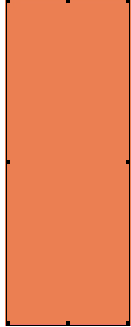




Key note address 2009 conference



## **How we see the landscape: managing boundaries or developing potential?**

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### **Introduction**

Initial teacher education partnerships have come a long way since the circular published in 1992 by the Department for Education, as it was then (and the subsequent one in 1993 relating specifically to the training of primary school teachers) with its expectation that 'partner schools and HEIs will exercise a joint responsibility for the planning and management of courses, and the selection, training and assessment of students'. This circular also set out, more or less, what it saw as the role and function of the individual partners within initial teacher education, leading to what John Furlong and his colleagues involved in the Modes of Teacher Education (MOTE) project called 'complementary partnerships'. In such partnerships, to quote from their 2000 book *Teacher education in transition – Reforming professionalism?*, 'the school and the university or college are seen as having separate and complementary responsibilities' but with 'no systematic attempt to bring these two dimensions

into dialogue'. Day (2007) has more recently referred to this as 'coalition partnership' or the 'inter-dependency model' (2007:25). In reality, however, the MOTE project team reported that what it found in most cases were examples of 'HEI led partnerships' where it was the teacher training institutions that defined and directed the nature of the activities in which student teachers were engaged while they were in schools during their teaching practice. However, Furlong and his colleagues also talked about collaborative partnerships in which the initial teacher education provider and schools are seen as equal partners and where there is joint decision making in relation to all aspects of the programme, but acknowledged that examples of such partnerships were few and far between, the most notable example being the Oxford Internship Scheme (Benton, 1990; McIntyre 1997). Day (2007) refers to collaborative or 'equal' partnerships as following a collegial model where 'all agencies negotiate and agree the outcomes, the roles and responsibilities and the reciprocal accountabilities' (2007:26). These partnerships, he says, are characterised by a 'sense of trust/ownership/respect' and examine 'ethical/epistemological/pedagogical interests' (2007:26). Partnerships in initial education, whatever model they may follow, continue to evolve but there are nevertheless frequent reminders of the need to re-evaluate the nature of these partnerships, for example the recent call from Moran and her colleagues at the University of Ulster (2009) for partnerships that display the characteristics of 'consistency, continuity and community' (2009:7)

In considering the nature of partnership in initial teacher education I want to begin by recognising that the landscape of partnership is something that is complex and dynamic. Likewise we have to be able to conceptualise it from a number of different dimensions - while it may have many distinctive features we are unlikely to get the best out of it if we only ever take the same vantage point. Furthermore we have to be aware of the complexity of the eco-systems at work in the landscape if we are to move on to thinking about developing its potential in such a way as to maintain its outstanding features, draw on its natural resources efficiently and effectively and enhance its overall impact on those who operate within it, in whatever capacity.

I am aware that I am going to be in great danger of stretching the metaphor too far and that at some point the analogy will break down but I was quite pleased that the conference is entitled partnership landscapes because I think it is a useful way of looking at some key issues. What I want to talk about today is the way in which our perception of the landscape is something that can either facilitate or constrain the way in which we see partnerships developing, so I am going to attempt to address these three questions:

**What are the particularly striking features of the current partnership landscape?**

**What are seen as being some of the less attractive features of the terrain in other words some of the 'blots on the landscape'?**

**What is the potential for re-defining the landscape in such a way as to bring about positive benefits for all those involved in initial teacher education?**

In addressing the theme I am going to be drawing to some extent on some data that was collected as part of a TDA funded project (Best *et al.* 2005 ) looking at initial teacher education partnerships and in particular the role of the school co-ordinator within those partnerships.

