

# **PRIMARY TEACHER EDUCATION IN ENGLAND: FORTY YEARS ON**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This article examines the relationship between pre-service teacher education (ITE) for primary schooling and primary teaching in England between 1974 and 2014 and explores the ‘fitness of purpose’ of the current system of preparing teachers for the classrooms of the twenty-first century. Our historical analysis suggests that, despite forty years of change in ITE, there are still a number of unresolved issues in ITE. These include: how to prepare for the multi-subject, class teacher role which the majority of primary teachers still undertake; how to equip future teachers to deal with the social and emotional aspects of primary teaching; how to ensure that they are creative and flexible practitioners, able to cope with the demands of future curricula, pedagogical changes and the new roles and responsibilities which will inevitably occur during the course of their teaching careers in the next decades of this century; and how to structure ITE to provide adequate long term foundations for the necessary professional development as a teacher.

### **Keywords**

Pre-service teacher education; primary schooling; history of education; elementary education

## INTRODUCTION

Our intention in this article is to mark the *Journal of Education for Teaching's* 40th anniversary by focusing on pre-service teacher education or Initial Teacher Education (ITE), for teaching in primary schools in 1974 and 2014. In England Primary schools usually educate children between the ages of 5 and 11 and may therefore be seen as the equivalent of elementary schools in other national education systems. Primary ITE or pre-service programmes educate students to teach in these types of schools. Schooling is often discussed as if it was a homogeneous enterprise; ITE is often treated in similar ways. Such homogeneity, we argue here, 'washes out' the notable differences between primary and secondary schooling, and the ITE provision for them, to the detriment of specific age-related issues and contestations. Both primary schooling and primary ITE have distinct histories which differ in many ways from the history of secondary provision (Dent, 1977), providing historical resonances which affect the present. As Alexander (2010) notes, despite multiple changes in primary schooling over the last 40 years, some key structures and practices, including the class teacher role and the dominant emphases on literacy and numeracy within the curriculum, trace their origins to the elementary schools of the Victorian era. The origin of the majority of primary ITE is in the pupil-teacher schemes operated within those elementary schools, developing then through the training colleges of the early and mid twentieth century and only coming into the university sector in the early 1990s. In contrast, much secondary ITE was consolidated in the university sector by the 1930s (Thomas, 1990). Alexander (1984, 118) argues that the history of this dual system 'embodied and reinforced the mutual exclusiveness of the two central traditions in British education: minority / elitist / academic and mass / elementary / utilitarian'. This has undoubtedly contributed to the

historically pervasive sense of the academically low status of primary schooling, and consequently of primary ITE, and its gendered associations with the care and nurture of young children. The persistence of this sense is, in many ways puzzling, given the vital importance of primary schooling in the education system, but it is in this under-appreciated and often under-valued area that we focus this article, aiming to mark out its distinctiveness and the ways in which it has sometimes been led by developments more relevant to secondary provision. We should note, however, that some of the points covered by the critique in this article are relevant to all sectors of ITE.

Overall, we aim to provide an historical framework for evaluating the ‘fitness of purpose’ of current models of ITE to prepare students for teaching in twenty-first century primary schools. We look first at both ITE and schooling in 1974. We then move to a, necessarily brief, analysis of the situation in 2014, identifying what we perceive to be the key issues affecting current modes of primary ITE and primary teaching. Finally, we draw together these different threads to discuss issues involved in educating teachers ready to face the multiple challenges of teaching in twenty-first century primary schools. Our key argument is that, since 1974, primary ITE has clearly undergone radical changes (Furlong, 2013a), driven in part by a series of equally radical modifications to the primary school sector (Alexander, 2010). But, despite those multiple changes, we argue that a number of issues have remained unresolved between 1974 and 2014, notably how to prepare primary teachers for their multi-subject, class teaching roles. Some elements of ITE in 1974 have also been lost, notably the emphasis on the key values and moral purposes of primary schooling. The current emphasis on preparing teachers to be ‘classroom-ready’ certainly offers a more practical and relevant training than ITE in 1974 did, but we argue that it cannot and does not

include deep understanding of primary schooling, including recent research on child development, and offers limited foundations to encourage a long-term career in teaching.

