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Developing a university contribution to teacher education: creating an analytical space for learning narratives

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ABSTRACT

What might a distinct university contribution to teacher education look like? This paper tracks a group of prospective teachers making the transition from undergraduate to teacher on a one-year school-based postgraduate course. The study employs a practitioner research methodological framework where teacher learning is understood as a process of developing and evaluating self-representations. Students persistently revised a story of 'Who I am becoming', referenced to evolving notions of pedagogic subject knowledge. University sessions provided a platform for students to share and discuss their experiences in schools and reflect upon the research process as it occurred. Our findings suggest this approach enables student teachers to account for their learning in more nuanced and sophisticated ways where time for university-based reflection is restricted. The theoretical perspective draws on the psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan. Subjectivity is conceptualized not as fixed but persistently re-produced in an increasingly analytical developmental perspective. Data comprise reflective and analytical material produced by students at successive stages of the course, where this material provides temporal reference points for them in tracking and asserting their own development. The paper provides a methodological framework for teacher education informed by critically reflective constructions of the process through which individuals become teachers.

Introduction

The practitioner research project to be reported here tracked a group of English language and literature graduates aspiring to be secondary school teachers of English. Despite the authors' involvement in a one-year postgraduate course for trainee teachers of secondary English, the research methodology here employed is neither age- nor subject-specific. Our particular circumstances reflect a general interest in what a university-level contribution to teacher development can become (Burn & Mutton, 2015; Rogers, 2011; Sjølie, 2014; Tatto, 2015). Our project was carried out at a university in the North West of England, where the circumstances of teacher education were undergoing rapid change and time with students was particularly compressed.

In this paper, we present the findings of a three-year research study into how university time and university-based expertise are used to complement school experience whilst providing a distinct developmental opportunity for student teachers. Underpinning this opportunity is a theoretical focus informed by Lacanian psychoanalysis, on the developing teacher as a 'subject' of her own learning practices (Brown, Rowley, & Smith, 2014, 2015). We therefore represent a distinct university contribution as enabling a subject to demarcate where that process of higher learning occurs and the ways in which it can be significant.

On this one-year postgraduate training course, student performance was assessed largely in terms of acquisition of skill-based competencies, reflecting criteria in the national Teachers' Standards (TS) (2012–2013). In contrast, we concentrate on the 'inside' perspective, centring on students' understanding of the process of becoming a teacher, how they relate to this understanding and ways in which they are able to articulate it. In a reference to a recent international review of teacher education, Tatto and Furlong (2015, p. 146) write:

> At a time when teacher education is under active development across the four nations of the United Kingdom, an important question for all those seeking to improve the quality of teaching and learning is how to boost the use of research to inform the design, character and content of teacher education programmes.

Our aim is to demonstrate that students involved in a process of practitioner research, with specific theoretical commitments, developed reflexive-analytical capability applicable across school and university locations.

Data for this project were taken from student narrative accounts and reflections, drawing on university and particularly school activity. University sessions provided a platform for the analysis and discussion of data, then stored and made available for subsequent retrieval. Students were able to mark key moments and establish them within a developmental personal trajectory, an evolving story of 'Who I am becoming'. This story was continually revised reflecting shifting circumstances at school and university and the responses of peers (who could interpret situations very differently). Students needed to pay close attention to how stories were being told and reflected upon, in order to remain responsive to new possibility. For example, in early discussion students were often worried about how they were being perceived by pupils, mentors and peers. Over time, most were able to develop a more nuanced vocabulary for self-representation, reflecting their deeper inquiry into the ways in which their opportunities for agency were distributed across roles and situations. Such enhanced understanding implicitly acknowledges our dependency on self-images and how these remain subject to change and renewal (Hanley, 2007). Moreover, the 'original' conception may reveal itself to be rather less solid than we supposed. It was important for student teachers to notice how earlier conceptualizations (in this instance, of 'who I am' in relation to 'how I am seen') were being revised to reflect fresh understanding, and how this contributed to an altered sense of what was possible in future. Course tutors tasked themselves with capturing this activity and making data available to students at intervals for further analysis and discussion.

First, we outline the specific circumstances shaping our enquiry. In the next section, 'pedagogic subject knowledge' specifies the field of our particular project and focuses a wider debate about how teachers develop. This underpins a methodological approach, described next, centring on Lacanian psychoanalysis, in which students portray themselves in professional settings and learn through different identifications with these portrayals. Data are then presented thematically, tracking progressive changes to student identifications. In particular,

the trajectory marks a shift from an early desire for 'competence' as a teacher to more critical forms of engagement, illustrative of how individuals can develop within relatively restricted professional spaces. We conclude by discussing the implications for development of teacher education programmes.

