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INSTITUTIONAL CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF TEACHER EDUCATION

AS ACADEMIC WORK IN ENGLAND

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Abstract:

Through an analysis of job recruitment texts, and interviews with academic leaders, this article shows how the university-based teacher educator is produced as a category of academic worker in England. Focusing on the discursive processes of categorisation provides insights into how English universities conceptualise teacher education. Variations in conceptualisations are noted within and between institutions, with the teacher educator produced as a hybrid or exceptional category. Often, variations are produced around a practitioner/researcher contradiction. The article concludes by asking whether such variations and potential lack of coherence matter, in the context of national policy and funding constraints, and internationally.

1. INTRODUCTION

In this article, we examine how the university- or college-based teacher educator is conceptualised as a category of academic worker at the institutional level in England. By teacher education, we are referring principally to pre-service work with student teachers in higher education (HE) settings and in schools (an activity known in England as initial teacher education) and we are focusing on HE-based personnel as we are interested in understanding the position of teacher education within HE institutions more generally. England, particularly, offers an interesting case internationally – as an example of a highly-regulated, centralised system subject to much more directive and frequent policy interventions than in other parts of the UK (Menter 2006)¹. Initial teacher education in England has, at the graduate level, been essentially school-based since 1992 and has followed a competency-based model since 1997, with competences specified and monitored by central government. In our analysis of both texts (job advertisements, etc) and talk (interviews), our focus is on how the category *teacher educator* is produced in discourse and what that might reveal about the institutional contexts in which this categorisation is produced. Theoretically, our perspective is grounded in sociocultural understandings of language as a mediational means and of the production and negotiation of categories as essential aspects of the cultural-historical processes that enable individuals and institutions to think and to reason together (Mäkitalo & Säljö 2002, Mercer 2000). In the next section, we provide some background to contextualise our inquiry.

1.1 Teacher educators and work

1.1.1 A distinctive population of academic workers

In the UK Economic and Social Research Council's (ESRC) Demographic Review of the Social Sciences (Mills et al 2006), Education was the second largest discipline under consideration and the report's authors noted the

unique challenge of a large number of ‘second-career researchers’ – principally, school teachers who move into university education departments to work on teacher education courses. More than half the academic staff in Education were found to be 50 or over at the time of the review; just under half were in the 46 – 55 age range, with the smallest proportion across the social sciences aged under 34 (8%). In the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) – a UK-wide audit of research quality linked to government funding for HE - the report noted that two thirds of Education academic staff were not classified as ‘research active’ (Mills et al 2006). The Review suggested that the structural challenges faced by those working in Education meant that ‘there exists no clear academic career structure’ (ibid. np.) whereas both better career structures and higher salaries were apparent in the professional setting of schools.

Out of more than 100 UK HE institutions with Education departments, 82 prepared submissions to the 2008 RAE, entering 1, 696 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff or approximately 27% of full-time staff in UK Education departments (HEFCE 2009a; HESA 2009). Compared to the 2001 RAE, submissions for 2008 were more selective, with 404 fewer academic staff entered (Hazlehurst et al 2010). Indeed, 30% of submissions to RAE 2008 represented the work of fewer than 10 full-time academic staff and 70% represented the work of fewer than 20 (HEFCE 2009b).

The picture of Education as a discipline in the UK emerging from both the ESRC Demographic Review and the 2008 RAE seems to be of a large field of HE practice undertaken by a predominantly older population of academic workers strongly differentiated by research activity and with a large core of former school teachers for whom the possibility of developing a research programme and, indeed, progressing through a ‘clear academic career structure’ are fairly limited.

1.1.2 The distribution of teacher education work across HE in England

The higher education system in England has been – and continues to be – subject to profound change over the last fifty years. A major force for change has been the imperative to widen participation beyond the relatively small percentage of the population that had access to HE decades ago. Many institutions that have come to have university status in England (as elsewhere around the world) grew out of specialist training colleges and, in England, that is particularly true of what has become known as the ‘post-1992’ or ‘new’ university sectorⁱⁱ. The 1990s also saw a move towards diversification and the establishment of a quasi-market of teacher education ‘providers’ in England (Mahoney & Hextall 2000). As a result, the situation today in terms of where teacher education work is located is a complex one with programmes distributed across both old (pre-1992) and new (post-1992) institutions as well as in entirely employment-based routes (e.g. the Graduate Teacher Programme).

The key actor in the distribution of this work in England is the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA; formerly the Teacher Training Agency), established by central government in 1992 to fund, regulate and improve recruitment into teacher education. On the basis of Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted – another government agency) inspection reports and other evidence, the TDA allocates places (funding) to ‘providers’ on the basis of ‘target numbers’. Universities and other HE institutions are therefore obliged to compete for funding (places for student teachers). The allocation of places by the TDA gives some sense of how teacher education work is distributed at the national level in England.