## **PRIMARY ITE AND PRIMARY SCHOOLING IN 1974**

In 1974, the majority of primary ITE provision was located in teacher training colleges, with some placed in polytechnics and universities (Ownes, 1971). The colleges were at the start of a time of a huge institutional upheaval, memorably termed ‘colleges in crisis’ by Hencke (1978), triggered when economic factors combined with demographic changes in pupil numbers required a large reduction in teacher numbers. By 1981 the number of colleges had reduced dramatically, with many other institutions closing or merging with universities or polytechnics (Hencke, 1978). But in 1974 many of these structural changes were yet to occur, and ITE therefore stood on the edge of institutional upheaval. Numbers of ITE students were controlled by the Department of Education and Science (DES), and ‘light touch’ quality assurance mechanisms came from Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and from Her Majesty’s Inspectorate (Craft, 1971). There were no formal partnerships with schools and student practicum in school was overseen by college lecturers. Most primary ITE students were female, in the age range 18–25 years and studying on concurrent, under-graduate or certificate programmes of three or four years in duration (Gilbert & Blythe, 1983). A small percentage of students studied on one year post-graduate programmes (PGCEs) (Gilbert & Blythe, *ibid.*), and it was still possible to enter primary school teaching with only a first degree.

Teacher training colleges had expanded dramatically in the 1960s, offering Bachelor of Education (BEd) degrees in the wake of the Robbins Report (Robbins, 1963). This report triggered intense debates, notably around institutional re-organisation of the colleges and curriculum revisions, memorably recorded in the Colston Papers (Taylor, 1969a). By the early 1970s the elements of the ITE curriculum were four-fold: study of education disciplines; professional or curriculum studies; study of a main academic subject; and ‘teaching practice’ or practicum (Eason, 1971). The majority of time was located in the HEI on both undergraduate and postgraduate routes, although the practicum and support for it through preparation in ‘methods’ courses were key elements of the programmes (Taylor, 1984).

This curriculum pattern was being rationalised, following the James Report (DES, 1972), with the aim of providing more functional forms of training. This report had responded to the demands of head teachers and local education authorities (LEAs) that ITE should be reformed to prepare students more effectively for the reality of schools. In 1974 colleges were shifting the main academic subject study towards a more instrumental focus, with the priority to inform classroom teaching rather than to develop the student's personal education (Eason, 1971). At the same time, modularisation of the subject curricula, together with the diversification of the institutions into other degree areas, meant that the main subject study was already becoming more fragmented (Eason, 1971).

On many primary courses, there was still a strong emphasis on the education disciplines of history, philosophy, psychology and sociology (Golby, 1976), and particularly on knowledge of educational psychology, where the work of Piaget approached hegemonic status in terms of offering the mechanisms for understanding child development (Sadler,

1974; Walkerdine, 1984). Progressive, child-centred ideas about primary education had had a strong influence on the nature of the ITE curriculum since the 1930s (Dent, 1977), but Piaget's work offered theoretical justification to reinforce longstanding ideological convictions.

There is limited evidence about the cultures of the training colleges in the 1970s (Taylor, 1984), although Bell's (1981) empirical research at Gola College (a pseudonym) showed that the culture of at least some training colleges still provided a diffuse, moral, child and learner-centred process of socialisation into teaching well into the late 1970s. He argued that the organisation of the colleges as still largely mono-technic, residential institutions in which social, professional and academic activity were indivisible, facilitated their development into moral and powerfully normative communities. An holistic, person-centred and overtly moral curriculum (Taylor, 1969a) meant that students encountered 'a thoroughly integrated culture that was fully in harmony with the college structure' (Bell, 1981,6).

Many of these broad approaches to education were mirrored in the child-centred, moral and normative cultures found in primary schooling (Sadler, 1974; Walkerdine, 1984), although the use of progressive child-centred pedagogic practices in the primary schools of 1974 was less widespread. The Oracle project, conducted 1975-1980 to analyse pupil-teacher interactions (Galton et al., 1980), found that, although many primary teachers may have embraced the ideas of child-centred pedagogy in theory, they struggled to manage the implications of this ideal with a class of thirty pupils. The effect was to compromise; as in the 1960s, classrooms were often informal and sometimes open plan; the curriculum was often integrated; and much learning was individualised. But the use of worksheets as a means to individualise learning together with elements of repetitive work encouraged boredom rather

than the engagement of genuinely child-centred learning (Galton et al., 1980, 155-165). Overall, Galton et al.'s findings indicate broad agreement with Walkerdine's (1984,162) analysis that, whilst not by any means every primary school used child-centred teaching methods wholesale, 'the parameters of [primary school] practice are given by the common sense of child development ... The apparatuses themselves [within colleges and schools] provide a norm, a standard of good and possible pedagogy'. This analysis of the dominance of the child-centred discourses in schooling is confirmed by other commentators (Nias, 1989; Cortazzi, 1991). It is therefore possible to conclude that the rhetoric, if not the reality, of child-centred discourses and practices was powerful in determining the culture of primary education in the 1970s.