Context

Teacher development in England has been characterized by a shift away from universities to a vocational route located primarily in schools (Brown et al., 2014, 2015; Hodgson, 2014). This is in contrast to models followed in continental Europe subject to the Bologna Process, where many student teachers follow a university course of some four to five years (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2013). On 'employment-based' courses in England student teachers may spend as little as 30 days in university within a one-year teacher education programme. These changes seemingly undercut conceptualizations of teacher education as a form of 'higher' learning, particularly the distinct contribution made by universities (Barry, 2014; Ellis, Glackin, Heighes, & Norman, 2013; Winch, Oancea, & Orchard, 2015).

Despite an international consensus that research-centred learning contributes to the development of better teachers, school-based research is less developed in England than in countries like Finland, the Netherlands and Singapore (Burn & Mutton, 2015; Tatto, 2015). In England, practitioner research can be restricted by policy and accountability imperatives that hinder its authentic development and make teachers sceptical about its relevance (Leat, Reid, & Lofthouse, 2015). Conversely research engagement by teachers can be obstructed by a 'tyranny of common-sense' reflecting views of teacher learning that are over-reliant on local knowledge and experiences (Cordingley, 2015, p. 249). Student teachers based in university but significantly placed in school face a distinct challenge in attempting to create a coherent set of responses to these contrary requirements.

In the theoretical terms of this study, students were involved with competing 'master' discourses (Bailly, 2009, p. 156) based on partial characterizations of how a teacher learns and requiring the students to reference a process of learning in particular ways. For example, the school-based components were assessed in terms of classroom performance and professional aptitudes, whilst success at university was largely dependent on quality of written assignments. They imply different conceptions of who a teacher is and how she develops. Teacher identities were also being shaped by ideological motives so that, for example, students were required by government to teach in ways commensurate with a particular designation of 'British Values' (TS, 2012–2013). Far from blindly adopting one advantageous position after another, our findings suggest student teachers can respond with increasingly critical reflexivity to the demands of competing 'masters', variously located across school and university contexts.

Preliminary research was carried out over two successive one-year courses with student English teachers (*n* = 38) (2012–2014). In this period, methods were trialled with a view to developing the course and to conducting more systematic research in the following year. Commencing September 2014, when the main research began, student teachers also had the option of following an alternative 'route where a little more time was spent in school. The university component, upon which this paper focuses, however, was shared by students on both routes (*n* = 21).

Thinking about pedagogic subject knowledge

Given the current ascendance of school-led Initial Teacher Training in England, what might a distinct university contribution look like? A recent report from the UK government emphasizes the importance of both pedagogic subject knowledge and university-led research in teacher learning (Carter, 2015, pp. 8, 42). The research study here outlined is informed by a body of literature explicitly concerned with pedagogic subject knowledge (Green, 2006; Grossman, Wilson, & Shulman, 1989; Leach & Moon, 1999; Shulman, 1986; Smith, Hodson, & Brown, 2013; Winch et al., 2015). This study's particular focus is on student teachers' conceptualizations of their own practices, how they relate to these conceptualizations ('Who am I becoming?') and the distinct role universities can play in furthering this analytical activity.

The tutors were working with a conception of knowledge influenced by psychoanalysis and particularly the writings of Jacques Lacan (1977, 1989, 2007, 2008). This conception addresses how individuals learn to work within certain parameters, when these parameters assert particular discursive priorities about what can be known.[1] A set of received ideas (or master discourse) may have diminishing credibility over time. For example, a student might set herself to acquire the skills and knowledge to be designated an 'outstanding' teacher, gradually realizing that these are subject to institutional constraints, locally enacted and without absolute value. In coming to this realization, the learner may begin to think of herself not as a single, unified knowing subject, but as the addressee of competing knowledge-generating structures that position her as a learner in particular ways.[2]

It is important to understand why students' narratives centred on an idea of 'Who I am becoming', rather than 'What am I learning?'. The notions 'becoming' and 'learning' obviously overlap, but they articulate different kinds of belief about how learning takes place and how the subject might respond to an adjusted image of herself. 'Who I am becoming' does not specify in advance what will count as a learning experience in a narrative of self-formation. It might be that real[3] learning occurs when 'learning' in the received sense has broken down and the status of our perceptions is radically unclear to us.[4] For example, many students in this study began with an altruistic conception of what teachers do and were motivated by reasons of social inclusion, fairness and equality. These reasons spoke to a conception of education that was drastically altered with greater experience, when students were much more familiar with the discourse of learners as 'human capital' (Davies & Hughes, 2009, p. 608), of intrinsic value in relation to exam performances, league tables, etc. These represent fundamentally opposed views of human agency and perhaps cannot be reconciled. There can be something traumatic in recognizing that knowledge about the world is at best partial and provisional, giving no ultimate purchase on how things 'really are' (Žižek, 2009, p. 3). Our ideas about the world never quite measure up to reality, but in recognizing this fact we might well learn something about how to extend ourselves as learners and as people. As Britzman (2003) suggests, the lessons of 'education' often do not reveal their impact until much later in life.