**What might be seen as the 'distinctive features' of the current landscape?**

Firstly we have to acknowledge that many schools now work in partnership with a number of different ITT providers. From our own study (Mutton & Butcher, 2008) we found that the majority of schools are working with at least two providers (see Table I), although those working with at least three providers are more likely (although not exclusively) to be secondary schools which perhaps is to be expected given the relative size of schools and the capacity of smaller schools to receive only a limited number of trainees. The fact that 52% of primary schools

and 85% of secondary schools in the sample were working with more than one ITT provider indicates that the landscape may have changed somewhat in recent years. Within these figures almost a quarter of the primary schools in the study and over half the secondary schools were actually working with at least 3 different providers, including 54% of primary schools and 63% of secondary schools involved with trainee teachers following an employment based route into teaching through the Graduate Teacher Programme.

Table I

Percentages of schools in the sample working in partnership with one or more ITT providers

Number of ITT providers from whom the school is accepting trainees	Percentage of primary schools	Percentage of secondary schools	Percentage of all schools
1	48	15	31
2	30	30	30
3	18	27	23
4	0	22	11
5	4	6	5

We also found that some schools were developing the capacity to take on greater numbers of trainees for longer periods of time. This was particularly true of secondary schools, although one primary school did report taking on 21 different trainees for a placement of 10 weeks or longer.

Thus we are looking at a context where many schools are keen to take on greater involvement in initial teacher education, both in terms of the number of providers with whom they are working and the number of individual trainees that these schools are accepting. It is also generally the case that trainee teachers have good experiences of those schools which are keen to take on board fully their partnership responsibilities.

### **So what does successful partnership mean to these schools?**

Schools in our own study were clearly able to identify a range of potential advantages in being involved in their initial teacher education partnerships and these findings (Mutton & Butcher, 2008) echoed those of previous studies, in particular those summarised by Hurd (2007) in his review of the research relating to the impact of trainee teachers on school achievement.

Firstly such involvement is seen to be an advantage both in terms of the direct benefits to pupil learning of having trainee teachers in the classroom and in terms of the indirect benefits that come from the more general sharing of ideas for good practice amongst the school staff as a whole. Respondents were referring, for example, to a 'cross-fertilisation of ideas', implying a climate of mutual learning. Likewise Hurd (2007) refers to the 'breath of fresh air' both in relation to the trainee teachers' 'enthusiasm and vivacity' and to the context in

which involvement in initial teacher education helps to 'refresh the host teacher's knowledge and skills' (2007:22)

Secondly, working with a number of different providers can be seen as a way of offering wider opportunities for ITT coverage across the school and/or across the curriculum as part of a strategy for continuing professional development. If a school works with only one provider then the skills associated with mentoring might be seen as being limited to a small proportion of teachers within the school whereas involvement in a number of different partnerships enables this expertise to be spread more widely. Having a critical mass of teachers in a school who have the knowledge and expertise to support and develop the professional learning of others is clearly seen to be advantageous.

Thirdly, schools believe that their involvement with a range of providers leads to better opportunities for what might be termed a 'common discourse', that is to say the development of a wider understanding of ITT-related issues. One school coordinator in our study talked about "sharing a philosophy" across the partnership in relation to initial teacher training and another talked of the 'benefit of getting professionals together to talk' (Mutton & Butcher, 2008:54)

Discourse can be seen as an important 'boundary object' since, as Wenger (2000) says, it enables 'people to communicate and negotiate meanings across boundaries' (2000:236).

What these three areas seem to indicate is that teacher education can become the catalyst for wider professional development within schools when expertise is distributed between partners and when initial teacher education is seen as being a key contributor to what schools would see as their core activity (that is to say the education of its own pupils) rather than being seen as a peripheral activity. There can inevitably be tensions when schools see involvement in teacher education as detracting from their primary concern, but this is only likely to be the case if the role of schools is seen by either partner as merely providing the context in which trainee teachers carry out 'teaching practice'. In other words if, in terms of managing the landscape, trainee teachers are seen merely as apprentice workers drafted in from the outside to toil in the fields for a limited period of time, before being taken back for further training and subsequently moved elsewhere.