Just over half of the secondary (high school) initial teacher education places in the 2008 – 2011 period were allocated to the new HE sector (57.3%); old universities were allocated 37.5% and school-centred initial teacher training schemes (SCITTS)ⁱⁱⁱ accounted for 5.2% (TDA 2009). Similarly, over 80% of primary student teachers during this period underwent their professional preparation in new institutions (77.5%) and SCITTS (5.9%). Indeed, some institutions in the new sector have secured a very large proportion of the places allocated by the TDA (up to 1,392 places - or 4 % of the total allocation - to one institution). In summary, however, most primary and most secondary teacher education work takes place in new HE institutions (universities and colleges), generally the sector that does less well in research funding terms and where research activity is much less concentrated.

1.1.3 Researching teacher education as academic work

Internationally, there is very little research that focuses directly on what teacher educators do - their practical activities and the material conditions under which they work. As Horner (2000) points out, this is not an unusual situation as academic work is often understood in an individualistic and narrowly intellectual sense (e.g. the conversation-opener, ‘what are you working on at the moment?’). There has been some attention in the US to the ‘education professoriate’ at the level of self-perceptions and life histories (e.g. Ducharme 1993) and their somewhat precarious status within the universities generally (e.g. Labaree 2004), and also, more generally across HE, to the transition points between prior experience, graduate school and becoming ‘faculty’ (e.g. Schuster & Finkelstein 2006). This interest in the ‘becoming’ of HE-based teacher educators and the ways in which HE institutions as employers might support these transitions is evident in recent research literature from the UK, north America, Australia and Europe (e.g. Acker 1986, Carrillo & Baguley 2011).

While the literature on teacher educators’ identities is beginning to grow, research into how HE institutions conceptualise teacher education as academic work is extremely difficult to identify. The few relevant studies discussed above are more often written from the perspective of trying to understand the teacher educator’s subjectivity or professional development needs; the way in which institutions conceptualise and frame the work of teacher education is left implicit. Others have offered a view of the potential or desirable ‘role’ or ‘contribution’ of HE-based teacher educators in the professional learning of teachers (e.g. Furlong 2000) but this

research is not always empirically-based and interest in teacher education as *work* is, again, implicit. Furthermore, other studies suggest that teacher educators themselves do not constitute a homogeneous group (Tierney 2001; Kosnick & Beck 2008). Despite this heterogeneity, the term *teacher educator* in much of the current research literature to date is treated as an undifferentiated category. A consequence of this limited conceptualisation of *teacher educator* and the dearth of research generally in the field has led to rather limited understandings of the position of teacher education as *work* in HE.

It is beyond the scope of this article to survey the growing research literature on academic work. Tight (2004) has identified the increasing interest in ‘what lecturers and other members of staff actually do, and how this is changing’ as one of the key themes in higher education research (p. 4). The perspective on academic work in the higher education literature is mainly sociological and has become particularly interested in how changing patterns of academic activity and employment relations are related to transnational forces of globalisation and the marketisation of higher education (King et al 2011). In a study of employment and working conditions for academic staff across Europe, Enders noted that ‘the concept of a single academic profession might be an illusion’ (Enders 2000: 7). It was important for our research that we kept in mind that academic work itself is not a homogenous and undifferentiated category while at the same time recognising that teacher education courses continue to constitute a large part of the work of Education departments in universities and colleges in England and, in some cases, a large part of some HE institutions overall.

In order to examine how teacher education is produced as a particular category of academic work, we decided to analyse how texts and talk produce the category discursively. We were interested in how the work of the HE-based teacher educator was conceptualised from the perspective of HE institutions themselves - in the expectations and contractual requirements delivered by the job advertisement and ‘further particulars’ texts^{iv} and in interviews with a small sample of academic leaders in HE Education departments. Our guiding questions were:

1. How is the work of teacher education conceptualised in the job advertisement and further particulars texts of a sample of vacancies?
2. How do heads of education departments talk about the work of teacher education?

Our approach to answering these questions led us to collect and to generate text and talk data that would be amenable to analysis by a number of methods.

2. GENERATING TEXTS AND TALK TO UNDERSTAND CATEGORIES AND INSTITUTIONS

2.1 Design and methodology

We began by collecting job advertisements and further particulars texts for all teacher education vacancies at HE institutions in England during two periods totalling eight months: July to November 2008 and March to May 2009. These periods were chosen as it was felt they represented the busiest recruitment periods for HE institutions. The job advertisements and further particulars were drawn from the website *jobs.ac.uk* (the main academic recruitment website in the UK) and the institutions' own websites. Our sample criteria required the vacancies to be HE-based and to involve regular face-to-face work with student teachers.

In the period immediately following the second collection of job advertisement data in 2009, we wrote to the heads of all the HEI Education departments that had advertised vacancies we had collected and requested a telephone interview. In each interview, we asked about the specific vacancy, the process of advertising and putting the further particulars texts together, how teacher education was organised and valued within the institution and other questions designed to elicit the head of department's reasoning about teacher education as academic work.