The 'I' of 'Who I am becoming' was therefore a focal point for students' inquiry, in discussion with peers who often saw things very differently. In psychoanalysis, it is not what we intend to say that carries most significance, but what we *reveal* through what we say. Fundamental to our intentions is their underlying desire, revealed despite our best attempts to conceal it (Homer, 2005, p. 44). In Lacanian psychoanalysis, 'desire' means approximately the same as 'wishes' (Brown, 2008, p. 408) and is evident in the way we speak to certain states-of-affairs as if they are true. For example, if a student is angry with a pupil, the real focus of her anger is

not the pupil as such but an idea she has of the pupil and the meaning of his behaviour (see Homer, 2005, pp. 60–63). According to this way of seeing things, learners construct fantasies of learning that become objects of their desire. These fantasies are stoked by depictions in the media of triumphant teachers, overcoming the odds to turn round difficult pupils' lives (Hanley, 2007, 2010). At a more prosaic level, we can begin to discern the play of our desires by attending carefully to what we are saying and how others are receiving it. For example, one student might notice how a second student resists her account of an encounter with a 'naughty' pupil, by putting more emphasis on the first student's state of mind at the time. Such discussions reveal how we wish others to participate in reality from our perspective and how others exert pressure, either by overtly resisting our way of seeing things or by raising alternatives that better articulate what we want to say.

Students were therefore encouraged to weigh their choices of words when depicting their activity and to reflect upon how a sense of self might be premised upon better use and evaluation of language (Ellis, Fox, & Street, 2007). We argue that this enabled students to work towards realizing the possibility or 'becoming the change' (Hodson et al., 2012). Past events, whose significance was under constant scrutiny, were more important for how they differently enabled the future to come about, than for their latent or 'repressed' significance – as might have been the case had psychoanalytic theory been more strictly applied (Fink, 1997).

Methodology

The research perspective is influenced by hermeneutic phenomenology, involving a focus on 'how individuals experience the world and make sense of it rather than any notion of underlying truth' (Brown & Heggs, 2011, p. 295). In this perspective, the research subject's existence in language is key in determining her relationship with herself and with the world. Following the ideas of Jacques Lacan, to be described here, we focus on how the practitioner-researcher's identity relates to the stories she is willing to tell, and how subjective identifications can change with the development of our personal stories.

The research focus on how individuals form progressively, through time, is influenced by the writings of Lacan and his commentators. Lacan's psychoanalytical approach centres on disclosures by an individual that is revelatory of her self-image and how that self-image influences her conduct. Particularly significant is Lacan's (1989) formulation of the 'mirror stage' where the infant identifies with its image reflected in the mirror (or the gaze of the mother). The 'mirror' stands metonymically for particular identity positions that await the infant, through which she will process the image of herself. These identifications entail recognition that *she* is not the reflected image; nevertheless she will seek reunification with her imaginary self, perhaps throughout her entire adult life. The subject craves a 'coherent, singular and unified identity to match the promise held up by the mirror' (Bibby, 2011, p. 34). It is important to note when moving through successive identifications, the subject is not uncovering an essential or underlying ego; rather the ego is cumulatively formed and never complete (Bibby, 2011, p. 35). 'The ego is thus always an inauthentic agency functioning to conceal a disturbing lack of unity' (Leader & Groves, 1995, p. 24). For example, she might have a different sense of self in family situations from professional ones, and different again in friendship situations. None of these capture her entirely, but it might be that she identifies positively with certain selves and works to bring them into actuality (e.g. the image of the successful professional, concretized in her factual existence).

In this study, we elucidate a process of education research where the student teacher becomes the subject of a process of inquiry, involving an analytical encounter with her self-image. The practitioner–researcher can identify differently with images of herself and premise a process of personal growth and understanding on this interplay. Particular data are therefore to be regarded as interim assessments of evolving meanings in need of further scrutiny. The spirit of this mode of inquiry is captured in Deborah Britzman's writing about the early development of psychoanalysis:

> One learns, Freud came to believe, from identifying with one's own capacity to be curious about what is most incomplete and take courage from gambling with the unknown. One learns by *representing an autobiography* of learning. (Britzman, 2011, p. 51. Emphasis added)

In this study, students were taking ever more responsibility for locating themselves in discontinuous sequences of action and establishing that perspective as 'theirs'. 'My' perspective is accordingly distinguished from its surroundings, providing a focal point for biographical narrative, reflexive and analytical work that further cements that perspective. The student is both chief protagonist in her own story and its inventor, where both the story itself and her agency within it are open to further renewal – she is an 'agent-in-becoming' (Žižek 2014a, p. 130). As is intimated by Britzman, if we wish to keeping growing as people we are required to make judgements or 'gamble' with uncertainty, to assert our motives as *ours* rather than merely expediency and in some essential sense, to accept consequences brought about by our actions.