Likewise, the way in which the different partners engage with the challenges inherent in any system of teacher education can determine to what extent the partnership in question is able to mature and expand.; or to what extent it remains constrained by the need for individual partners to manage their own boundaries and to maintain their own organisational stability (Edwards & Mutton, 2007). Any tensions as to the way in which individual roles or responsibilities within the partnership might be perceived can, rather than being seen as problematic, actually lead to a better understanding of how the



partnership is conceived and the way in which it functions on a day to day basis. Such an analysis, which involves all the partners and which draws on a range of perspectives, might lead to both a shared and a more developed notion of partnership itself.

**So what might some of these challenges be, the blots on the landscape perhaps?**

Firstly there is the fairly common complaint that the resources available may not adequately support the amount of time needed to ensure that the individual trainee teacher is able to learn both effectively and successfully. A lack of time and financial resourcing to do the job properly was a source of dissatisfaction among the school co-ordinators in our own study and I suspect that this would be common to most partnerships.

Secondly those responsible in schools for the co-ordination of the trainee teacher's practice can be frustrated that they are required to focus mainly on the management of systems rather than on the trainee teacher's professional learning, which may not even be seen as a primary focus at all. School-based initial teacher education can easily become dominated by bureaucratic procedures with a particular focus on quality assurance mechanisms, leading to the complaint that there is too much 'paperwork'.

Thirdly the landscape has perhaps become less easy to define in recent years as schools are now working with increasing numbers of initial teacher education providers, which can result in many of the issues being exacerbated on a larger extent. Schools may see the differing requirements of a range of providers as constraining the way in which they work with trainee teachers where these requirements are seen as 'prescriptive and bureaucratic' to quote one of the respondents in our own survey and copious paperwork is seen as being a necessary concomitant to this level of administration. Some groups of providers, (either through their own initiative or as a result of participation in small-scale funded project work) have addressed this issue by agreeing to work with common pro-forma for schools, but this may not be without its own problems. Drawing on work carried out as part of the evaluation of the Teacher Training Agency 'National Partnership Project' Furlong *et al.* (2006) point out that:

*(w)hen partnership is reduced to finding more places or setting up common procedures and paperwork, without paying attention to the epistemological and pedagogical issues underpinning any one teacher education programme, it undermines the nature of the professional education that is offered. Once again, it flattens the complexity and reduces teacher education to technical rationalist tasks. (Furlong et al. 2006, 34)*

The result of this is that the relatively small number of people who work across the boundaries in initial teacher education (and in particular the school ITT coordinators who are seen as being the link between the school and the ITT provider) may see their role primarily as a bureaucratic one that mainly involves the maintenance of administrative systems. Furthermore it may be seen as being highly risky to disrupt such systems – from the school point of view because it may be more problematic if initial teacher education is seen as needing to be a more integrated part of the school's activity; and from the provider point of view because the more that the trainee's school-based experience is 'directed' by that provider the more effectively quality assurance procedures can be implemented and monitored. The boundaries between providers and schools are, like all such inter-organisational boundaries, likely to be complex and potentially problematic and the work that occurs there can be threatening for systems that instinctively seek stability.

Furthermore, some schools are clearly relishing their enhanced involvement in the training process, particularly those secondary schools that have been designated as Training Schools (Department of Education and Employment, 1999a, 1999b) and while there are some good examples of collaboration between ITT providers and these schools (see, for example, Brooks, 2006), we should be aware that there is an altering partnership dynamic. Where there are schools that are working with a large number of trainees from a number of

different providers there may be an expectation that the school, rather than any one external partner, will determine the nature of the training experience within that school. An argument could be made that the consistency of experience within one school is actually more important to that school than the consistency of experience across all the students within a group of trainees from any one provider. However this approach is not ultimately going to reinforce the development of more collaborative partnerships since it will be the vested interests of the individual schools rather than any commonly agreed principles that then determine any approaches to partnership in initial teacher education.