2.1.1 The sample of job advertisements and further particulars

One hundred and eleven (111) vacancies met our sample criteria, 64 in the first data collection period (July to November 2008) and 47 in the second (March to May 2009). The most frequent categories of vacancy were for generalist primary and secondary Mathematics teacher educators (both $n = 11$ or 10%). Forty-two HEIs were represented in the sample, of which 30 can be described either as post-1992 (new) universities or colleges and 12 as pre-1992 (old) universities. Across our two samples, a greater proportion of work was available in the new university sector and, in at least one large institution, a good deal on the basis of part-time and temporary employment. Proportionately, the availability of teacher education work in the old sector was quite small and, in our samples, mostly full-time and permanent. However, it is worth striking a note of caution over the representativeness of this data as recruitment in HE can be both responsive to demographics and policy as well as idiosyncratic. Nonetheless, the sample of 111 vacancies generated a rich corpus of job advertisement and further particulars texts.

2.1.2 The sample of transcribed telephone interviews

From the 42 HE institutions which advertised positions in our sample, eight academic leaders agreed to be interviewed: six heads of department (deans or chairs), one associate head of department and one head of teacher education. Fortuitously, our respondents came from a range of institutions: four new universities and four old, of varying sizes and in both the north and south of England. They also represented institutions that had achieved at different, although generally positive levels in terms of research output and quality (as measured by the 2008 RAE), something we have indicated in Table 1 below by referring to an institution's profile as greater than (+) or less than (-) the mean performance in Education (which was 1.95 on a 4 point scale). Six institutions

offered initial teacher education programmes at undergraduate (UG) as well as the graduate (G) level; the remaining two offered graduate programmes only. Although we do not claim that either data-set (job advertisements or interviews) are representative they do begin to reflect some of the diversity of HE settings in England. All interviews were recorded and transcribed.

[Insert table 1 about here]

2.1.3 *Analysing texts and talk*

In seeking to account for the institutional production of *teacher educator* as a category of academic worker, we took a variety of analytic approaches to what constituted a relatively large amount of data in the form of texts (job advertisements and further particulars) and talk (research interviews). Although we did not set out to conduct a linguistic analysis per se, we nonetheless used a selection of analytic tools to interrogate the language data. One approach, derived from the computational strategy of corpus linguistics (McEnery & Wilson 2001), was to generate word frequencies and key-words-in-context (KWIC). The interviews with heads of department were analysed using computer software to generate lists of high frequency words and collocations. The software was then used to produce KWICs - or the stretches of discourse in which the high-frequency words appeared. This strategy gave us some insight into how the word *research* was used, for example, revealing its context in the utterances of participants.

We also drew on a linguistic annotation strategy by tagging certain word classes (e.g. nouns and verbs) in specific sentences. So we examined the corpus of advertisements and further particulars texts to identify the ways in which the job category was introduced in the first sentence of the advertisement. Initially, we focused on the word(s) that usually took the object position in this sentence - *We are looking for a* [noun or noun phrase]. The function of this clause is to orient the potential applicant towards the way in which the employer categorises the work and the sort of knowledge, skills and experience being sought. These methods helped us to look in detail at language-in-use and, supplemented by complementary strategies (described below), to understand how institutional conceptualisations were being built (cf. Flowerdew 2005).

A third approach employed Membership Categorisation Analysis (MCA), a method of understanding how certain categories are produced in texts or the jointly-constructed discourse of research interviews (Hester & Eglin 1997, Freebody 2003). MCA involves identifying emerging categories in the discourse, understanding how attributions are made to these categories (looking at particular verbs and adjectives, for example) and how they are substantiated (e.g. through invocation of policy discourses or through personal narratives) and then analysing how these categories and attributions permit particular conceptualisations and lines of reasoning. Lists (such as 'main duties' lists in job descriptions) are a significant way in which categories are produced and, methodologically, items in such lists were seen as primary attributions to the category, in this case, the category of HE-based teacher educator. MCA was used to analyse both texts and talk.

Finally, with specific reference to the job advertisements and further particulars, we conducted an analysis of them as written texts, as instances of a particular genre that share a typified rhetorical purpose (Bazerman 2004). Genres can be understood as historically-evolving cultural tools that seek to achieve the same social action (Miller 1984). Further particulars are complex texts, emerging within institutions over often lengthy periods of time, with a recognizably similar social function. For example, while further particulars usually contain references to the specific duties of the advertised post within the Education academic unit, they also refer to the expectations of the specific pay grade or rank across the whole institution. These documents can often reveal traces of earlier versions and how conceptualisations have changed between different drafts (e.g. two sets of further particulars for two different posts in the same department). In analysing the job advertisements and further particulars as instances of genres, we looked particularly for contradictions within the texts because such contradictions can reveal the diverse ways in which the job category is understood within institutions. In other words, we did not simply assume that the advertisements and job descriptions externalised how the HE institution was conceptualising teacher education as academic work and our genre analysis of these texts (as well as our interviews with the heads of department) surfaced how the texts were negotiated within the institutions on the basis of different and sometimes competing priorities.