Conversely, inquiry can become entrenched in a position of 'not knowing', shielding the inquirer from more complex forms of engagement. The learner is therefore tasked with recognizing how her desire 'to know' and 'not to know' frame and occupy her learning perspective. It is this desire – to understand herself, her practices and the objects of her perception in particular ways – with which the student is grappling when trying to give an account of her activity that fits 'what actually happened'. The story we tell of ourselves is never quite right, the attempt to capture moments never quite does them justice (Lacan, 1977). But we can learn about how we see things in attempting to talk about them differently, and as a consequence may be able to talk about ourselves in ways hitherto unimagined.

The main research project was introduced on a pre-course day in July 2014. University sessions were arranged in two blocks of days in September and January, with sessions in-between running on one day per week, the remaining time being spent in school. After January university sessions were sporadic until May. The data collection took place from July 2014 until May 2015. Six university sessions were selected for generation of key data. Typically students were asked to gather data before sessions, incorporated in session activities (see below). Session design was guided by our pilot activity, where students' initial desire to appear competent had become more critically responsive as the year wore on. (Data from the pilot activity was influential in helping tutors to finalize theoretical and empirical priorities but is not incorporated in this paper.) Data from the main project comprised written reflections by students (e.g. a response to a classroom situation, thoughts about a depiction in the media, reflections on another student's writing) collated by mentors. Some university sessions with students were recorded and transcribed. Wherever possible two or three tutors were present and field notes after sessions compared.

Students began deliberately and systematically *noticing* how they adjusted to early course requirements, including an introduction to research purposes and methods. They were

encouraged to note how they were perceiving new situations, to scrutinize the feelings and ideas that emerged, and consider how best to mark and record this material (Mason, 2002).

Students collated written and spoken accounts and other data, pertaining to their developing practice in schools (to give further examples: the tension in meeting a mentor's expectations, a piece of work done by a child in their lesson, a film concerned with identity formation). These data related to particular moments and were intended to provide points of reference, or 'symbolization' (Dockar-Drysdale, 1991, p. 98), to help the students capture a sense of themselves in their locations. This material was gathered at six selected points through the year and continuously on an informal basis, as circumstances permitted.

Throughout the one-year course, students gained experience of at least three school placements. University criteria for selection of placement comprised an overall judgement of suitability, centring on mentoring arrangements at the school and the academic and pastoral demands students were likely to face. Where possible students were offered contrastive placements over the year. All students undertook brief primary school placements (pupils aged 4–11 years). The vast majority of secondary schools were state-funded, though recently many more had converted into 'academies', typically involving an element of private sponsorships with commensurate changes in ethos. Students were required to complete a contextual study of every placement school, involving retrieval of information on student numbers, socio-economic backgrounds, school systems, staffing structures and the like. Students were asked to supplement this information with detailed reflections upon particular observations, involving for example subject pedagogy in a different subject area or a conversation they had had with a mentor or pupil.

University sessions became less frequent, but served as a vehicle for critical-reflexive work where students could begin to recognize their strategies for 'making sense' of recorded material. This involved structured activities devised by the tutors. For example, in groups of four students were asked to share data excerpts (e.g. reflections and observations) without deviating from the original word choices they had made. In responding to each other, they were required to first write down their thoughts without seeking clarification or dialogue. Students then read out their responses, each student given equal time without interruption. When trialling this activity, tutors noted students can be overly concerned with cementing social relationships and presenting a reasonable exterior. Students were therefore tasked with focussing as precisely as possible on the data whilst noticing the desire to supplement or change its meaning, for example by seeking consensus, or adopting favourable interpretations and dismissing alternatives. Other university sessions were similarly (if not so strictly) sequenced. The tutors' purpose was to enable students to recognize how an image of oneself as learner affects how one participates in learning situations.

This dimension of the research was particularly prominent when current journal entries, reflections and so on, were contrasted with data from earlier collection points. It was possible to see how an individual's strategies for making meaning worked across these contrasts, to reinforce or challenge an earlier identification. This work was dependent on the students' ability to 'notice' where automatic conceptualizations were tying in with prevalent notions of 'common sense'.

In another example of work at university, students were challenged to recognize their participation in alternative conceptions of 'common sense'. This session utilized excerpts from the movie *Memento* by Christopher Nolan. As a result of an injury the protagonist Leonard Shelby has acute memory loss, though his pre-injury identity remains intact. Every

few minutes his mind is emptied of current perceptions and he must begin again, re-constructing a sense of where he is and what his purposes might be (i.e. tracking down his wife's killer) by deciphering the trail of clues laid by his earlier self, while reading the intentions of people immediately before him. In a sense in Leonard's world, 'common sense' is at intervals effaced and restored slightly differently, on the basis of his latest reading of the clues and supplementary notes used to guide his interpretation.

University students were invited to explore ideas in *Memento* without seeking strict correspondence with their own situations. For example, students had been asked to collect alternative sources of data pertaining to the same professional situation, such as a lesson report by a mentor and student reflections on the same lesson. These involved very different kinds of 'common sense' about how the learner relates to an image of learning, for example through a vocabulary of performance or personal aspiration. As with Leonard in *Memento*, students were grappling with competing accounts of 'what actually happened' without recourse to an absolute source of explanation. Rather, students were asked to concentrate on how data was being framed discursively and to chart these effects, particularly in terms of their developing sensitivity to the 'common sense' pre-suppositions built into different learning situations, and how these might change.

