Manchester Metropolitan University

e-space

Manchester Metropolitan University's Research Repository

Please cite the Published Version

Hulme, Moira, Olsson Rost, Anna and O'Sullivan, Rachel (2022) Developing an online practicum in professional education: a case study from UK teacher education. In: Applied Degree Education and the Future of Learning. Lecture Notes in Educational Technology . Springer Singapore, Singapore. ISBN 9789811698118 (hardback); 9789811698125 (ebook)

DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-9812-5_15

Publisher: Springer Singapore

Version: Accepted Version

Downloaded from: https://e-space.mmu.ac.uk/628775/

Usage rights: © In Copyright

Additional Information: This version of the chapter has been accepted for publication, after peer review (when applicable) and is subject to Springer Nature's AM terms of use, but is not the Version of Record and does not reflect post-acceptance improvements, or any corrections. The Version of Record is available online at: http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-9812-5_15

Enquiries:
If you have questions about this document, contact openresearch@mmu.ac.uk. Please include the URL of the record in e-space. If you believe that your, or a third party's rights have been compromised through this document please see our Take Down policy (available from https://www.mmu.ac.uk/library/using-the-library/policies-and-guidelines)

Developing an Online Practicum in Professional Education: A Case Study from UK Teacher Education

Moira Hulme, Anna Olsson-Rost and Rachel O'Sullivan
Manchester Metropolitan University, UK.
m.hulme@mmu.a.uk, K.Olsson.Rost@mmu.ac.uk, R.A.Osullivan@mmu.ac.uk

Abstract

A 'practicum', 'clinical experience' or 'internship' is an established component of professional preparation in education, health, social work, law, accountancy and engineering. Across diverse occupational fields, employability and work readiness are gaining prominence in college marketing strategies. The disruption to work placements during the Covid-19 pandemic in programmes linked to licensure rapidly increased the pace and scale of virtualisation and the need for systematic evaluation of curriculum re-design. This chapter presents a case study of the transition to a fully online practicum for UK university students training to be teachers during 2020/21. Drawing on interviews with students, university tutors and school partners, the chapter outlines key learning about partnership formation and innovation. The evaluation suggests that online supervision requires participants to work harder to establish a positive working alliance and sense of belonging across time-space-digital media. The study highlights the importance of iterative review to promote reciprocity, transparency and voice.

Keywords: practicum, internship, online learning, online teaching

Introduction

Within tertiary education, there is general agreement on the value of experiential or work-integrated learning. The reported benefits of workplace learning include enhanced learning outcomes, graduate employability, smoother transitions into employment and reduced risk of attrition (Pereira, Vilas-Boas and Rebelo, 2020). Experiential learning outside academia is a critical component in diverse occupational fields that include hospitality (Park and Jones, 2021), engineering (Male and King, 2019), sports management (Lu, 2021), translation (Schnell and Rodríguez, 2017), as well as disciplinary subfields such as applied psychology (Schweinsberg et al., 2021). Work experience is variously described as the 'practicum', 'residency', 'internship', 'field experience' or 'industry placement' (Hora et al., 2017, 2020). Experience ranges from formal assessment linked to occupational licensure, to work-integrated learning within academic awards, to community-based 'service learning'. All forms aim to combine academic learning with practical skills and/or civic responsibility (Grassetti, Solic and Getz, 2021). Experience within workplace settings for tertiary students draws on the dual discourses of human capital theory (preparation of the future workforce and contribution to the health of the economy) and cultural capital (the inculcation of civic values). Community engagement through service learning is commonly used within narratives that support the civic mission of public universities.

Interest in work experience placements has intensified as a result of reported mismatches between college curricular and students' and employers' needs (Abelha, 2020). Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are under increased pressure from students, employers and policy makers to offer work-relevant (marketable) skills and attributes. Attention to

employability skills has increased in response to the needs of graduate students seeking entry to de-regulated employment markets. Employability, approached as a multidimensional concept, includes a range of generic or transferable skills such as teamwork, communication, being flexible and adaptable, possessing organisational skills and a capacity for critical thinking and problem solving (Suleman, 2018). Economic insecurity and precarious graduate employment increased following the 2008 economic crash and deepened with the economic legacy of the global pandemic of 2020 (Wyn et al., 2020). Employability has emerged as an individual responsibility for job-seeking millennial graduates and a public responsibility to sustain the quality of public services. As an established metric and measurable commodity, employability is used to differentiate between providers in an increasingly competitive domestic and global market for higher education services.

Within neo-liberal education policy, fee-paying university students are positioned as citizen consumers making rational choices between alternative providers. For example, in England, the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF) was introduced in 2015 to help students make informed admission choices. Employment outcomes are measured in terms of the proportion of graduates who obtain highly skilled professional employment. The TEF uses data from the annual Graduate Outcomes survey, which is completed fifteen months after graduation, to construct university rankings (NAO, 2017). Other metrics include outcomes from the annual undergraduate National Student Survey (NSS) and Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) that cover Assessment and Feedback, Academic Support, and Learning Resources. Rank position is important in universities that are more dependent on up-front student fee income. More recently established and teaching-intensive universities receive less support from research quality funds from government, or grant income from funding councils and philanthropic bodies. In the face of changing demographics and an increased number of alternative providers (including for-profit, non-state organisations), institutional marketing strategies emphasise graduate employability (Durazzi, 2021).

Although the marketisation of higher education is intended to promote student choice, the evidence base on which to differentiate between alternative forms of work experience in applied education programmes is neither extensive nor robust. While the acquisition of work relevant knowledge, skills and attributes is regarded as an increasingly desirable component of an applied university education, the academic design, delivery and evaluation of such activity remains under-researched. There is little conceptual clarity concerning the orientation of the diverse range of employability development initiatives promoted by HEIs (Divan et al., 2019). For example, Holmes (2013) distinguishes between 'possessive', 'positioning' and 'processual' approaches (p.540). The first is most closely aligned with human capital theory, and empathises the acquisition of skills and attributes. In contrast, the second stresses the social value of connectedness and cultural capital. The third, empathises the longer-term interaction of learning and work experiences over time. Across disciplines and institutions, at an operational level there is little consistency in the design characteristics of work experience placements (that is, their duration, frequency, supervision/mentoring, performance criteria, or resourcing). Moreover, extant research emphasises the positive outputs of work experience, with scant empirical research examining the challenges of operationalisation and the possibility of less than optimal outcomes (Lopes et al., 2019).