Within schools in 1974, teachers enjoyed what has often been called 'licensed autonomy' (Alexander, 2010, 30). Decisions about the content and form of the curriculum were often made by teachers, with many subjects integrated using cross curricular planning or 'topic webs' (Sadler, 1974). The 'basics' of mathematics and literacy were, however, often still taught as discrete subjects (Galton et al., 1980). Teachers also made decisions about how to teach, albeit often guided by tacit orthodoxies around the rhetoric of child-centred practices, as discussed above. External monitoring and regulation of schools was limited. Inspections were few and often benign, and the abolition of selection for secondary school entry in many areas had relieved primary teachers from the pressure of the eleven plus examination. This coincided with a strong tendency for local education authorities and head teachers to encourage innovation in teaching, supported by primary teachers' increasing professionalisation through the lengthened time spent in ITE from the mid 1960s. In her research into teachers' work during the 1970s and 1980s Nias commented that this relative autonomy was linked to what she called 'ideological freedom' (1989,16), in which teachers



were given the scope to select, within broad limits, the values they wished to pass on to their pupils, and she suggested this was a strong attraction for those wanting to enter the profession (1989,17). Her research also demonstrated how work was underpinned by a strong emphasis on caring for children and nurturing child development, a powerful example of the importance of the affective in primary education at the time.

A further contributing factor to the perception of freedom was the relative isolation within which teachers worked; other adults, including parents and colleagues, rarely entered primary classrooms. This freedom could, however, be interpreted as isolation; a general absence of collaborative structures within primary schools meant that there was a 'lack of a common technical culture' to be shared (Nias, 1989, 59). Induction was frequently regarded as an 'occupational *rite de passage* which equates the establishment of competence with suffering' (Nias, 1989,16). There was belief in the importance of teachers' individual personal characteristics, as exemplified in the following quotation: 'personality, character and commitment are as important as specific knowledge and skills that are used in the day to day tasks of teaching' (DES, 1983, cited in Nias, 1989,14). As Nias also suggested, there was a widespread acceptance that primary teaching was based on a kind of intuitive action that could and should be learned while alone with a class of children in school.

## **PRIMARY ITE IN 2014**

Over the 40 years between 1974 and 2014, ITE for all sectors of schooling has become increasingly politicised, re-positioned as an effective mechanism to transform schools and the teaching profession. Central control in governing, monitoring and regulating ITE increased

dramatically from the 1980s and, once the principle of government intervention was established, the speed of policy change imposed on the system became progressively more intense (Furlong et al., 2000). Higher Education Institutions gradually lost much of the autonomy they once had over the structures, validation, governance and even staffing of ITE, beginning in 1984 with the establishment of the Council of Accreditation of Teacher Education as a validating body (DES, 1984). These developments over the last thirty years have made all ITE a ‘major site for ideological struggle’ between government, HEIs, schools and other stakeholders (Furlong et al, 2000, 2; Gilroy, 1992). Central to these changes have been the tensions noted above between education and training, sometimes symbolised by the misleading but oft quoted binaries of ‘theory’ and ‘practice’.

Furlong and Lawn (2011, 6) have identified that successive government policies since 1984 have caused ITE to ‘turn to the practical’. As part of this emphasis on the practical preparation for teaching, successive government policies since 1984 have ensured that HEIs work in various forms of partnerships with schools. They have also increasingly focused the ITE curriculum on the priorities of the National Curriculum, first introduced in schools in 1988. Government policy has also implemented much stronger quality assurance, audit and inspection regimes, with programme and funding penalties in the event of poor performance against centralised inspection criteria.