### **So what can we do to develop the landscape?**

What I really want to focus on is the way in which we can perhaps think about addressing some of these issues and developing further the still to be tapped potential of partnerships within initial teacher education, particular in the context of schools working with multiple ITT providers. If we are to think about re-conceptualising initial teacher education partnerships in any way then I think we have to have to consider carefully the following:

Firstly we have to be explicit about what sort of teacher education programme we want to develop, perhaps with regard to Wideen's (1998) categorisation

(cited in Bills *et al.* 2007) of either a positivist tradition or a progressive tradition. In the EPPI review that focussed on the 'structure, management and processes in initial teacher education' (Bills *et al.*, 2007) the authors describe the positivist approach as being one which relies on a model in which 'the university provides the knowledge base for teaching and the school supplies the context for practice' whereas the progressive approach focuses on what it is that 'beginning teachers know and believe and how they come to know and believe it' (2007:5). In the latter case the focus is clearly on the student teachers' learning. Trying to reconcile these two approaches might clearly lead to tensions, but I would suggest that any notion of developed partnership needs to be rooted in such a progressive approach.

Within such an approach there is the need for a shared understanding of the principles underpinning any partnership, its purposes and the roles played by individuals within the institutions or organisations that are the participating members. This understanding would clearly need to develop through negotiation and acknowledge the nature of the expertise distributed across partnerships as a whole. The development of mentoring skills and mentor expertise in recent years following the implementation of circulars 9/92 and 14/93 has been enormous and is well documented. Hagger and McIntyre (2006) acknowledge the current expertise of mentors to enable them to fulfil the role of teacher educators but add that:

*it is not at all apparent that they have been asked or encouraged to develop this or indeed new roles and strategies in ways that take full advantage of their positions, knowledge and expertise. If this had been done, and done thoughtfully, we are in no doubt that very much more success would have been achieved in relation to all three of our suggested tasks (Hagger & McIntyre, 2006, p18)*

These three suggested tasks relate to the aims of initial teacher education as they see it, namely to develop trainee teachers' classroom teaching expertise, to prepare them for ongoing professional learning rooted in their own professional experience and to prepare them to 'engage intelligently with ideas for innovation and improvement'.

This leads on to the next consideration, which is the need for a focus on the individual trainee teacher's learning to be at the heart of partnership work. This may seem fairly uncontroversial but I would question to what extent this is always the case within our own partnership models. I suggested earlier that much of the focus of partnership activity is actually on the maintenance of organisational structures whereas we might envisage partnerships where the main focus is on what the beginning teacher is learning in any given context (be it school, university, or any other contexts) and how this learning takes place. Such an

approach recognises the need for expertise to be distributed across partnerships and for roles and responsibilities to be negotiated and interpreted in fresh ways, which will, in itself, lead to changes in professional identities.

Further work that we have carried out as part of our teacher education research at the University of Oxford has centred on the 'Developing the Expertise of Beginning Teachers' (DEBT) project, a three year longitudinal project that has tracked beginning teachers through their PGCE year and their first two years of teaching. Findings from this project have highlighted the complexity of the thinking of these teachers (Burn *et al.* 2000; Burn *et al.* 2003) and the importance of understanding both what it is that these teachers are actually learning and the way in which they are learning it (Burn *et al.* 2007; Hagger *et al.* 2008; Mutton *et al.* 2009). Such an understanding, I would argue, needs to be at the heart of all initial teacher education partnerships.