In this chapter, we use 'practicum' to refer to work-integrated learning that is a formal requirement of professional preparation programs undertaken by university students. Arrangements for practicum vary across regions and nationally, and between professional fields. Practicums are a critical component of clinical education in nursing, social work, and

teacher education. Readiness to practice has become a key policy concern following high rates of early career attrition in the United States, Australia and Europe. Policy makers emphasise the need for 'classroom ready teachers' (TEMAG, 2014) and 'ready to practice' nurses and social workers (Ragsdale and Schuessler, 2021; Nathaniel, 2018). Calls for reform to improve readiness have produced waves of external regulation. Professional preparation in the human services (i.e. licensure pathways) in the Global North are typically highly regulated by national agencies in terms of recruitment and selection of candidates, course content, supervision and assessment. National regulatory bodies often specify the number of credits, minimum hours and weeks attached to work placements; and there is sector level agreement on threshold competence standards, that are subject to periodic inspection by national quality assurance agencies. Because professional education is subject to such high levels of external regulation and accountability, it occupies an uneasy place in the university ecology (Labaree, 2004; Furlong, 2013). As the response of HEIs to the 2020 pandemic demonstrates, managing multiple accountabilities adds complexity when pursuing innovation at pace in response to rapidly changing needs.

Research aims

This case study examines the partnership forged between a university and a multi-academy trust (MAT) in England to sustain practicum arrangements for Pre-Service Teachers (PSTs) during the Covid pandemic of 2020/21. Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) are networks of publicly funded but independent schools that are similar to charter schools in the United States. The disruption to teacher education arising from the pandemic provided an opportunity to revisit the critical components of the practicum experience and the relationship between school and university locations as sites for teacher learning. Following the UK-wide lockdown announced on 23 March 2020, the ITE sector came to a 'screeching halt' (Ellis et al., 2020, p.560). UK universities pivoted to 'virtualisation' of ITE practica in the early stages of the pandemic (March-June 2020) due to school closures (la Velle et al., 2020). While some universities resumed in-person school experience in autumn 2020, others postponed provision to reduce demands on schools contending with the impact of a second wave of Covid-19 infections, learning loss among returning students, remote learning rotas and local lockdowns. One of the largest providers of teacher education in the UK, the case study university elected to offer a parallel model of in-person (the 'conventional' model) and remote practica (the 'flexible placement model') for the 2020/21 cohort of postgraduate secondary pre-service teachers (PSTs). While the PSTs were assigned a host school within a MAT on the flexible model, they did *not* physically attend this school site. Learning and support was achieved in synchronous and asynchronous online interaction.

During the pandemic, the online practicum was made possible by a temporary relaxation of the minimum requirement for 120 days of school-based learning (DfE, 2020). Pre-Service Teachers (PSTs) in England are usually required to spend 24 weeks of a 36-week postgraduate programme in schools. While experimenting with new modes of delivery, training providers needed to remain compliant with the nationally mandated *ITT Core Content Framework* (DfE, 2019) and prepare PSTs to demonstrate achievement of the *Teachers' Standards* (DfE, 2011), which specify minimum requirements for threshold competence. The reimagining of school experience for the academic session 2020/21 demanded reflection on the design principles, strengths and limitations of the existing practicum model, the affordances and constraints of the current and developing context, and the future needs of Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs).

The scale and pace of virtualisation in ITE increased the need for iterative formative evaluation. The research reported here was undertaken during the second wave of the UK Covid-19 pandemic in England. Curriculum development at this time remained within the mode of emergency adaptation, without the usual timescale afforded for the design and development of online and distance methodologies (usually 6-9 months) (Hodges et al., 2020). Extant research on the use of virtual learning environments in ITE typically addresses interaction between pre-service teachers (PSTs) and their university tutors, PST peer collaboration, or the experiences of teacher educators' teaching online (Carillo and Flores, 2020). This research is distinctive in addressing curriculum redesign for fully online school experience. The flexible placement model was founded on the expectation that aspects of the remote practicum had the potential to enhance support for teacher learning beyond current public health concerns. We use Ellis et al.'s (2020:561) definition of innovation in ITE as, 'intentional, creative change that adds value'. This small-scale qualitative case study offers an appraisal of the processes of partnership formation, how the first iteration of online practicum was resourced and delivered, and the lessons learned to inform future developments.

Research setting

The university is one of the largest providers of teacher education in the UK. Each year the University's School of Teacher Education trains over 1,000 schoolteachers to work in primary education (age group 5-11 years) and secondary education (age group 11-16/18 years). At the time of writing, there are 14 routes into teaching in England. This case study focuses on PSTs training to be secondary schoolteachers by completing a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE). The PGCE is a one-year, full-time programme for graduate students. The University offers a Secondary PGCE course in 20 specialist subject areas. The course involves three core masters-level units addressing subject pedagogy, critical studies and reflection on professional development. Each of the three taught units carries 30 masters-level credits on the UK Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (CATS) (which is equivalent to 15 credits on the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)).

Teacher education is founded on partnership work. The School of Teacher Education works in partnership with over 500 secondary schools, locally and regionally. The university-school partnership network extends 150 miles between north and central England. The University aims to place all PSTs within 50 miles or 90-minute radius of their term-time address. A fee per student is paid to schools to support PGCE students during school placement. In England, the fee paid to schools that support PSTs on university courses varies between £400 and £1,600 per placement (Allen et al., 2014). Within the case study partnership network, this fee can vary from £600 (Euro 697, US$ 842) to approaching £1,000 (Euro 1,161, US$ 1,404) per placement dependent on demand. Placement fees are extracted from income generated from annual student tuition fees of around £9,000. Partnership agreements are made through formal Memorandum of Agreement between the university and participating schools. At the case study university, PSTs following the PGCE pathway experience three placements: two placements in contrasting schools with different age ranges, and a third placement in a Special Educational Needs (SEN) setting.

The flexible placement model created during the pandemic was designed for PSTs without placements to provide opportunities for understanding schools, planning to teach in a Covid-secure environment and opportunities to teach online. The model enabled the university to remain fully compliant with national regulatory conditions (specified by the Department for Education and the education inspectorate, Ofsted). From a cohort of 600 PGCE students in

2020/21, a total 134 PSTs were supported through the Flexible placement model in their first placement (November 2020 to January 2021) and a further 29 in their second placement (March-June 2021).