These changes have undoubtedly made ITE more ‘relevant’ to contemporary schooling and more focused on the ‘practical knowledge’ of teaching. But they have also led to some highly instrumental approaches to ITE programmes and, arguably, the dominance in all programmes of the ‘discourse of relevance’ (Maguire & Weiner, 1994, 132; Murray, 2013). As many commentators (see, *inter alia*, Lawes, 2011; Menter et al., 2006) have

identified, the changes have also created the highly bureaucratic culture of compliance and regulation that now dominates teacher education in England. HEIs, for their part, have certainly complied with demands for practically-focused programmes, but repeatedly argued against intellectually impoverished models of ITE that are not research-informed and that fail to give students sufficient time to reflect on practice and to develop a sense of criticality about teaching (Furlong & Smith, 1996; Beauchamp et al., 2014). More recently, the incoming Coalition government of 2010 rapidly indicated its intentions to reform and improve ITE using school-led models of training (Gove, 2010), notably the employment-based route (EBITT) known as School Direct (McNamara and Murray, 2013) in which schools recruit intending teachers and arrange their training.

As a result of these new policy initiatives, in 2014 all ITE in England is again undergoing a period of upheaval, with its future perceived to be under continuing threat from school-led models. The simple pattern of routes into teaching portrayed in 1974 has been replaced by complexity and is now underpinned by the neo-liberal concepts of competition, ‘the market’ and consumer choice. Even before the introduction of School Direct, there were multiple providers and routes into teaching. In 2011/12, for example, Smithers et al. (2013,i) noted that ITE for 35,790 students across the whole school sector was supplied by 348 providers, with 76.4% on university-led courses, 18.9% on EBITT programmes and 4.8% on School Centred ITT schemes (SCITTS). The introduction of the School Direct route since 2012 has further diversified these patterns.

Most HE-led primary ITE is now in the ‘new’ or post-1992 university sector, which contains few research-intensive or ‘elite’ universities. Most primary students follow some kind of post-graduate training course on completion of their undergraduate degree, with the

PGCE (nine months in duration) the dominant qualification at the time of writing. Smithers et al. (2013, 17) state that the percentage of primary students on undergraduate ITE routes had fallen to less than 40% by 2011/12. They also identify that the majority of such students is still female, with only 18% male. The average age has risen since 1974, with EBITTs in particular bringing older recruits and mid-career changers into teaching in greater numbers. Only 9% per cent of all ITE students are from black or minority ethnic backgrounds.

Increased time is now spent in the primary classroom on practicum (usually a minimum of two thirds of postgraduate ITE programmes). Most time in ITE is therefore spent mainly (or entirely in the case of some EBITTs) in schools, underpinned by the assumption that a longer period of time spent in the future workplace automatically leads to better and ‘more relevant’ learning. The main focus of the primary ITE curriculum in the HEI is on preparation and support for the practicum to ensure that students meet the demands of teaching in contemporary classrooms. Main subject study still exists on primary undergraduate routes, but this learning is often vocationally focused, preparing students to ‘deliver’ the primary National Curriculum effectively. Some limited subject and age range specialisations exist on primary PGCE routes, but most students are prepared to be general, multi-subject class teachers across the primary age range. On PGCE programmes, in particular, there is little explicit inclusion of research-informed knowledge from the traditional disciplines of education in the ITE curriculum. Nevertheless, most university-led provision has continued to combine perspectives from educational research and, as indicated above, an emphasis on some form of student engagement in research, whilst also meeting the official imperatives of making programmes ‘demanding, relevant, and practical’ (Furlong et al., 2000,144).

## **PRIMARY TEACHING IN 2014**

As with primary ITE, there has been increasing politicisation of primary schooling as successive governments have positioned education as the key both to national economic growth and individual welfare. As in ITE, a neoliberal shift in policy for all schools has resulted in a mixture of increased centralisation in terms of accountability, and wider de-centralisation with regard to governance and management. De-centralisation has included a rapid expansion of the academies programme (academies are independent state-funded schools that are managed by teams of co-sponsors) and the introduction of Free Schools (independent state-funded schools that can be set up by interested groups such as parents, religious groups and education charities); both types of schools bypass local education authority control and are exempt from the national curriculum, teacher certification requirements and the provision of induction for new teachers. Distinctive, local and sometimes ‘branded’ practices are emerging as some schools belong to groups of academies or other types of alliances and federations or forge distinctive identities as Free Schools. Regardless of type, all schools have responsibility for the provision of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for their staff, provision is often ‘in-house’ and led by the requirements of the School Development Plan, rather than by the needs of individual teachers (McNamara et al., 2013). These structural changes and demands, when combined with the realities of a highly complex, multi-cultural society, have expanded primary teacher roles and responsibilities to a point where they are potentially almost limitless.