We shall now attempt to pick up some of these alternative attitudes to identification through a discussion of some of our data.

Student teacher data

The first round of data gathering took place in a pre-course session in June or July and data collection continued from September to June through the academic year. The data are presented thematically, marking students' identifications across the data collection points and reflecting students' development through the training year. All participants are referred to pseudonymously.

Early adjustments

Students were tasked with transforming their existing knowledge, into something appropriate for school to be accessed by their pupils. This began with *noticing* what students felt they currently knew and how this knowledge might be articulated.

Initially, this challenge was met with overwhelmingly positive responses; discussion recorded by the tutor illustrated how the beginner teachers conceived of themselves as budding subject pedagogues but also as activists instigating social change. Adam wrote:

> I hope to show students how English is both relevant and important in their lives. Of course on the most basic level, an understanding of literacy forms a basis for most employment routes. Furthermore, I hope to ignite some passion for literature so that pupils can enjoy being transported to different worlds.

Adam's response typifies much of the early debate in which education was seen as central to a more progressive, fairer society. Discussion also concentrated on the personal qualities students felt a new teacher would need to succeed. Phil wrote:

> Many of the core attributes I feel I already hold, such as: honesty, integrity, determination … However, I am more certain than ever that the path to becoming the teacher that I wish to be will be challenging, and importantly never completed.

Phil's transcript illustrates how students initially valued personal and moral qualities, seeing these as the foundations upon which technical 'know how' could be subsequently laid. At this stage there was a clear distinction between 'personal' characteristics and 'instrumental' or technical skills, the latter being necessary for the efficient running of lessons but not valuable in themselves. These ideas were progressively reconceptualized as the course demands increased, and students concentrated more upon technical analysis of their teaching practices.

Early university sessions enabled students to develop connections between personal learning histories and essential teacher activities, such as planning, effective use of questioning, modelling and demonstration and behaviour management. Thereafter, the university input was much reduced, with school-based experience becoming the students' main focal point. The tutor observed the transformation in some students who were impatient to 'get on with it'. One student observed: 'In university it's all about reflection … I was thinking, when am I going to get the answers? In school they don't ask you what you *think* about it, you just have to *do* it'. This comment is illustrative of how theory and practice can become bracketed apart, with students wary of the opaqueness of theory in contrast to self-evident practical responsibilities (Sjølie, 2014). Moreover, student conceptualizations shifted in line with their re-location to schools, so that 'the progress I am making' was now definitely referenced to how successful students were in meeting immediate practical demands, with university-based 'thinking' less obviously available or useful for making such judgements.

Moving on: practical difficulties

The students' personal pedagogic 'orientations' (Grossman et al., 1989) were key in determining how their practice could be formatted (i.e. linguistically and behaviourally) to suit pupils of different abilities. After the first weeks of school practice, students frequently referred to having to 'break down' complex ideas into simpler components. Central to this was students' ability to *notice* how skilful use of language enabled the connection of ideas at different levels of difficulty. Students often struggled to articulate how undergraduate experiences might assist them in doing this. David observed: 'It is hard to explain and teach someone how to write despite being able to do it well myself. Writing feels instinctive and inherent after so many years of practice'. Adele said: 'I had not really thought about how hard it is to understand books, analyse language and base opinion upon evidence in text'. These comments reveal the specific challenges of locating what we think we already know, and of doing so in an analytical vocabulary that others can access in order to learn. As postgraduates having already spent some time in school, students could claim substantial expertise. However, as the quotes suggest, these ideas were being reconfigured from the perspective of novices developing new ways of referencing what they know in unfamiliar situations.

Moving on: freedom to be oneself

Students recognized that pupils arriving at secondary school have had very different formative experiences. As a result pupils are working with diverse ideas about how learning takes place in pedagogic situations and the personal qualities a new teacher ought to possess. Charlotte remarked:

> When I began this course, I just thought we were all going to come out as teacher-bots, all teaching in exactly the same way. But I can already see we are so different, we are going to be such different teachers. We're different people.

Charlotte's comment indicates a widespread belief amongst students that, in becoming a teacher, you are processed by a technical and professional course apparatus that delivers finished teachers at the other end. Charlotte therefore introduces the notions of 'difference' and 'different people', enabling her to re-orientate the story of that early development towards a more diverse conception of becoming a teacher. Conversely the idea of 'difference' takes on significance in being used to express fresh insights, contributing to Charlotte's ability to imagine an adjusted version of the future ('we are going to be such different teachers'). This is illustrative of the research process described in previous sections of this paper, where earlier conceptions take on new significance and by doing so, enable the learning subject to re-conceptualize her future activity.