The material in this chapter relates to a new partnership with one multi-academy trust (MAT) that the university approached in October 2020. The Trust is comprised of two high schools and six local primary schools (with a total of 3,700 school pupils on roll) located 50 miles (80km) from the university campus in a Northern market town. Both high schools were awarded a 'good' rating for overall effectiveness in their most recent inspection by the inspectorate, Ofsted. Patterns of pupil attainment in both schools are marginally above the national average and improving. The schools are average size, with over 800 pupils on roll, and a mixed gender intake of pupils aged 11-16 years. The Trust employs between eight and twelve newly qualified teachers per annum.

Methods and data sources

A case study design was adopted to allow for triangulation of multiple perspectives. This study sought to understand the experiences of pre-service secondary teachers (PSTs) assigned to the flexible placement model; university tutors and a technologist supporting PSTs on the flexible placement model; school teachers acting as link personnel for the flexible placement model; and school leaders with direct involvement in developing the school-university partnership for the online practicum.

Prospective participants received an invitational email that explained the purposes of the study, how data would be used, and a realistic estimate of the time commitment involved. Participation was voluntary. The research team was mindful of any perceived pressure to participate. In addressing this issue, care was taken to emphasise that the evaluation was in no way linked to student progression on the PGCE programme or to staff appraisal. The research team was not involved in formal assessment of the PSTs in the subject areas involved in the evaluation. Moreover, none of the researchers held line management responsibility for faculty participants. The evaluation protocol was reviewed by the university Faculty ethics committee and adhered to the ethical guidelines of the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018).

The primary data collection methods were semi-structured individual interviews and focus group discussions convened between January and May 2021. Interviews were conducted remotely using video call technology or telephone. Individual interviews were held with three key informants within the multi-academy trust. These were the Director of Secondary Education, the Deputy Headteacher of the largest school in the Trust, and the Head of the Department that hosted the largest number of PSTs in one subject at this school (n=10 PSTs). Two mixed focus groups involving 13 PSTs in seven subject specialisms (English, Science, Maths, French, Spanish, Geography, Social Science) were convened at the end of the first ten-week placement. A further group interview was convened with four university tutors, with specialisms in secondary English, Science, Geography, and Religious Education, supporting PSTs on the online practicum; and an individual interview with the university learning technologist supporting the use of video technology for guided reflection on this model.

Data were analysed using NVivo qualitative data analysis software. The analysis draws on the three dimensions of the workplace curriculum articulated by Billet (2006): the intended,

enacted and experienced curriculum. The findings consider the period in which the 'intended curriculum' was planned, before considering how the curriculum was 'enacted' (what actually happened) and 'experienced' by participants (Billet, 2006, p. 32).

Findings

Partnership brokerage

Motivation for involvement in the flexible placement model was multi-layered. Participation was both altruistic and instrumental. By providing places, the schools helped to support the professional learning and certification of new teachers at a challenging time. However, as the Trust Secondary Education Director commented, 'On the most mercenary level, it's a recruitment tool'. Both high schools within the Trust had a previous record of providing ITE with other HEI providers. In supporting ITE in shortage areas, schools are able to review potential recruits prior to qualification. The Trust was able to consider participation because it had moved relatively swiftly into live lessons during the first lockdown. By April 2020, the Trust provided live-streamed lessons to all exam classes (Years 10 and 11, aged 14-16 years) and expanded this to other year groups through the summer term. By autumn 2020, all staff had accessed continuing professional development to support remote learning. The Trust Secondary Education Director felt the teaching staff were well prepared to cope with the demands of hybrid teaching (with some pupils isolating at-home) and a possible second period of regional school closures from November 2020. As a result, supporting PSTs remotely did not appear too onerous. In deciding to participate, the Trust chose to accommodate PSTs with a subject specialism that aligned with the school's need to address learning loss in English, mathematics, science and Modern Foreign Languages (MFL). These subjects contribute to the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) measure. In England, schools are measured on how well their pupils perform in these subjects. Hosting larger groups of PSTs was seen as offering potential bespoke support for pupils in need of 'catch up' tuition. The approach from the university was regarded as 'timely' by the Deputy headteacher, who described the model to parents as a 'mastery programme' delivered by graduates in specialist subject areas.

Agreement was reached at senior level (i.e., MAT and School of Teacher Education Executive Groups) that the proposed partnership could be mutually beneficial. However, customary ITE roles and responsibilities needed to be re-negotiated to accommodate the additional demands made of schools during the pandemic and the volume of PSTs who needed an online placement. The role of subject mentor that is usually undertaken by a cooperating teacher in school was re-configured. Subject mentorship responsibilities were transferred back to the university. It was agreed that the subject link would provide curriculum guidance only, and the HEI tutor would take all other roles including individual support with lesson planning, target setting, and pastoral support. The agreement to scale up to clusters of PSTs contributed to the decision to transfer roles back to the university. Smaller subject departments in school could not move from hosting one or two PSTs to the cluster model. For example, the MFL department (Spanish and French) that would be supporting ten PSTs was comprised of three qualified teachers, one of whom was newly qualified. The fee to schools for the online model was reduced to £200 per student, and students were placed in groups of a minimum of five (i.e. multiples of £1,000 per school for each five PSTs placed).

Schools participating in the flexible model needed to be able to support full virtualisation. Access for university tutors and PSTs needed to be fully compliant with the digital security policies of both the host school and university. The possible use of recorded lessons from a

remote school site for guided viewing raised ethical and data security issues. The online practicum used IRIS Connect (www.irisconnect.com) to support lesson observation. IRIS software tracks the movement of the teacher around a classroom and is used subject to school, multi-school trust or local authority policies on recording classroom interaction for the purposes of professional development. These policies are subject to parental approval and ratified via local governing bodies. In line with these policies, digital recordings were deleted on conclusion of the online school placement. Table 1 summarises the affordances and challenges of using video technology in remote placements.