In the first instance, classes can often contain pupils with a wide range of differing educational, behavioural, emotional and cultural understandings, needs and motivations.

Teachers have a responsibility to engage all pupils with curricular learning; lesson planning, observation and evaluation all focus on the types of learning that should be achieved by pupils, with the result that lessons can be highly differentiated. Similarly, there has been wider recognition of the ways in which education can perpetuate inequalities (Gewirtz et al., 1995); recent initiatives such as Every Child Matters (HM Government, 2003) and extended schools (DfES, 2005) provide examples of compensatory actions aimed at widening educational opportunities for pupils from areas of high multiple deprivation. These initiatives, however well-intentioned, often translate into wider responsibilities for teachers. Third, schools can have a high proportion of children with English as an additional language, requiring inclusive and innovative approaches to curricular learning together with an understanding of different cultures. Finally, teachers require deeper knowledge of different areas of child health and welfare as attempts are made to integrate education, health and care services with children and their parents at the centre of delivery.

In addition to widening responsibilities, pressures on all teachers, regardless of sector, have changed as accountability has become linked to a target and performance-oriented system (Ball, 2003). External accountability that is exercised through league tables and Ofsted inspections obliges teachers to show transparency over their methods and to raise standards as measured by pupils' external assessments. The introduction of sophisticated school data systems has enabled close monitoring of pupils, teachers and schools as they attempt to reach government-imposed targets, with local authorities charged with the role of policing schools' progress. Increased opportunities for parental involvement in schools have also opened schools up to a different kind of relationship with parents. All teachers may, then, be directly answerable to central and local government, to different layers of school managers, to parents and, not least, to their pupils.

Teachers in both primary and secondary schools have also lost much of the ‘relative autonomy’ they once had. The rapid pace of change (dubbed ‘initiativitis’ by school leaders in one research report (PwC/DfES, 2007,p.vii)) has meant that teachers have had to respond to a large number of policy changes while implementing the national curriculum. Alexander (2010) argues that the primary curriculum, in particular, has expanded and become more complex and professionally demanding, making high and, he argues, excessive demands on the depth and breadth of teacher knowledge. The current primary curriculum requires teacher knowledge in a wide range of subjects; it also continues to demand a very strong focus on the ‘basics’ of mathematics and literacy. In order to be effective, teachers also need knowledge of how to make good cross-curricular links, particularly in terms of integrating the teaching of the ‘basics’ into other subjects.

Also influential in curriculum change has been the implementation of ‘centrally-defined’ practice (Furlong, 2013b, 37). This type of practice has had a particular impact on primary schools through, for example, a new phonics strategy which will be compulsory for teaching children to read from September 2014 and which requires primary teachers to follow prescribed pedagogic and curricular formats. In many primary schools now, the implementation of these centrally-imposed policies has then led to teachers making fewer decisions related to pedagogy and curriculum. Set against this diminution, however, the relative degree of curriculum freedom given to Free Schools and academies means that these primary schools, but not necessarily the teachers within them, *are* making more localised pedagogical and curriculum decisions. But we should note that in all types of primary schools, actual classroom practice is often driven by the performativity pressures described above.

The examples above provide illustrations of how the primary teacher's role has widened and deepened in some ways but narrowed and become more limited in others since 1974, and how, in 2014, the pressures on teachers to 'perform' in the sense of raising children's levels of achievement as measured by standard assessment tasks at the end of Key Stage 2 (when children are 11 years of age) have increased. As is the case with the ITE sector, there is evidence of a bureaucratic culture of compliance and regulation in primary schooling in response to these centralised demands. Alexander (2010, 411), for instance, comments that younger primary teachers are 'content to 'comply and implement'' and lack 'the skill, or will, to improvise'. Other research, however, points to the enduring nature of primary teachers' commitment to 'making a difference' to the lives of young children, with the ideas of care and nurture running deeply through their practice (Passy, 2013). A continuing issue for teachers then, is their capacity to work within numerous layers of accountability and within politicised and pressurised environments, balancing professional practice that often demands an instrumental approach to teaching with strong individual and communal desires to offer children the care and nurture seen as an essential part of primary education. In addition, a continuing issue for ITE, in consequence, is how to help student teachers to begin to understand this balancing act and how to achieve it whilst remaining ethical and caring teachers of the children they teach.