Job advertisements and further particulars were collected by a research assistant under the supervision of the first author. The first and second authors conducted the research interviews with the academic leaders (heads of department or their nominees). All three authors analysed the data using qualitative data analysis software (Wordsmith and Max QDA), with regular cross-checking at each stage, including how the data was being represented, displayed and coded, as well as the final interpretations. All three authors also contributed to the writing of this article.

3. FINDINGS: INSTITUTIONAL CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF TEACHER EDUCATION

In focusing on how the category of HE-based teacher educator was produced in the job advertisements and further particulars, and research interviews with academic leaders in Education departments, our perspective was shaped by a sociocultural understanding of language as a mediational means by which individuals and institutions think and reason together (Mäkitalo & Säljö 2002, Mercer 2000). Moreover, the shaping of categories at the institutional level to some extent precedes individual sense-making, particularly when individuals are invited to align themselves with institutional motives and meanings in a job application process; to that extent, individual prospective employees are invited to 'join in' with the institutional language game. This study did not collect and analyse work-place discourse but, consistent with a sociocultural theoretical perspective on categorisation, our analysis proceeded on the basis that understanding how and where the category of teacher educator was produced in texts and talk might reveal something about the broader sociocultural traditions of conceptualisation and argumentation that manifest themselves in the field of teacher

education in England overall, as well as in specific institutional sites of teacher education activity. In other words, analysing institutional conceptualisations might allow us to get some sense of how teacher education in England – as a field of practice and as a type of academic work - is produced, culturally and historically, in language.

3.1 Producing the category I: job advertisements and further particulars texts

In analysing the written texts, we quickly became aware that sectoral generalisations (i.e. between new and old institutions) could not be warranted. A complex situation was revealed, in terms of attributions to and substantiations of the *teacher educator* category, and in contradictions in the further particulars documents.

3.1.1 'We are looking for ...': introducing the teacher educator as academic worker

In many of the advertisements (46 of 111), the phrase was focused on the noun 'practitioner'. The following examples were typical of the range:

an experienced, highly skilled *practitioner* who is passionate about their subject and has an ability to explore ideas and pose questions (new university A)

a *practitioner* with QTS to work on primary ITT (old university C)

As 'practitioner' was rarely explained (as it is in the second example above – QTS [Qualified Teacher Status] being the professional credential in England), we inferred that what was being sought was a school-teaching practitioner. Other nouns used to orient applicants include *educator* and *pedagogue*, with *lecturer* accounting for just 3 instances out of 111. In other advertisements, beyond the academic job title in the headline, the role was not named and a different construction employed (e.g. In this role, you will teach on ...). If using an acronym, advertisements referred to 'ITT' – initial teacher training – the preferred alternative in policy terms to initial teacher education (ITE).

A wide range of verbs attributed activities to the job category. Teaching students is normally a significant part of the work of university-based teacher educators, as it is for academics in all disciplines. Most of the further particulars emphasised the variety of teaching required by the posts but there were many references to *training* and *delivering content*. The following examples were typical:

training students on the BA course (old university E)

delivering secondary ITT programmes (new university D)

Other verbs used frequently included *supervising* and *tutoring* in relation to working with student teachers during school placements. Indeed, as postgraduate teacher education in England is essentially school-based, there were a diverse range of verbs used to attribute forms of partnership-working to the teacher educator category. Indeed, *partnership* was used more often in the advertisements and further particulars than *schools*. Partnership-working, as an attribute of the teacher educator, was conceptualised in a variety of ways in the further particulars – from a developmental perspective on shared work with teachers through to an organisational arrangement that needed to be managed and quality-assured.

Personal qualities were important in a significant minority of the advertisements as well as in the further particulars, leading to the elaboration of adjectives attributed to the person, before the specification of the job's main duties. Advertisements that emphasised personal qualities tended to prioritise enthusiasm, dedication and resilience. The following examples reflect these emphases:

an enthusiastic and dedicated person (new university G)

a colleague with energy, enthusiasm and vision (new university H)

an excellent communicator with a positive approach for this exciting role in our challenging environment (new university D)

The nouns used (*person, colleague, communicator*) were also interesting and there was a strong, if implicit, sense in some of the advertisements, as in the third example above, that an unusual combination of positive personal qualities would be necessary to fulfil the role successfully.

3.1.2 *Internal contradictions in further particulars texts - and intra-institutional variations*

Variation between advertisements/further particulars from the same HE institution but different academic units (e.g. two departments in the same large school or college of education) also revealed tensions between whole-institution and Education unit conceptualisations. For example, many new HE institutions' further particulars were characterised by elaborations of the distinction between Lecturer and Senior Lecturer. But *within* such institutions, there were also significant differences between whole institutional-level and Education unit discourse.