Table 1. Using video technology in online placements

Advantages	**Challenges**
• Data security - the device recording the lesson sends the data directly to a secure server which is not accessible outside the platform. • The teacher has ownership of what is shared. The teacher recording their own lesson has full editing tools to select which segments will be shared, and which will remain private for personal reflection. • Permits secure individual, pair and cluster-level reflection. • Develops professional etiquette and language to discuss professional learning – skills of offering constructive developmental (rather than judgemental) feedback in practice to peers in a professional manner. • Video extracts can be time stamped and comments/questions added to specific actions to support reflection. • Enables multiple perspectives on the same teaching segment – from students and tutors. • Video recordings can be revisited to support reflection at a later stage and reflection on different aspects of practice (e.g., students asked to share a segment of video where they used question and answer, or formative assessment, or demonstrated some form of behaviour management) and to evidence progression through the course.	• Navigating school policies on safeguarding (e-safety) and national legislation re. data protection (privacy and storage). • Negotiating access to tools that are not centrally supported by HEI IT services. • Does not allow migration or storage of video files outside the platform for later use. • Video data cannot move with the individual teacher e.g. for inclusion in digital portfolios that are carried into the early career phase. • Teacher unions may express concern about the possible use of video data for other purposes e.g. teacher appraisal or performance management. • Schools use different systems for recording video e.g. Teams, Google classroom etc. • Recordings depend on the positioning of the hardware and can only offer a partial view of what is happening in the classroom or 'tunnel vision'. • Requires significant recurring investment in licensing (external) and provision of student technical support (in-house). • Depends on tutor buy-in for optimal benefit (to promote high levels of student engagement). It is good practice to specify the number of video segments to upload for personal reflection and the number selected to share, and with whom. • Clear parameters need to be set for timely responses and to manage student expectations (online tutors are not available 24/7 to respond immediately to student uploads).

Distance engagement required attention to safeguarding. As the MAT Director noted, 'We took the challenge of having our pupils online with somebody we didn't know'. The participation of PSTs was subject to mandatory records check by the UK Disclosure and Barring Service, and safeguarding training at the university. Groups of two or three PSTs working from their homes engaged with pupils who were to be supervised by a member of the school staff in a computer room at school. Recorded consent would be required from pupils, and their parents/carers, before participation.

Curriculum enactment

Challenges

The speed of development presented significant communication and coordination challenges. The Trust Chief Executive Officer (CEO) made the decision for the Trust to participate and relayed this to the senior management team in the Trust, who worked with Deputy headteachers (DHTs) in schools to make it happen. As a result, there was some 'confusion' (DHT) at the start of the first placement period. The pace of the development meant that the school 'went in a bit cold' (DHT) and did not initially fully understand the level of commitment required. Following online induction with the DHT, some PSTs joined classes for live observation using Google classroom and subsequently commenced tutoring small groups of pupils before meeting the usual class teacher. School curriculum leaders shared schemes of work and targets for individual pupils with PSTs, subject to required data privacy checks. The re-negotiated role of the Department subject link 'evolved' in the first two weeks of the online placements (DHT). Subject leads were unsure of their day-to-day role in the initiative, and how and when to engage with PSTs. School teachers first commitment was to the learning of their pupils. For example, one Head of Department commented, *'My first commitment is to deliver high quality education to the students in front of me. I didn't know what was expected of me, really. If I needed to the take the first step or not'.*

The pupils selected by the school for PST tutoring did not include any for whom the school received additional grant funding to address disadvantage. In England, mainstream schools receive a Pupil Premium grant to help improve the attainment of disadvantaged pupils. In 2021, schools received £955 for every secondary age pupil eligible for free school meals, or who claimed free school meals in the last 6 years; and £2,345 for every pupil who experienced local authority care or adoption. The school decision to exclude these pupils removed PST contact with around one third of the student body. In addition, the DHT excluded pupils who staff felt would not engage fully with the process. A small number of families declined to take part. In order to take part in the tutoring programme, school pupils were excused from non-assessed Physical Education (PE) classes (PE classes during the pandemic were restricted due to social distancing requirements). The Trust acknowledged that this strategy would not be sustainable when the full timetable resumed as tutoring was additional to scheduled whole class tuition.

Despite the stated aim of improving coherence between course work and school work, participants reported limited communication around the focus and submission of university coursework by PSTs. When asked, the MAT Secondary Education Director could not comment on the university curriculum and saw no linkage in terms of their operational role. Similarly, senior staff in school did not extend their knowledge of the academic programme beyond accommodating the direct needs of the PSTs assigned to their school. The school focus remained at the level of practical teaching. The contraction of the subject mentors' role in school and the transfer of greater responsibilities to the HEI tutor may have supported this separation.

During the pandemic, the workload of participants intensified. There is a limit to the number of roles that can be undertaken by senior staff in schools and HEI tutors, especially during a period of unprecedented challenge. For example, the DHT with responsibility for ITE also held responsibility for continuing professional development (CPD) and for remote learning during the pandemic. Setting up the logistical details of the flexible placement across subjects

areas in the school, recruiting pupils and organising parental permissions, technological support and timetabling fell to the DHT in the period in-between school closures (March to June 2020 and January to March 2021). School-level subject leads were recruited 'on a goodwill basis' (DHT) with no additional timetable remission or other form of remuneration. This meant that some cooperating teachers made offers of support to PSTs that proved unrealistic amid other demands on their time. University tutor hours were costed at 4.8 hours per PST over the 10-week placement (i.e. around 5 hours per cluster every week). Given the transfer of responsibility to the HEI tutors from the school subject teachers, the *actual* cost of high quality mentoring for a large cluster was under-resourced. Such considerations need to be balanced by possible sanctions that might be imposed by the Department for Education in terms of reducing future allocation of student places if the HEI failed to support PSTs to complete their PGCE programme. Failure to support registered students would also be grounds for complaint through the Office for Students (OfS), the independent regulator of higher education in England.

> *It was all very fast … We were going through a challenging moment with hybrid teaching. It was quite a challenge to maintain the attention of the children in front of you while at the same time teaching the children at home. I was dividing myself into pieces and then on top of that student teachers joined us. (Head of Department)*

While grateful to be able to complete their course, PSTs initially expressed concern that one of their placements would be online. PSTs assigned to the flexible model in November 2020 feared they might not receive an equivalent experience to peers assigned to schools that remained open. These concerns were mitigated as a second national lockdown was announced on January 3rd 2021 and UK schools closed to all pupils except the children of critical workers and the most vulnerable pupils (January to March 2021). The intermittent nature of online engagement reinforced a sense of isolation. Some PSTs struggled to identify as a member of the school community. One PST reported, 'We felt like we were on an island'. Another suggested, 'We felt like we were outsiders and something to avoid if possible'. While technology enabled connections to be made, a perception of distance and exclusion persisted for a minority, with some reporting feeling like 'intruders'.