Acknowledging change in the self

At the third data gathering session in university, some earlier responses were shared and formed the basis of discussion. Student teachers were asked again about how personal aspirations fitted with their evolving perspectives on pedagogic practice. Invited to conceptualize these changes, students reflected on the immediate pressures in school leaving little opportunity for intellectual adjustment to fresh demands. One student, Kay observed:

> My placement school employs an accelerated learning approach in all of its planning and lesson delivery, which in its very nature seems to make learning rather clinical an prescriptive… I am learning to look beyond the official documentation that outlines the sort of teacher that I am. The feedback has been useful and is essential for my development, but it is equally important to take stock and appreciate how I have developed personally and professionally aside from the paperwork.

Students were exploring different kinds of response to 'master' (Lacan, 2007) discourses (such as 'accelerated learning') that dictate how the individual accounts for herself and her activity. As is evident in Kay's extract, there can be friction between different accounts of 'Who I am becoming', reflecting the alternative discursive priorities of school-based practice, the course administration and the student herself. Students often prioritized being able to articulate their experiences in language other than the official or technical. Typically, this involved students adopting a more personalized register attuned to the nuance of individual development, open to revision and renewal at a later juncture ('… it is equally important to take stock'). The university sessions were viewed as productive spaces for expressing some of the tensions felt with the respective pull of multiple demands and how these expectations could begin to be reconciled. Rob said:

> I have felt a gradual shift in myself that is not necessarily evident in my files. It is a more psychological shift, which has changed my entire approach to the course. Rather than seeing it as 'How can I pass the PGCE?', it is now 'How can I teach these pupils successfully?'

The widening gap between how students were being portrayed by master discourses and how they were seeing themselves, created a space in which experiences could be re-evaluated. There was growing ambivalence towards any 'masterized' (Lacan, 2007, p. 103) or totalized explanation of their development up to that point. Phil said:

> I am beginning to realise that these (formal assessment) judgements reflect a very small portion of of what I've actually developed. My attitudes and values have been changed, my emotions have been the highest of highs and the lowest of lows. Above all I feel as though I have changed… I am learning to evaluate the importance of feedback, and I am starting to understand that evaluations are not the final resolute word on an event, but instead a significant but subjective snapshot of a continuous sequence of events.

Phil is interested in the notion of 'events', which are open-ended occurrences ('a continuous sequence'). In electing to understand his experiences this way, Phil is able to relativize discursive framings that had seemed absolute ('not the final resolute word on an event'). This understanding seems to allow Phil to characterize his experiences in a more personalized register, in both emotional and analytical language that emphasize an emerging reflexivity in relation to professional judgement ('I am learning to evaluate the importance of feedback').

Moving on: affirming the change

Students moved to their second (of two) school placement blocks. Students were still keen to discuss personal ideals but with an adjusted sense of where they could lead. Students wanted to explore how to conceptualize the changes they wished to make so that personal valuations could co-exist with advances in technical skill and fuller engagement with institutional priorities. Charlotte said:

> This process has had its wobbles and I get anxiety about being able to deliver the aspects of the profession I value so much. I'm becoming more realistic but holding onto my passion and optimism. I'm starting to make decisions about which policy and school driven programmes I want to subscribe to and what doesn't fit within my beliefs and teaching philosophy.

Earlier commitments were being re-thought, or re-invented, with reference to new expectations. In Charlotte's excerpt, personal values are positioned somewhat precariously in relation to increasing performance demands ('I get anxiety about being able to deliver…'). Yet Charlotte postulates a new image of herself capable of making decisions about where and when professional demands will be allowed to interfere with personal aspirations. Personal beliefs are confidently purported as a 'philosophy', implying a coherent set of ideas that have been refined by early experiences and can support a more competent self-image through the remainder of the course.

Acknowledging change: articulating my trajectory

Students were asking significant questions about the identities they had developed and how future coordinates might be set. Sarah regarded her current situation as framed by persistent uncertainties about the perceptions of others and how these convey a sense of who the student teacher is *supposed to be*. Sarah said:

> It is interesting to see how professionals view trainee teachers, in terms of how much progress they are making. This is usually judged upon lesson planning and delivery. However, how well a trainee is progressing, is never judged upon other time spent in school, such as building relationships with staff and students; taking part in other lessons; how a trainee thinks and feels …

The meaning of our actions can seem largely decided in advance, but a gap remains and we are able to relate differently to our subjective perspectives, shifting the terms of our engagement with the world. For Sarah, the assessment component of the course no longer captures her sense of herself satisfactorily. Alternative framings, however, will always be possible.

The evaluative attitude she adopts is therefore crucial, allowing her to assert her identity differently ('building relationships … taking part … how a trainee thinks and feels'). She is conscious of the 'planning and delivery' perspective but wary of its limitations. Sarah therefore works with a more nuanced image of herself as a practitioner, her agency distributed across roles and situations and each of these implicated in a fuller conception of her learning.

Reviewing and re-assessing change

Students were able to view transcripts from throughout the year, captured in a range of formats and presented chronologically. These transcripts comprised students' earlier responses to professional circumstances and to each other's material. Initially, there was a qualitative difference in reaction to the sheer weight of amassed evidence. 'That's not me – it doesn't even sound like me' was a common kind of initial response.