In further particulars from a new HE institution's School of Education, for example, the main duties consisted of up to 10 bullet points organised loosely around the themes of personal qualities, teaching and administrative tasks. In the same institution's School of Physical Education, the main duties were summarised in two paragraphs, focused on the kinds of teaching expected, with the administrative work linked to the activities of

the institution as a whole and presented as an opportunity for 'wider involvement'. In the School of Physical Education there was also a specific reference to research and encouragement to potential post-holders to develop their own scholarly interests. The contrast between the further particulars from these different departments within the same institution was interesting for the way in which the School of Education posts were conceived of as somewhat separate from the wider institutional context whereas the posts within the School of Physical Education seemed much more aligned with whole institutional-level expectations delivered in the common section on expectations of Lecturers/Senior Lecturers.

3.1.3 The position of research in the job description's main duties list

Overall, it was rare for institutions to give research priority in the first half of the main duties list, and in only one instance (at an old university) did it appear consistently throughout the initial advertisement. In this case (for a lecturer vacancy in geography education) 'research and teaching' appeared throughout the details and one of the selection criteria was a 'commitment to develop high quality research output'. Two vacancies at an old HE institution (both at the level of lecturer) indicated that research was expected, but for the Music position, whilst research was mentioned as a priority (after teaching) in the job advertisement, in the main duties list 'willingness to engage in research' had fallen to 11th place. For the Science post, research was at 9th place. Whilst the majority of advertisements (61 out of 111) did include research and/or scholarship as a requirement, its position in the main duties lists of the further particulars varied from 1st to 22nd. And, of course, this means that 45% of the advertised posts made no reference to research at all.

As we have already indicated, intra-institutional variations were often pronounced and this was also true with respect to the position of research in the main duties list. The main duties lists for the full-time, permanent vacancies in the large Faculty of Education at one new HE institution gave research very different priorities. For example, in the main duties list for a Senior Lecturer in Primary Maths Education, the first priority was:

1. Lead advanced scholarship and research in the area of Primary and/or Early Years Mathematics and lead bids for research funding.

- whereas a Design and Technology position at the same level had a 'contribution' to research or 'scholarly development' as the second priority, with the field left open.

3.2 Producing the category II: the interviews with academic leaders in Education departments

Unlike the advertisements and further particulars texts, within our small sample of interviews with academic leaders (Heads of Department [HoD], Deans, Chairs or their representatives), it was possible to observe differences along sectoral (new and old) lines although, as we discuss later, these differences will of course have been jointly-constructed in the interview talk.

3.2.1 'You have to be both': the teacher educator as a hybrid category

In the research interviews with old university academic leaders, the *teacher educator* was categorised around a tension between research productivity and quality ('outputs', 'profile', RAE outcomes, etc.) and the potential and capacity of teacher educators to inform and influence the professional development of beginning teachers. The latter, more professional attributes were often expressed as personal dispositions towards working with teachers and with schools. Out of the four old university academic leaders, only one (Belvoir) offered a rationale for the importance of teacher educators' research and scholarly activity in student teacher learning.

The Dunmore University HoD spoke of teacher educators as 'bridges' between 'purely academic' staff (not defined) and professional staff who only worked on initial teacher education programmes. Teacher educators at Dunmore were positioned as a hybrid category of academic worker and one that was useful strategically in promoting the department to university senior management when government Ofsted inspections resulted in excellent grades made public in reports. The Ashland University Head of Teacher Education spoke about the importance of teacher educators' 'recent and relevant' school experience but also spoke of them in contrast to categorisations of 'excellent teachers' and 'excellent researchers'. For the Chalfont HoD, teacher educators were also positioned between academics in 'very pure' disciplines (also not defined) and the 'awfully practical' world of school experience. In response to a question about what knowledge, skills and experience were privileged when making teacher education appointments, the Chalfont HoD gave a sense both of the hybridity of the teacher educator as academic worker and of the HoD's positioning as a middle-manager in HE:

I am in the middle of two very hard places. One is my director of research who goes scatty if I don't demand publications, PhDs etc ... on the other hand these people have to teach on PGCE [initial teacher education] programmes, so they have to be practitioners. They have to have experience in schools And you cannot logically expect someone who's spent half a lifetime teaching in schools ... usually getting to a post of responsibility, deputy headships, that sort of thing ... to have also built a good research profile and have lots of publications in (...) journals.