## **FITNESS FOR PURPOSE? ITE AND SCHOOLING**

In 2014 ITE programmes emphasise the importance of practical and experiential knowledge of the current context and its immediate application to teaching as it is now; they produce



‘classroom-ready’ teachers, arguably with a good range of practical knowledge and skills, well-equipped to work as teachers in the schools of today and to teach according to current curricular and pedagogical practice. Unlike in 1974, students then are seemingly well prepared for the realities of school life. Congruence between ITE and schooling could be seen as high in that the short and sometimes instrumental forms of post-graduate courses, designed largely around training in and for the school workplace and sometimes on limited ‘apprenticeship’ models, serve as a good preparation to teach in a policy-driven, compliant and sometimes instrumental schooling system. In this sense, primary ITE provision may be seen as ‘fit for purpose’.

We would argue, however, that adopting that view involves very limited understanding of the forms and purposes of ITE. Building on the critiques which Alexander (2010) makes of primary ITE, we would ask instead: how well equipped are primary ITE students for the still dominant role of generalist class teacher in which they are required to teach a considerable number of single subjects at depth *and* to make effective cross curriculum links to ensure high quality learning for their pupils? Do these student teachers have sufficient knowledge of child development to inform their practice? How well are they equipped to deal with the social and emotional aspects of the primary teaching role? How well do our current short and practical programmes establish adequate long term foundations for further professional development as a primary teacher, particularly in terms of future research engagement? How well are new teachers prepared to be adaptable, flexible and creative about the future curricula and the numerous pedagogical changes in primary schooling, which will inevitably occur during their teaching careers? As we argue below,

despite the best intentions of some ITE programmes, we see current models of primary ITE as inevitably limited in terms of addressing all these aspects.

The limitations start with two structural aspects of current provision: first, the short time available for primary ITE on any post-graduate model in current use; and second, the amount of time now spent training in the school workplace, if and when that time is not well structured *primarily* around the learning needs of the student teacher and *if* it does not encourage adaptability. We deliberately focus on the critique of structures here, rather than on the many primary teacher education programmes struggling to make provision as good as possible within those significant, structural constraints.

The shift since 1974 of the dominant form of provision from under-graduate to post-graduate models for the majority of students has, we argue, been unhelpful in terms of developing in-depth primary ITE programmes, not least because it has shifted the emphasis from ‘education’ to ‘training’ (Furlong, 2013a). As Alexander (2010, 489) identifies, the increasing alignment of primary ITE to the multiple demands of the school curriculum, both explicit and implicit, together with rising levels of bureaucracy, policy requirements and accountability, now leaves little time for the systematic inclusion of research into children’s development and learning and into the pedagogical implications of psychological, neuro-scientific and socio-cultural research on young children and to the multiple issues related to diversity, difference and social justice. In contrast, in the primary ITE of 1974 educational psychology courses offered mechanisms for understanding child development in ways which had at least some relevance with the child-centred practices still powerful in primary schooling. In 2014, without in-depth theoretical perspectives, many of our new primary

teachers enter teaching without an understanding of current thinking on child development to inform their practice.

In addition, it would be helpful if ITE focused on both the academic learning and the often tacit expectations of the primary teacher's nurturing role in developing the 'whole child'. In 1974 ITE, arguably, did a better job of supporting these fundamental primary teacher values around caring for and nurturing children, not least through the general congruence between child/learner-centred values in both schools and colleges. In the ITE of 2014 inclusion of a clear focus on the fundamental moral purposes of primary schooling and teachers' values would provide students with stronger ethical frameworks for critically analysing and understanding their social and emotional positioning as primary teachers. Time on post-graduate ITE is severely limited for providing this kind of in-depth analysis, but without it, we would argue, we are not equipping emerging teachers to deal with the vital social and emotional aspects of the primary teaching role. This absence also means that ITE cannot help them learn to achieve that balancing act between accountability, demands for often instrumental teaching and powerful personal motivations to offer children care and nurture as part of a holistic education.

