tutors are well placed to assist the student teachers in negotiating this need. It is this shared negotiation of what constitutes professional agency that fuels the university element. The programme structure assigns apprenticeship roles to student teachers and marginal roles to tutors. There are clearly limitations to these specifications that reveal their inadequacies quickly. The more marginalised contribution to the training process defined after the lion's share of the responsibilities has been assigned to

the school-based component has resulted in a major challenge to university tutor agency and the space assigned to theoretical or analytical aspects.

Yet this very positioning creates the framework for resistance to the subordination that apprenticeship entails. “For what is it that enables a purposive and significant reconfiguration of cultural and political relations, if not a relation that can be turned against itself, reworked and resisted” (Butler, quoted by Davies, 2006, p.426). This identification of inadequacies provides a positive and productive role for tutors and a professional challenge for student teachers triggered by a realisation that their erstwhile model was insufficient to support effective practice. The university role is recast as one primarily concerned with the analytical dimensions of teacher education. The release of the university from primary responsibility for providing practical support for student teachers in school settings enables the creation of a platform from which student teachers can develop critical capability. And this capability is centred on a conception of theory concerned with producing generic teacher knowledge that can be adapted to meet the challenges of the ever-changing professional landscape.

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