The Belvoir HoD also spoke around the challenge this presented to HE institutions when deciding how to conceptualise the teacher educator and their work but Belvoir was distinctive in our sample because research productivity and quality were clearly privileged and a recent appointment on this basis was given as an example. The Belvoir HoD was also distinctive in being the only participant who made an argument – at two different points in the interview - for the importance of teacher educators' research and scholarship in student teachers' learning. Responding to a question that asked how teacher educator as a job would be explained to the general public, the HoD said:

... being a really good teacher educator has to be research informed, because ideally you would want the next generation of teachers to be being taught by the leading edge in terms of knowing where the field is going. But they also need to be excellent practitioners. So I think you know you have to be both. [...] Because often an excellent practitioner is heavily rooted in their own context and their own experiences. And the one real advantage of being a professional teacher educator, if you could put it like that is that, and a researcher, is that you see things from multiple perspectives ... so that you can counterpoint things.

In the interviews with old university academic leaders, the teacher educator was produced as a hybrid category of academic worker requiring both research and professional credibility – an effective practitioner but one that was not situation-bound. Although the Belvoir HoD did make an argument for the importance of research attributes in relation to professional outcomes, overall it was interesting that the importance of teacherly credibility was assumed rather than argued for.

3.2.2 *'Quite different to other faculties': the teacher educator as an exceptional category*

In the research interviews with the academic leaders at new HE institutions, teacher educator as a category was produced rather differently – as 'role models', capable of 'transferring best practice' as recognisably 'professional' figures subject to the tight constraints of policy. The Gebwick University HoD expressed it this way: 'our tutors have to model the best possible pedagogy, they have to be creative in their practice, set high standards of professionalism and integrity'. All four academic leaders emphasised the importance of 'successful professional experience' - with Eglinton also stressing 'middle to senior management experience' in schools and Finbury, local authority (school district) advisory work - and all categorised the *teacher educator* by invoking official (e.g. TDA and Ofsted) and managerial discourses more consistently than the old sector academic leaders. But research and scholarship as aspects of teacher educators' work were not entirely absent in these interviews. Thus, when the Eglinton associate HoD was asked:

Interviewer: [...] when you made the appointments what was it that you were privileging?

Eglinton: We were looking for a particular academic and professional expertise in terms of a specific procurement area.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Eglinton: Um ... we were looking for some middle management to senior experience within their existing organisation in terms of managing staff and in terms of managing curriculum development.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Eglinton: Um ... we were looking for somebody who has got a research potential that might fit into our themed areas in terms of research within the school and within the faculty.

- the interaction illustrates both the eventual priorities that were apparent across the academic leaders in the four new HE institutions as well as the development of the jointly-constructed talk in the interview. These academic leaders' reasoning about research and scholarly activity was relatively more difficult to elicit in the interviews with only one of them (Hawtree) offering a rationale and strategy for research and researcher development.

Conscious that their institutional context required organised developmental activity ('we grow our own'), the Hawtree HoD spoke of 'research clusters' led by a professor which all new teacher educator were required to join, where they were offered research mentorship and where research targets were part of annual appraisal. The Finbury HoD spoke briefly of 'currently reviewing strategies for supporting research development in advance of the 2013 REF' (the next iteration of the RAE) but strategic development of teacher educators' research capacity did not figure in the other two interviews. Moreover, although all these academic leaders spoke in various ways of teacher education work being 'research-informed', other than in the Hawtree interview, in response to questions about how university-level expectations of lecturers might be addressed, there was no sense of how teacher educators (mostly straight from school and without a Master's degree) would *become* research-informed nor sustain this capacity.

The interviews with these HoDs also showed the extent to which they regarded the Education department as distinctive within their universities – with different expectations of new academic staff than in other academic areas and with different institutional aims. When asked whether what was privileged in making teacher education appointments was similar to what other faculties within the university privileged, the Gebwick HoD responded:

Um, no I would think we're probably quite different to most other faculties. Because we um ... along with the health faculty we are looking for experienced professionals to join an educational faculty which still has a large core of its business in training initial professionals, whether it's in teaching or youth and community work or early years work. So um ... we are looking for academic qualification as well as professional qualification and experience professionally. That's quite different to most other faculties.

Across these interviews, Education departments were conceptualised by the academic leaders principally as sites of teacher education 'business' and this was presented as leading to somewhat different priorities to the rest of the institution. Teacher educators were produced as an exceptional category of academic worker in this sense

and also in the sense of bearing strong personal responsibilities as professional role models and exemplary practitioners.

4. DISCUSSION: THE PROFESSIONAL/RESEARCHER CONTRADICTION

In our sample of job advertisements and further particulars, it was common for HE institutions to conceptualise the teacher educator as a ‘super teacher’ – an effective classroom practitioner demonstrating strong personal qualities of enthusiasm and resilience. *Training* and *delivery* described teaching. Partnerships with schools were sometimes developmental in intent but more often conceptualised managerially. No significant differences were observed between new (post-1992) and old (pre-1992) HE sectors but differences in the way teacher educators and their work were conceptualised were often apparent *within* the same institution. For example, some posts were clearly aligned with whole-institution expectations of academic work whereas obvious discontinuities were apparent between other posts and these same expectations.