We asked above whether current models of ITE can provide adequate long term foundations for further professional development as a teacher, and we work here from assumptions that teacher learning in ITE, for both primary and secondary programmes, should ideally be a professionally and academically enriching process, which at its best sets up the foundations for and expectations of lifelong learning as a teacher by establishing critical thinking skills and a research-informed inquiry stance in all pre-service teachers. These starting points would then ideally be developed through CPD, but as our analysis

above shows, in a fragmenting and diversifying primary school system, much CPD will be driven by school needs and will not necessarily help individuals to develop research-informed models of ITE. We note that the importance of research literacy and research engagement at all stages of a teaching career has been underlined by the recent BERA-RSA report (2014). But, despite best intentions, there are limited opportunities on primary post-graduate courses to establish these foundations of long term enquiry-orientated modes of teacher learning. The availability of time is a circumscribing factor here but, more seriously, as Alexander (2010, 423) notes, the compliance and lack of criticality throughout the education system means that it is often challenging for students ‘to engage with processes of open enquiry, scepticism and concern about larger purposes’.

Finally, we address the issue of subject knowledge. The origins of the PGCE are in secondary ITE (Gilbert & Blythe, 1983) in which degree level knowledge of the subject to be taught in schools can be adapted and extended for teaching purposes during ITE, using appropriate curriculum subject knowledge and subject-specific pedagogies. Primary school subject knowledge, however, demands both a focus on single subjects *and* knowledge of how to make effective cross curriculum links to promote quality learning for pupils. How best to prepare students for this multi-subject teaching role was an issue in 1974, when teachers still had some autonomy to make decisions around curriculum structures, content and pedagogies; in 2014 it still remains unresolved, but such preparation has, arguably, become more important, with growth of the curriculum and its prescribed pedagogies. In addition there has been a long history of concern about the quality of subject teaching in, for example, mathematics (e.g. DES, 1982). ITE that merely ensures curriculum ‘coverage’ and subsequent ‘delivery’ of primary mathematics is not enough for students, particularly those

effective links to other subjects. When we take into account that mathematics is just one subject of the curriculum, albeit an important one, it is clear that the current post-graduate curriculum strains to achieve the impossible.

Alexander (2010) also identifies the inadequacy of current models of subject knowledge preparation in primary ITE, but his solution is to advocate for single subject teachers in primary schools, certainly for older children. This solution, however, denies three aspects of reality: first, that the growth of single subject-specialist primary teachers is very slow in many subjects; second, that the class teaching role remains stubbornly resilient to wholesale changes in England; and third, that the model of teaching subjects predominantly as distinct and separate knowledge areas still has far more relevance for secondary schooling than for primary education.

The second problematic structural aspect of post-graduate models of ITE is location, particularly the amount of time now spent training in the school workplace, *if* certain conditions are not met. This is not to deny that many primary schools provide very good training environments which train students well, but we have already outlined the problematic assumption that more time in schools necessarily equates to better learning. This assumption is often underpinned by simplistic constructions of student teacher learning as achieved merely through immersion in classrooms, with knowledge of how to teach positioned as easy to acquire through fundamentally apprenticeship modes of training. The extensive literature on learning in workplaces, for teachers across sectors and for many other professions (see McNamara et al., 2013 for a summary of this research), indicates, however, that for high quality learning to occur, some key principles or conditions need to inform the design and implementation of the learning. In summary, adapted to ITE, McNamara et al.

(2013:295) see these as: a communal learning culture within the school in which students are valued; a culture in which ‘symbiotic relationships between the multiple discourses about theory and practice, teaching and learning in ITE can be facilitated’; ‘participation in a well-planned, rich and flexible variety of activities balanced between organisational and individual needs’; the ‘availability of time and space for quality learning opportunities and experiences to occur, and then further time to reflect upon them’; and finally, teaching colleagues who undertake support roles and challenge learners. Above all, the workplace learning literature stresses that the student teacher’s status as a learner needs to be preserved, with time for learning protected from other demands within the school.