Through 2020/21, the ITE sector was buffeted by changes to policy in response to the shifting public health situation. In early January 2021, the school paused ITE provision as the school workforce focused once more on transitioning to at-home learning. PSTs were informed that they would not be required to resume online tuition until January 18th. This was in part due to pupils now being in their own homes rather than supervised by a staff member in the school building. However, after consultation with the Trust and university, the school instructed PSTs to resume their classes leaving PSTs with very little time to plan and prepare. The challenges of moving to remote working with pupils dispersed to their home locations, in addition to the impact of lockdown on PSTs personal wellbeing, proved stressful.

In addition, the workload for PSTs began to increase as university coursework progressed alongside a menu of elective tasks each week. The 'menu' offered a wide range of curriculum enhancement activities to compensate for exclusion from a physical school site. At pressure points in the assessment calendar, HEI tutors fulfilled the dual role of subject mentor (support for pedagogy) and academic tutor (support with research engagement and academic writing). The escalation of activity resulted in some PSTs feeling that they were hurrying along rather than engaging deeply for optimal benefit.

> *In the beginning, the menu of tasks was fine because you could manage your time but as we moved into teaching the tasks kept on piling up. You are working with different people who have different needs and it was like a running race. You're doing something without really comprehending it. I didn't learn as much because I had to do it quickly, so that I didn't accumulate a lot of weekly tasks. (PST)*

Although all PSTs on the remote practicum spent longer analysing lesson sections in their specialist field, PSTs were concerned that the range of live lessons they were able to observe was limited. PSTs benefitted from preparing lessons collaboratively and analysing these in-depth, but expressed a desire to supplement this introspective and self-analytical approach with opportunities to observe approaches deployed by a wider range of experienced practitioners in whole class settings. PSTs would have liked to observe teaching in contrasting curriculum areas, age phases and across the schools within the Trust. While the schools were in the same town, organising access to different intranets proved too challenging within the pilot timescale. Where IRIS was used to support observation of teaching, the fixed camera mount often restricted the view of the PSTs observing remotely. As the teacher moved around the classroom to support pupils, PSTs heard but could not see much of the teacher-pupil interaction.

> *You prepare for your lesson: you research, you do your language analysis, you research websites, you research videos, you are trying to look for specific vocab, you look for idiomatic expressions to test some of the more gifted students, to push them a bit further. So, you do all that but I haven't had a chance to have a series of observations of different teachers in action. For me, that's been a missing component. I still feel to this day I don't have a really good idea of what a strong language lesson should look like. (PST)*

While some issues were addressed more fully at this stage in the ITE year others areas remained underdeveloped. Class management, marking and moderation, and engagement with parents was limited. PSTs were particularly concerned about developing classroom management skills. The small groups of pupils did not exhibit challenging behaviour and PSTs were concerned they were less well placed to complete university coursework on this theme, and less prepared to manage behaviour in the classroom in subsequent placements and first teaching posts. Restricted access to the full life of the school impeded the development of a strong professional identity among a minority of PSTs. As the online experience was organised in clusters, most PSTs were teaching in pairs or trios. Some PSTs had reservations about how individual progress towards qualification would be assessed. This was evident where there was a perceived imbalance in contributions from PSTs in a cluster or pair. While the course was collaborative, assessment was ultimately based on individual merit.

> *I feel I can personalise learning and tailor learning to individual needs. There have been many opportunities to develop those skills but in terms of teaching a large group, which is what I'll be doing for the majority of my career, I feel like I'm still unprepared. I haven't had to do that. The theoretical foundation is quite good but there just hasn't been any opportunities to realistically transfer it into a practical setting. (PST)*

Benefits

During the early stages of the online placement, PSTs valued the opportunity to engage in-depth with educational theory and research due to the reduced level of contact hours. PSTs had access to a wider range of professional learning opportunities than would usually be available had they attended a full-time placement. Practitioner input, via live-streamed lectures from lead teachers and headteachers, on a range of applied topics gave breadth of insight into the wider role of the teacher at an early stage in professional formation.

> *'It's slowly eased us in, which for me personally is better than going on a placement and being thrown into doing twenty hours a week in a classroom with thirty students' (PST)*

Co-planning, co-teaching and collaborative reflection were highly valued by PSTs in the cluster model. Strong peer relationships were forged at an early stage of the PGCE course. The online practicum according to one PST had *'created this community of people that I can turn to any time, any hour of the day. That's quite special'*. Another described, the '*sense of community and knowing that we can all turn to each other and have each other's back, build each other up and encourage and develop each other's skills, to watch that develop and flourish'*. PST clusters spoke of valuing the different strengths and insights drawn from a range of undergraduate studies. For example, graduates with literature degrees and graduates with language degrees.

PSTs valued the timely focused support from HEI tutors that helped them move forward. Beyond academic support, PSTs valued the pastoral role of the HEI tutor as personal tutor. Experienced HEI tutors anticipated when PSTs began to feel overwhelmed and anxious. PSTs acknowledged the role of the HEI tutor as hybrid educators moving back and forward between school and university spaces, acting as an advocate for the PSTs, providing reassurance and support for development.

> *No question is too daft. If we want a one-to-one, they'll fit time in. They are always there if we need feedback or help [...] When I felt a bit trapped in my routine and there are things that I knew worked and things that didn't work but I didn't really know how to change them. (PST)*

PSTs suggested the online practicum helped them to be more resourceful, resilient and adaptable, whether contending with technology, learning to collaborate online, sourcing materials for remote learning, or supporting one another through different personal and professional pressures.

> *The most positive thing is the way we have to work together, reflect together, learn together, make mistakes together, and get on together. Teamwork is the basic skill we need to gain in our teaching life because once you're in a school you need to work with your colleagues […] We are all in the same boat and we have to keep rowing in the same direction. (PST)*