Some differences were observed between how teacher educators were being categorised in interviews with the academic leaders in new and old HE institutions but it is important to acknowledge that these differences were produced in jointly-constructed talk of an interview throughout which our participants were aware of – and, in one case, explicitly referred to – our own institutional situations as researchers. Nonetheless, in interviews with academic leaders in old HE institutions, teacher educators were categorised around a contradiction between research productivity and professional credibility. The teacher educator was produced as a hybrid category of academic worker. In the interviews with academic leaders in new HE institutions, the teacher educator was produced as an exceptional category, somewhat distinct from the rest of the institution, with different expectations made of them and different institutional goals. Although both sets of academic leaders, in several respects, appeared to be managing a similar range of work (e.g. the professional preparation of teachers, continuing professional development, research degrees) under similar resource constraints (national salary levels, national levels of student fee income) and experiencing similar kinds of personal pressure (Ofsted inspection grades, budgetary concerns, institutional reputation and prestige), the way in which teacher educators and their work was conceptualised in talk was different and these discursive differences related to questions of research and the capacity of teacher educators to develop a ‘research profile’.

It is important for us to stress that we have been analysing publically-available texts (job advertisements and further particulars) and research interviews with senior figures in the Education academic community in English universities. Although different kinds of conceptualisation and argumentation are at work in the different types of data (published writing and jointly-constructed interview talk), it is reasonable to assume that, taken as a whole, our data allows some insight into the ways a mixed sample of institutions conceptualise teacher education as academic work. This is not to say that our data makes institutional conceptualisations universally transparent; we do not claim that this is what these institutions think and argue always and everywhere. Given

that we have to assume that the institutions thought seriously before publishing job descriptions and that the academic leaders who answered our questions did so carefully, it nonetheless seems fair to move forward on the understanding that our analysis does make it possible to comment on the ways in which the categorisations were produced and how they were used to build arguments in the public sphere about HE-based teacher educators and their work.

To this extent, it is perhaps surprising that the degree to which conceptualisations of teacher education as academic work are coherent is fairly limited, both within and between institutions. What *is* shared is the teacher educator's difficult positioning in HE, a positioning that is produced differently in the text and talk data but reflected, for example, in a common reluctance to use the word 'lecturer' (the main academic career grade in the UK). Similarly, the institutions shared a commitment to teacher educators' credibility with the profession, usually demonstrated through significant professional experience. Indeed, this commitment to professional credibility was rather taken-for-granted.

What is not shared, it seems, is an argument for the importance of research as an aspect of teacher educators' work and for the relationship between research and teaching. Neither is an awareness of the need to develop research capacity in teacher educators, not only in relation to accountability and funding (i.e. RAE) issues of productivity but in relation to claims for research-informed teaching and student teachers' learning. In our sample of job advertisements and further particulars and in the interviews, we found some exceptions but they were indeed exceptional rather than systemic. We realise that one response to this interpretation of our findings is: does it matter? Perhaps wide institutional differences are what we should expect, each institution determining their own mission and values, recruiting staff and conceptualising teacher education as they see fit. It could be argued that there will inevitably be hierarchies of institutions like universities and colleges and hierarchies of departments, and staff within those departments, and perhaps there should be increasing acceptance of diversification according to institution-type (e.g. research-intensive and teaching-only) and of different categories of academic worker? Twombly et al (2006), for example, in their study of US faculty searches, ask whether the clinical faculty model – teaching staff without expectations of a research career but with a strong professional background – is worth consideration by the field as a whole. One practical problem with adopting this model in England is that all HE institutions and the work of all academic staff (i.e. lecturers) are regulated by the same criteria (e.g. Ofsted, the RAE audit, the Higher Education Funding Council quality assurance regime, international comparisons, etc), with common expectations of research and teaching excellence as well as the relatively recent assumption that teachers undergoing professional preparation in one institution's programme will have an equivalent or even identical preparation to those qualifying from others. Such are the consequences of a national competency-based model of initial teacher education.

Another interpretation of our findings might be that the position of teacher educators reflects a wider situation across HE generally in England or at least in professional/vocational fields such as Management/Business and Health/Social Care. Both the ESRC demographic review and our interviewees referred to potential commonalities here. Further research might undertake the same analyses of vacancies in these disciplines and others. It may well be the case that differences in conceptualisation in professional schools reflect the increasing stratification of HE in England on research lines. Certainly, on the basis of our data, it appears that what Enders referred to as the international trend across HE of ‘the rise of a class of non-professorial teachers’ and ‘a group of externally financed contracted research staff’ is increasingly true of Education departments in England, with all the potential conflicts that this trend entails (Enders 2000: 23). That said, perhaps the situation of teacher education in England is indeed unusual: given its long history in institutions of one kind or another, teacher education’s location continues to be under threat, whereas the position of relative newcomers to HE in England (such as Nursing and Health/Social Care) appears to be strengthening.

5. CONCLUSION: A FUTURE FOR THE PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION OF TEACHERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION?