Students often latched onto certain transcripts that seemed to capture something essential, whilst still requiring further comment and interpretation. Significant issues re-appeared in successive transcripts and became the focal point for subsequent discussions. After reading her 'teacher bots' and 'process has its wobbles' transcripts (above), Charlotte said:

> I stand by that, at first you think that's what teaching's going to be like and then you have this real pressure; that's when you have to decide what you believe in … Looking through the transcripts I've seen a process of moving from what I want to be to be a teacher (I think it's *naïveté* now!), and then what the school wants to me be, and then what I really want to be, what I won't give up on…

Charlotte works with images of her own development in a practitioner researcher's perspective. Reviewing the data, she is able to reference a process of researching her own learning to obstacles that have become more clearly defined with the passage of time ('I think it's *naïveté* now!'), whilst cementing the research perspective as 'hers' ('what I really want to be'). In this excerpt Charlotte continues to reflect upon, and to attempt to encapsulate that which she ultimately wishes or does not wish to be. The cumulative experience of reflecting ('looking through the transcripts'), has refined her ability to perceive and articulate that which is intrinsic to her wishes and continues to motivate her. Here she begins to reflect on an ultimate source of value ('what I won't give up on'), seeing this as an enduring source of guidance for her ethical aspirations.

Other students revealed how their understandings of pedagogic subject knowledge had evolved through the research process. Reflecting on earlier data, Liz argued that she had initially conceptualized subject pedagogy as a 'transmission' of information with learners in a passive, assimilative position. She was now aware that earlier convictions had been surpassed and that new understandings were affecting current practice:

> My understanding has developed a huge amount. When I started I was thinking of [subject pedagogy] as a delivery of information, 'I am the hammer you are the nail'; it was something [tutor] said in an observation that totally changed my approach, now I focus more on what the pupils are thinking and how I can develop this through the lesson. It's more interactive so I'm asking questions to try to develop their ideas and not just check what they've learned.

Several students admitted that they had allowed 'performance' demands to swamp their thinking at one time or another. The tutors were particularly interested in the images of learning that emerged in these discussions ('I am the hammer you are the nail') and how these had been surpassed ('develop their ideas'). In reflecting upon her transcript about

'accelerated learning' (above), Kay came at these issues slightly differently, focusing instead on how learning can be made more accessible to students unfamiliar with abstract thought:

> …now, rather than saying this is the poem, this is the theme, and presenting it in an abstract way, I now present it in a way that is connected to them, with the abstract core at the centre. Having said that, it's been a huge journey for me to leave the abstract nature of English behind and think of its more functional aspects … with your undergraduate degree you come with abstractions, moving through the course I've been connecting it to where the students are starting from, their understanding of the world … they need to explore things for themselves, make the connections for themselves, you have to give the student the chance to explore, define something before an experienced head puts a certain meaning on it.

Kay's understanding has moved a long way from her earlier reflections on the limitations of accelerated learning. In the earlier quote, Kay saw lesson *structure* as the obstacle to more open-ended learning. In this later quote, her attention has switched to the ways in which ideas are developed in the pedagogic situations and how these might enable pupils to relate to some of the fundamental abstractions such as 'poem' and 'theme' that format the subject and set the ways it is approached in class. In both excerpts, Kay alludes to conceptions of the learners and teachers as different kinds of 'pedagogized subject' (Atkinson, 2011, p. 23), whose identity is framed by a particular approach to knowledge, encoded and distributed in particular ways matching a local conception of the academic subject. Her progression through the year, anchored in a research process encouraging alterative formulations, enabled her to substantially develop her understanding of pedagogic practice and the centrality of learners to it. Reflecting on the cumulative impact of the research process as a whole, particularly after reviewing excerpts from other students gathered throughout the year, Kay observed:

> I'm more solid in that conviction now as a consequence of looking back where I've been over the year. I'll work my hardest to get student an A but that's not what matters to me…

Kay occupies an analytical perspective through which the conflicting demands of performance and personal values are, at least temporarily, reconciled. Rather than dismissing institutional demands as inauthentic ('I'll work my hardest to get a student an A'), or rubbishing personal ideals as naïve ('that's not what matters to me'), Kay maintains both sets of demands in a comparative perspective likely to reflect her subsequent attitudes as a practicing teacher, attuned both to practical realities and potentialities for future growth.

Conclusion

In this paper we are concerned with what a distinct university contribution to teacher education can become. Students involved in this study engaged in a process of practitioner research, working with specific theoretical commitments to make maximum use of limited time in university. These commitments can be summarized as enabling a more critically nuanced developmental process in restricted circumstances. Specifically, students are less concerned with the assimilation of particular course 'content' than with understanding how conceptions of the learner and her practices are configured in a knowledge generating perspective. Most significantly, reflecting our Lacanian focus, the learner develops by reflecting upon the persistent mismatch between her self-image and the changing demands built into real learning situations. In challenging students to analyse how knowledge is perceived and conceptualized (as well as *used*) tutors saw themselves as fulfilling an ostensible aim of 'higher' learning as well as making best use of university-based expertise.