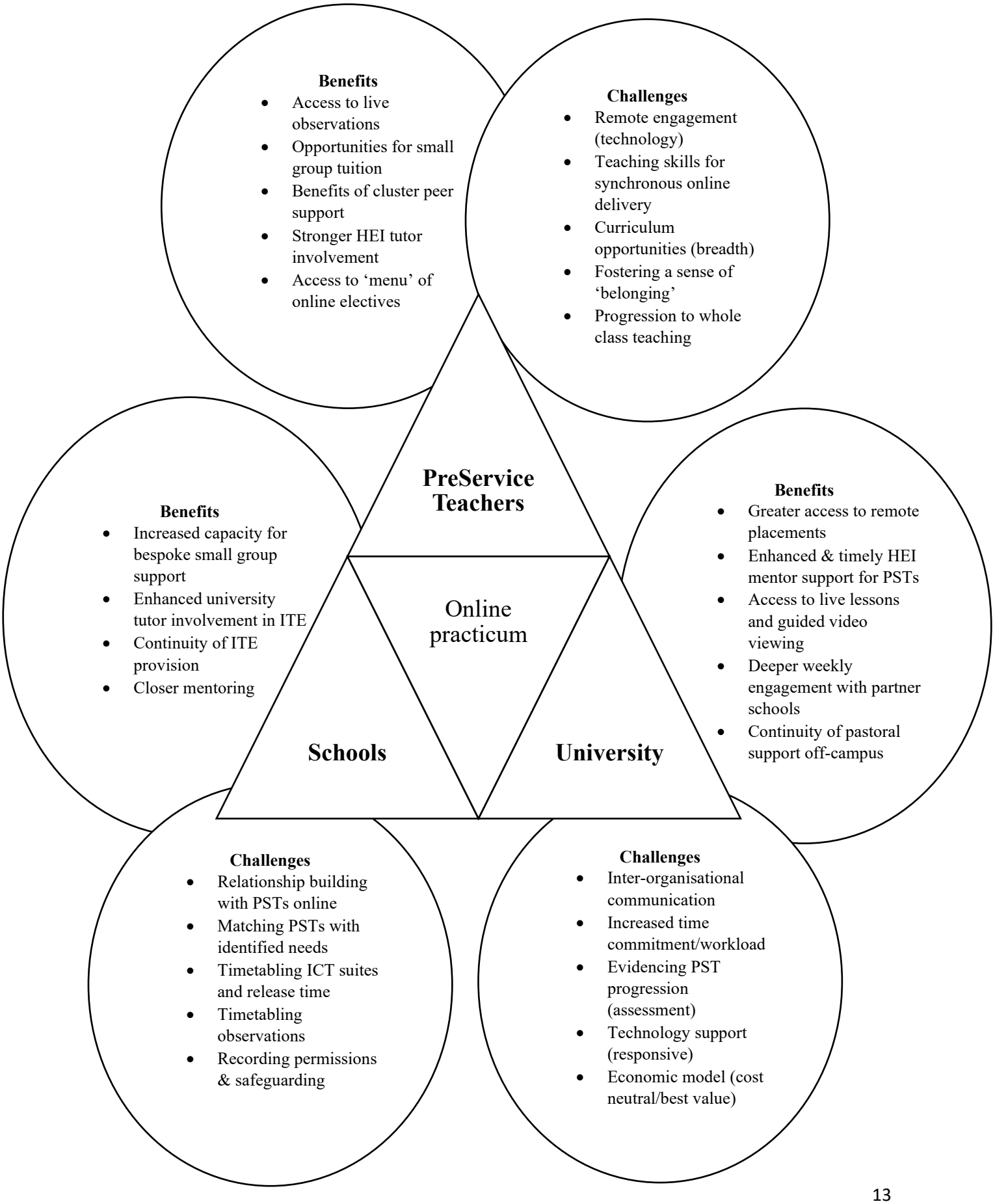
Tutors invested more time in building relationships with PSTs on the online practicum and reported accelerated progress in lesson planning, meeting individual needs, subject knowledge, questioning strategies, observation skills and digital skills. Regular online dialogue with a university tutor, focused on specific aspects of pedagogy, broke down barriers associated with the conventional high stakes tutor visit. Online clusters supported by the regular presence of a tutor were more open to feedback. Tutors valued the opportunity to recalibrate the learning partnership with PSTs on placement. In the conventional placement

model, tutor engagement was evaluative rather than developmental: *'With our other students, we only really tend to fix the negative problems' (University tutor).*

> *'Had they been in school, they would be worried about being criticised. Whereas we've built a relationship where it didn't matter about making mistakes in front of me' (University tutor)*

The case study presented here was undertaken to identify key learning to support practicum development. Drawing on Gazley et al. (2013), the benefits and challenges of reconfiguring practicum partnerships are summarised in Figure 1, Three-legged stool of the online practicum. The findings have relevance for a range of occupational fields in tertiary education.

Figure 1. The three-legged stool of the online practicum (adapted from Gazley et al., 2013, p. 562)



Conclusion

There are clear advantages to digital professional learning for schools and universities. Online technology can overcome geographical isolation and provide cost-effective, enhanced support for schools with higher rates of teacher absence or mobility, and/or diverse student needs. Distance from PST home residence is no longer a limitation. Practicum settings can be utilised in regions far beyond the university campus. Technology allows greater access to specialist provision from a distance, and bespoke support in targeted areas (EEF, 2018). In this case study, for example, remote tutoring addressed the specific learning needs of individuals and small groups of learners. Online platforms can support synchronous (real time) as well as asynchronous (consecutive) interaction among participants. Education technology, such as the IRIS Connect video platform, affords opportunities for online collaboration between clusters of PSTs and remote mentor teachers. A key benefit in this case study was the re-engagement of HEI tutors in the school space as the responsibilities of the school subject mentor were redrawn. HEI tutors re-engaged directly in applied pedagogy in supporting PSTs with guided viewing of teaching. This case study reiterates that the ability to observe what is happening in a classroom is an acquired skill. Social practices of seeing involve skill and sensitivity. Research indicates that novice teachers exhibit 'selective attention' (Fadde and Sullivan 2013) when viewing video of classrooms. The online practicum helped new and experienced practitioners to develop cultures of observation within stronger professional learning communities (Patton and Parker, 2017).

Digital technology will be increasingly important in preparing tomorrow's workforce. The professional preparation of future teachers will need to accommodate support for learning outside the 'normal' classroom (Kalloo et al., 2020:9), while also addressing a stark digital divide (Cullinane and Montacute, 2020). The need to foster 'technological pedagogical content knowledge' (Mishra and Koehler, 2006) has become more acute in the post-covid context. Going forward, newly qualified teachers will need to learn digital competence and gain experience in supporting online/at-home learning as well as in-presence classroom learning (Konig et al., 2020; Kim 2020). New challenges include how to foster an ethic of care as well as technical competence, and how to support curriculum continuity away from in-person interaction at school. Equally, this implies digital competence among a teacher educator workforce that can model effective support for online learning, with attendant resource implications (Scull et al., 2020).