When HE institutions in England think about what they are ‘looking for’ when recruiting teacher educators, on the basis of our data, it seems reasonable to conclude that they want an expert ‘practitioner’ who can ‘deliver’ research-informed teaching or possibly develop a research ‘profile’, depending on the institutional context. This position is coherent insofar as it renders the teacher educator as a difficult or troublesome category, as hybrid or exceptional, and often the subject of some sort of truce with the HE institution as a whole. The position lacks coherence, however, in that it doesn’t attempt to reconcile what are presented as contradictory expectations nor does it argue a case for professional education in relation to HE as a whole. Given that the future direction of HE in England is uncertain given a new policy and funding environment following the 2010 general election and the likely impact of a government White Paper on schools and teacher education, our view is that this question of coherence merits serious consideration. It is also a question, however differently inflected, that can be asked of teacher education systems internationally.

On the one hand, one could argue for the professional education of teachers as the cutting edge of HE where knowledge has to meet multiple tests of rigour and relevance in intersecting settings for practice under public scrutiny. Hybridity, from this perspective (as it is in horticulture) is a strength and should be the ultimate goal of all academic work where researchers/practitioners co-produce knowledge (Gibbons et al 1994). Teacher educators, from this perspective, do not simply act as a conduit for ‘research findings’ to teachers, with straightforward implications for practice, but instead their research and teaching develops a theory of professional practice that informs and engages with the work of other researchers. So rather than accepting the potentially undermining distinction between ‘basic’ and ‘applied’ research, the academic work of the teacher educator potentially explodes such a polarity with a focus on practice-developing research that also develops a theory of practice (cf. Chaiklin 1993). The hybrid vigour of the teacher educator therefore arises from their

capacity to develop new knowledge across multiple social settings and at different levels of specialisation and abstraction. This meaningful interpretation of hybridity is one that Zeichner has begun to pursue in the US context (Zeichner 2010).

If, on the other hand, proximity to practice and ‘professional credibility’ are over-riding factors, there are at least two important questions to answer: first, given that initial teacher education in England is essentially school-based, do both partners (schools and HE institutions) need the same forms of expertise? It seems reasonable to assume that, appropriately resourced, school teachers would win the credibility argument every time and initial teacher education would therefore need to be located in schools. Expecting HE-based teacher educators to act as ‘super teachers’, as external facilitators of reflection, as quality assurance consultants or as ‘enthusiastic’ and ‘resilient’ accreditors of school-based, school-led inquiry is surely an unsustainable model of HE’s involvement in teacher education. Traditionally, at least, suitability for academic work has not relied on personal qualities alone. Second, when the teaching profession - in the way Evetts (2009) understands a profession as a knowledge-creating collective, built on principles of collegiality and trust – is being transformed through political reform, in England and internationally, what does ‘professional credibility’ and, more vitally, professional knowledge actually mean? When government seeks to specify the professional knowledge-base (for however laudable ends), then the highest levels of professional credibility can only ever be achieved by civil servants and policy advisors. The involvement of HE institutions only complicates and slows down reform, from a politician’s perspective; professional credibility can only accrue to those who align themselves with the policy.

These positions might seem extreme – a new vision for the professional education of teachers in HE or acceptance of a transformed professionalism and a new arrangement for teacher education in schools. We are not arguing for either position here. But we do want to suggest the importance of a coherent position, whatever its direction. Coherence need not mean uniformity. Our view is that teacher education as an academic field of practice in HE in England needs to build an argument, to make a case. Whatever the specific details and variations, we suspect that these are some of the alternative conceptualisations of teacher education that governments, HE institutions and the profession will have to confront in the years ahead, in England and elsewhere.

Word count: 7810

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NOTES

ⁱ England is one country within a four country, devolved United Kingdom. Scotland and Northern Ireland have long histories of separate educational policy-making. Since 1999, Wales has also developed its own policies following political devolution and the establishment of a representative assembly.

ⁱⁱ Throughout the article, we use both ‘new’/’old’ and pre-/post-1992 to refer to generally-understood groupings of UK HE institutions. Given that the ‘new’ designation is used to describe both former polytechnics and specialist teachers’ colleges, many of which have long histories, we recognise these labels are somewhat unsatisfactory. Nonetheless, it is commonplace to refer to a structural divide in UK HE along ‘new’/’old’ lines.

ⁱⁱⁱ SCITTS are led by schools, usually in a particular geographic area, often in some form of collaboration with an HE institution but with the schools taking full responsibility for academic and professional standards. The TDA figures referenced here do not include numbers for the Graduate Teacher Programme – technically, an entirely school-based route into teaching - which are allocated separately.

^{iv} ‘Further particulars’ is the generic name given in England to the texts that supplement the job advertisement. ‘Further particulars’ usually include, at minimum, a description of the employer, their mission, a job description and sometimes a person specification (lists of essential and desirable qualifications and experience).

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