Thus I think that there needs to be greater openness to all the possibilities for effective school-based teacher education and a greater willingness to examine more closely the wider pedagogical role that schools might have in preparing new teachers so that the expertise that I have just mentioned is fully tapped. Mentors are, it could be argued, already in a position to fulfil this role although our research with school ITT co-ordinators suggested that their role could have a more pedagogical function (Mutton & Butcher, 2007). I am not just talking here

about the organisation and delivery of a professional studies programme, or the equivalent, which takes place in many schools already. Certainly, in most secondary schools, and in some primary schools, it is the ITT co-coordinator who is responsible for arranging a seminar programme that both serves as an induction to the school for the trainees and as a way of informing them of a range of school policies and practices in relation to specific issues and this could be seen as a pedagogic role. McIntyre *et al.*(1994), however, highlight, the dangers inherent in an approach which only focuses on the way that things are done in the school in question. Whilst it is tempting to adopt such an approach (and since it is one which often suits the trainees own preferences and is relatively easy to manage and deliver) it does not address the question as to why things are done in particular ways, questions which lead on “to questions about alternative practices and their relative merits, and to issues about the criteria being used, the evidence available, and the interests being served.” (McIntyre *et al.*1994, p. 49). What is needed therefore is the establishment of a culture where pedagogical discussions can take place and where tensions between conflicting sources of knowledge can be seen as potentially rich sources of learning rather than as problems. If trainee teachers are struggling with making sense of the discontinuities between, for example, one theoretical perspective and another; or between what they expected to see in practice and what they actually see; or between what they are striving to achieve and what is it actually feasible to achieve; or between what they have learned at a



general level and how that then might relate to a specific context. If they are struggling with such tensions then the opportunity to discuss these issues fully with experienced teachers and their fellow trainees is a highly valuable opportunity. As part of our reconceptualising of partnership landscapes and here, specifically, the role of the ITT co-ordinator in schools, it may be also be worth looking briefly at initiatives elsewhere.

In some Professional Development Schools in the USA the role of the 'site co-ordinator' has been developed as a full time post within schools in order to respond to the demands of implementing 'the multiple functions of a partnership school' (Utley *et al.*, 2003, p. 516). In these schools the site co-ordinators have a key pedagogical role to play both in terms of initial teacher preparation, and professional development, but are also involved in supporting curriculum development in the school, and research and inquiry in an integrated way.

This conceptualisation clearly takes the notion of partnership away from a focus on initial teacher education as a specifically defined activity within an institution to the idea of partnership embracing multi-level activities within the school setting. I would suggest that this is a further way in which we could usefully think about developing the partnership landscape. One of my colleagues at Oxford, Viv Ellis, recently carried out a fascinating research project involving secondary

trainee teachers of English working in close collaboration with the English departments in partnership schools. Set within an activity theory framework the DETAIL project involved 16 student teachers (placed in the English departments of 4 schools) working as co-researchers with their school-based colleagues in relation to various aspects of the teaching of English. One of its key aims was to 'reconfigure roles and relationships in school-based, pre-service teacher education' (Ellis, 2005) and the project itself has important implications that challenge traditional notions of partnership.

An important aspect of the DETAIL project was the importance of the shared learning that took place within the subject department; learning was not an activity that only student teachers themselves were involved in but rather they became an integral part of the school-based knowledge creation that the co-researcher model allowed. However for such an approach to operate successfully the starting point clearly has to be one in which epistemological beliefs are discussed and shared amongst all the participating partners and where developed roles and responsibilities are seen as opportunities rather than threats.

What strikes me about all of this is that when we look at the partnership landscape from our own perspective we can easily forget that others have different vantage points and, as such, may see the same terrain in a very

different way. Furthermore if the boundaries are too rigid then the mechanisms for managing them become rigid too, with systems remaining potentially hierarchical and the trainee teachers themselves, the ones with little or no power within these hierarchies, having to negotiate their way through the features of what may appear, at times, to be a pretty uninviting landscape.

So, to sum up, I see the landscape as being one that has huge potential for development. There are undoubtedly arguments as to why we should maintain our current way of operating in a climate where ITT providers are involved in heavy competition with other providers for school places and where any disruption of the 'lay of the land' might exacerbate these difficulties. I do think, however, that we have to be bold and look to new horizons, first and foremost for the sake of our trainees but not least because it allows us to engage in exciting development opportunities ourselves

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