While the contribution of theory to teacher development has been the focus of intense debate in the Global North, the value of different approaches to school experience is less examined. Proponents of Professional Development Schools and clinical practice models of teacher education have challenged the archetypal high stakes visit by a university tutor to a host school (Darling-Hammond, 2014; Conroy et al., 2013). The one-off 'crit lesson' for assessment purposes promotes inauthentic interaction and 'the need to please and perform' (Aspden, 2017: 134). This case study contributes to the body of evidence that asserts that the quality of mentoring is more influential in shaping practice than the amount of time spent in school (Lofthouse et al., 2020; Ronfeldt and Reininger, 2012).

The (time limited/temporary) removal of in-person school experience for some pre-service teachers (PSTs) necessitates new forms of collaboration between schools and universities, and a renewed focus on high quality practice-oriented mentoring. As shown here, remote supervision may be more 'intentional' than in-situ supervision as participants need to work harder to establish a positive working alliance and sense of community (Inman et al., 2018).

Research in allied human service fields suggests that online supervision in clinical practice can compare favourably with face-to-face supervision in terms of quality of supervision and rapport building (Bernhard and Camins, 2020). However, this needs to be supported by a robust infrastructure, communication strategy and realistic costings. Such calculations include not only hardware and software (licensing) costs, but the full economic cost of staff time (legal, administrative, technical and academic), especially time invested in relationship building (with external partners) and timely provision of support (for students, HEI tutors and school partners).

The great pause of 2020 created an opportunity to reflect on the purposes of partnership work in higher education in general and initial teacher education in particular. The emergency response took university teacher educators back into a space that had been ceded to schools over the last decade. The distancing of university teacher educators from schools was accelerated by central government's promotion of school-led ITE and the comparatively higher costs of university ITE provision (in comparison with campus-based courses). This separation reinforced a longstanding division between the workplace and the academy, and threatened to reduce the aims of education to a narrow vocationalism.

Rather than retreat to separate spheres, effective partnership development should be approached as a participative process. This demands explicit alignment of goals, shared objectives and programme outcomes, a readiness to trial and evaluate new ways of working, and strong inter- and intra-organisational communication. From this perspective, brokering partnerships is an on-going commitment rather than a start-up activity or decision taken at Executive level. Such reconceptualisation would move the concept and practice of partnership work beyond cooperation at inception, towards employer involvement in the co-design of courses and HEI involvement in the co-delivery of workplace learning. Practicum partnerships built on principles of mutuality (common purpose), reciprocity (shared benefit) and collective responsibility (accountability) model the forms of 'collaborative professionalism' (Hargreaves and O'Connor, 2018) that are most likely to prepare and retain new teachers in challenging circumstances.

References

Abelha, M., Fernandes, S., Mesquita, D., Seabra, F., & Ferreira-Oliveira, A. T. (2020). Graduate Employability and Competence Development in Higher Education. A Systematic Literature Review Using PRISMA. *Sustainability*, *12*(15), 5900. MDPI AG. Retrieved June 15, 2021, from http://dx.doi.org/10.3390/su12155900

Aspden, K. M. (2017) The Complexity of Practicum Assessment in Teacher Education: An Examination of Four New Zealand Case Studies. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 42(12), 128-143.

BERA (British Educational Research Association). (2018). *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research* (Fourth Edition). Retrieved June 15, 2021, from https://www.bera.ac.uk/publication/ethical-guidelines-for-educational-research-2018

Bernhard, P.A. & Camins, J.S. (2020): Supervision from Afar: trainees' perspectives on telesupervision, *Counselling Psychology Quarterly*, DOI:10.1080/09515070.2020.1770697.

Billett, S. (2006). Constituting the workplace curriculum. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 38(1), 31-48.

Carrillo, C. & Flores, M.A. (2020) COVID-19 and teacher education: a literature review of online teaching and learning practices, *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 43(4), 466-487.

Conroy, J., Hulme, M. & Menter, I. (2013) Developing a 'clinical' model for teacher education. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 39(5), 557-573.

Cullinane, C. & Montacute, R. (2020) COVID-19 and Social Mobility Impact Brief #1: School Shutdown. Sutton Trust. Retrieved June 15, 2021, from https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/COVID-19-Impact-Brief-School-Shutdown.pdf

Darling-Hammond, L. (2014) Strengthening Clinical Preparation: The Holy Grail of Teacher Education, *Peabody Journal of Education*, 89:4, 547-561.

Department for Education (2011) Teachers' Standards. Retrieved June 15, 2021, from https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teachers-standards

Department for Education (2019) ITT Core Content Framework. Retrieved June 15, 2021, from https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/919166/ITT_core_content_framework_.pdf

Department for Education (2020). *Coronavirus (COVID-19): Initial Teacher Training (ITT): Information for Providers about Managing Initial Teacher Training Courses Impacted by the Coronavirus (COVID-19)*. London: Department for Education.

Divan, A., Knight, E., Bennett, D. & Bell, K. (2019) Marketing graduate employability: understanding the tensions between institutional practice and external messaging, *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 41(5), 485-499.

Durazzi, N. (2021). Opening universities' doors for business? Marketization, the search for differentiation and employability in England. *Journal of Social Policy*, 50(2), 386-405.

EEF (Education Endowment Foundation) (2018) Small Group Tuition. Retrieved June 15, 2021, from https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/evidence-summaries/teaching-learning-toolkit/small-group-tuition/

Ellis, V., Steadman, S. & Mao, Q. (2020) 'Come to a screeching halt': Can change in teacher education during the COVID-19 pandemic be seen as innovation?, *European Journal of Teacher Education,* 43:4, 559-572.

Fadde, P.J. & Sullivan, P. A. (2013). Using interactive video to develop pre-service teachers' classroom awareness. *Contemporary Issues in Technology and Teacher Education*, 13(2), 156-174.

Furlong, J. (2013) *Education – An Anatomy of the Discipline: Rescuing the University Project?* Abingdon: Routledge.

Gazley, B., Bennett T. & Littlepage, L. (2013) Achieving the Partnership Principle in Experiential Learning: The Nonprofit Perspective, *Journal of Public Affairs Education,* 19(3), 559-579.

Grassetti, S. N., Solic, K., & Getz, Z. (2021). Bridging the Science-to-Service Gap: Service Learning in Graduate-Level Psychology Education. *Teaching of Psychology*, *48*(2), 175–181.