The key finding of this paper is that students involved in this process of practitioner research, developed reflexive analytical capability applicable across school and university settings. This capability is predicated on students' increasing ability to recognize how they identify themselves as having a capacity to learn. Students in this study identified themselves learning through, for example, redefining personal aspirations or moving from overly schematic to more nuanced conceptions of pedagogic knowledge. Professionals involved in ITT in other locations might be able to identify such opportunities as they arise in their field of activity. That is, we might re-conceptualize teacher learning as a process of self-formation in response to incommensurate demands, articulated variously across different institutional and cultural locations.

We have outlined the specific circumstances of our inquiry, highlighting changes to teacher education in the UK with a notable shift of emphasis away from universities towards apprenticeship models of learning in school. Data have illustrated some of students' difficulty in meeting the demands of competing 'master discourses' entailing partial characterizations of how teachers learn (as seen, for example, in the discourse of 'outstanding' teachers) and how this can be referenced. We have presented a methodology for a process of higher learning in which university serves as a reflexive-analytical space in which students are able to scrutinize how their learning is being referenced and how this might be done differently. Changes, however, do not come easily and there is more for teacher educators to do in terms of reconceptualizing a role for universities, specifically regarding how a process of practitioner research can be supported.

Our paper therefore contributes to ongoing international debate, previously referenced, about the place of research in programmes of teacher development. In the early sections of this paper, we allude to some of the specific obstacles in relation to the UK context. The proposals outlined in this paper are principally methodological and not restricted to UK circumstances. Rather our ideas may be internationally relevant, particularly where there is a perceived compression of the university component of teacher education, or reductive conceptions of teacher knowledge are in the ascendancy (see for example Gerrard & Farrell, 2014; Wermke & Höstfält, 2014). Also, our ideas might provide a point of reference for those in countries where university education is much longer but not always fully appreciated. We propose a model of teacher knowledge influenced by Lacanian psychoanalysis and predicated on a methodological dynamic, in which students persistently re-evaluate the story of 'Who I am becoming'. This reflects our use of university sessions as spaces in which to challenge simplistic ideas about teacher development, reinforced on the one hand by pervasive notions of 'common sense' and on the other by student desires for the appearance of competence. We have detailed some of the content and design of university sessions, indicative of the course activity and a starting point for colleagues interested in our work.

Tutors saw themselves as asserting the prerogatives of a programme of higher education where all knowledge is contestable. Data reveal that students were able to analyse specific enactments of pedagogic subject knowledge but that they did not relate to these statically. Rather, with greater experience students were more able to perceive more alternatives. We have highlighted how early idealism was somewhat dampened when students came into closer contact with performance oriented conceptions of learning. Yet in encountering the change, as we have seen, students were able to reference their learning to more critically nuanced ideas about how learning takes place and to articulate what, to them, was valuable within it.

Working in a Lacanian theoretical perspective, we encouraged students to remain attentive to how desires or wishes influenced their perceptions. In particular, students were tasked with noticing how projected fantasies dictated a sense of what was possible and how language might be used to frame things differently. Students faced difficult choices. If they decided to stick with current interpretations, to *suture* meaning here and not there (Žižek, 1989), what developmental opportunities were being missed? There can be significant risk in a speculative process of inquiry whose outcomes are not guaranteed in advance. Students were asked to remain sensitive to how the desire for certainty influenced narratives of 'what really happened', and how these might be further analysed.

The beginner teacher faces a significant challenge to carve out a 'subjective space' in which her own story can be developed and its discursive framings progressively renewed (Hodson, Smith, & Brown, 2012). This paper highlights a distinct university contribution, based on a methodological innovation, where the beginner teacher successively relocates herself in a developmental story of 'Who I am becoming'.

Notes

1. Lacan says that knowledge is located in the wider social world of signs and meanings (called 'the Other'). In thinking about how 'knowledge' operates in this wider field, 'we are no doubt leaving behind what knowledge authentically is, what is recognizable as knowledge, and referring to the limits, to the field of these limits as such' (2007, p. 15).
2. Lacan writes 'Hence the division of the subject – when the subject appears somewhere as meaning, he is manifested elsewhere as "fading", as disappearance' (1977, p. 218). In the example given above, the student's earlier aspiration to be 'outstanding' is replaced by awareness about how she was being constructed as 'outstanding'.
3. The word 'real' is here used in its Lacanian sense, referring to an encounter with reality that 'destabilizes our entire universe of meaning' (Žižek, 2014b, p. 120).
4. Lacan distinguishes between a subject who is in a 'state of knowledge' and one who is open to 'revealed truth' (1989, pp. 325–327). We have the latter in mind when thinking about how the student can learn from destabilizing experiences.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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