Hargreaves, A. and O'Connor, M.T. (2018) *Collaborative Professionalism. When Teaching Together Means Learning For All.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin/Sage.

Hodges, C., Moore, S., Lockee, B., Trust, T. & Bond, A. (2020) The difference between emergency remote teaching and online learning. *Educause Review*. Retrieved June 15, 2021, from https://er.educause.edu/articles/2020/3/the-difference-between-emergency-remote-teaching-and-online-learning

Holmes, L. (2013). Competing perspectives on graduate employability: Possession, position or process? *Studies in Higher Education*, 38(4), 538–554.

Hora, M.T., Vivona, B., Chen, Z., Thompson, M., Brown, R. (2020) What do we know about online internships? A review of the academic and practitioner literature. Centre for Research on College-Workforce Transition Research, Brief n. 10, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Hora, M.T., Wolfgram, M., Thompson, S. (2017) What do we know about the impact of internship on student outcomes? Results from a preliminary review of the scholarly and practitioner literatures. Centre for Research on College-Workforce Transitions Research Brief 10, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Inman, A. G., Soheilian, S. A., & Luu, L. P. (2018) Telesupervision: Building bridges in a digital era. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 75, 292–301.

Jones, K., Hein, L. C., & James, L. (2021). A nursing leadership practicum in the time of covid19. *Nurse Leader*, *19*(2), 145–149.

Kalloo, R.C. Mitchell, B. & Kamalodeen, J.V. (2020): Responding to the COVID-19 pandemic in Trinidad and Tobago: challenges and opportunities for teacher education, *Journal of Education for Teaching*, DOI:10.1080/02607476.2020.1800407.

Kim, J. (2020) Learning and Teaching Online During Covid-19: Experiences of Student Teachers in an Early Childhood Education Practicum. *International Journal of Early Childhood*, 52, 145–158.

König, J., Jäger-Biela, D.J. & Glutsch, N. (2020) Adapting to online teaching during COVID-19 school closure: teacher education and teacher competence effects among early career teachers in Germany, *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 43:4, 608-622

la Velle, L., Newman, S., Montgomery, C. & Hyatt, D. (2020): Initial teacher education in England and the Covid-19 pandemic: challenges and opportunities, *Journal of Education for Teaching*, DOI: 10.1080/02607476.2020.1803051.

Larabee, D.F. (2004) *The Trouble with Ed Schools.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Lofthouse, R., Greenway, C., Davies, P., Davies, D. & Lundholm, C. (2020) Pre-service Teachers' conceptions of their own learning: does context make a difference? *Research Papers in Education*, DOI: 10.1080/02671522.2020.1767181

Lopes, B., Silva, P., Melo A., Brito, E., Paiva Dias, G. & Costa, M. (2019) The 'Lunar Side' of the Story: Exploring the Sustainability of Curricular Internships in Higher Education. *Sustainability*. 11(21):5879. https://doi.org/10.3390/su11215879

Lu, H. -. (2021). Enhancing university student employability through practical experiential learning in the sport industry: An industry-academia cooperation case from Taiwan. *Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism Education, 28* doi:10.1016/j.jhlste.2021.100301

Male, S. A., & King, R. W. (2019). Enhancing learning outcomes from industry engagement in Australian engineering education. *Journal of Teaching and Learning for Graduate Employability*, *10*(1), 101-117.

Mishra, P. & Koehler, M. (2006). Technological pedagogical content knowledge: A framework for teacher knowledge. *Teachers College Record, 108*(6), 1017-1054.

Nathaniel, A. (2018) Readiness for Practice in Social Work Through a Constructionist Lens, *Field Educator*, 8(2), 1-21.

National Audit Office (NAO) (2017) The higher education market. London: NAO. Retrieved June 15, 2021, from https://www.nao.org.uk/report/the-higher-education-market/

Park, M. & Jones, T. (2021) Going Virtual: The Impact of COVID-19 on Internships in Tourism, Events, and Hospitality Education, Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Education, DOI: 10.1080/10963758.2021.1907198

Patton, K. & Parker, M. (2017) Teacher education communities of practice: more than a culture of collaboration, *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 67, 351-360.
Pereira, E. T., Vilas-Boas, M., & Rebelo, C. F. C. (2020). University curricula and employability: The stakeholders' views for a future agenda. *Industry and Higher Education*, *34*(5), 321–329.
Ragsdale, M., & Schuessler, J. B. (2021). The impact of simulation and senior practicum on graduating senior nursing student's readiness for practice. *Clinical Simulation in Nursing, 53*, 66-70.
Ronfeldt, M. & Reininger, M. (2012) "More or Better Student Teaching*?" Teaching and Teacher Education* 28(8), 1091–1106.
Schnell, B. & Rodríguez, N. (2017) Ivory tower vs. workplace reality, *The Interpreter and Translator Trainer,* 11:2-3, 160-186, DOI: 10.1080/1750399X.2017.1344920
Schweinsberg, A., Mundy, M. E., Dyer, K. R., & Garivaldis, F. (2021). Psychology Education and Work Readiness Integration: A Call for Research in Australia. *Frontiers in psychology*, *12*, 623353. Retrieved June 15, 2021, from https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.623353
Scull, J., Phillips, M., Sharma, U. & Garnier, K. (2020): Innovations in teacher education at the time of COVID19: an Australian perspective, *Journal of Education for Teaching*, DOI: 10.1080/02607476.2020.1802701.
Suleman, F. (2018) The employability skills of higher education graduates: insights into conceptual frameworks and methodological options. *Higher Educ*ation, 76, 263–278.
Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group [TEMAG] (2014) Action Now: Classroom Ready Teachers. Retrieved June 15, 2021, from https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/action_now_classroom_ready_teachers_accessible.pdf
Wyn, J., H. Cahill, D. Woodman, H. Cuervo, C. Leccardi & J. Chesters. (2020). *Youth and the New Adulthood: Generations of Change*. New York: Springer.

Authors' bios

Moira Hulme is Professor of Teacher Education at the Education and Social Reseach Institute, Manchester Metropolitan University, UK.

Anna Olsson-Rost is Lecturer (History) in the School of Teacher Education, Manchester Metropolitan University, UK. Prior to this Anna taught modern history at Bangor University.

Rachel O'Sullivan is Senior Lecturer in the School of Teacher Education, Manchester Metropolitan University, UK. Rachel taught secondary Physical Education and was a subject lead, pastoral lead and Assistant Head before moving to her current role.