Implementing all the principles on this list is a tall order for any workplace, but may be particularly daunting for schools where the primary imperative is the education of pupils, not student teachers. Add in the consideration that some primary schools are small, with limited staffing and that non-contact time for teachers still tends to be less extensive than in secondary schools, and it is clear that there are logistical reasons why some schools might struggle to provide high quality workplace learning for ITE students. Again, this is not to deny that there are many primary schools, including small institutions, which balance these imperatives effectively to provide very good support to student teachers, based around all of these principles. But there are also worrying patterns already emerging in some ITE programmes, across both school sectors, including: erosions in the recognition of the status of student teachers as learners (ATL 2013, 2014); tendencies for students to replicate practice observed in particular schools, in their efforts to reproduce ‘the way we do it here’ (McNamara et al., 2013, 193); erosion of the time and space allocated for learning (ATL, 2014, 10); and the provision of only limited learning opportunities within school and classroom (ATL, 2014, 11). Overall, the indications are that such ITE programmes may be

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offering what Engestrom (2001, 35) defines as ‘adaptive learning’, in which compliance to government and school imperatives, performativity and practical knowledge of the immediate context are automatically privileged over theoretical knowledge and broader pedagogical, subject and curriculum knowledge about learners and learning (Murray et al., 2013).

The other major concern around such heavy reliance on schools as locations for training is caused by the effects of the diversifying and fragmenting schooling system, alongside the implementation of the School Direct model. There are fears that some of these current models of school-led ITE may encourage students to replicate in uncritical ways the ‘local’ practices they see in that particular type of school, without having opportunities to encounter and critique broader perspectives on the diversity of practice found in current schooling (McNamara et al., 2013). There is also a danger that if school imperatives, determined by narrow and instrumental outcomes and targets, are allowed to dominate student teacher learning, then opportunities for individuals to find integrated ways of conceptualising and articulating their emerging practice and their developing senses of agency and identity as a teacher may be suppressed. It is also hard to see how the parochial nature of such ‘adaptive’ models of ITE prepares students to be adaptable, flexible and creative about the future curricula and the numerous pedagogical changes which will inevitably occur during their teaching careers.

## **CONCLUSION**

In this article we have offered an historical framework for evaluating the ‘fitness of purpose’ of ITE to prepare students for teaching in primary schools. Taking ‘the long view’ over 40 years of history has enabled us to identify that ITE in 1974 had some congruence with primary teaching at the time, particularly around provision of knowledge of child-development and the fundamental values and moral purposes of schooling. But ITE, in general, did not provide students with practical skills and knowledge of the realities of schooling. Multiple changes to the field over 40 years have resulted in ITE in 2014 offering far more practical and relevant training than ITE in 1974, but possibly at the expense of a deep understanding of child development and/or a critically-informed approach to primary teaching.

In our critique of primary ITE in 2014 we have focused around two structural issues: the predominance of short post-graduate models of ITE for primary teaching in England; and the heavy reliance on schools as the main locations for training, which affects primary and secondary ITE. In critiquing these structures within post-graduate models, we do not, however, mean to imply a wholesale rejection of post-graduate provision. Nor do we mean that the preferred route into primary teaching should automatically revert to under-graduate degrees; many of these courses face exactly the same issues as we have identified in post-graduate programmes, albeit spread over longer timeframes. Nor do we wish to condemn the training offered by all EBITTs or to suggest a wholesale return to old patterns of practicum and ‘college courses’ in HE-led programmes, similar to those found to be inadequate for the preparation of teachers in 1974.



As our analysis has shown, schools have become, and will remain, vital locations for student learning, but opportunities for diverse workplace learning opportunities within them may need to be better articulated. In addition the university, with its cultures of research and the intellectual space offered for critical enquiry and debate into current practice in schools, should not be overlooked as a place where students can also learn. In HE contexts, students can acquire broad knowledge about education and research-informed practice, as well as deepening their understanding and critiques of the practices and cultures in which they participate and observe in schools. Nor should we overlook the unique contribution of HE-based teacher educators for whom the main focus of work and expertise is teaching intending teachers and working in partnerships with schools.

We also have concerns about how far current models of ITE for secondary teachers as well as for primary establish long term foundations for future learning in CPD, particularly through research and enquiry, and about ‘future proofing’ in ITE in terms of the adaptability and creativity of teacher thinking present in some programmes. If we do not undertake this future proofing and ensure the provision of coherent CPD, following ITE, for all, then we will find ourselves without a well educated teaching force, prepared to face the multiple, long term challenges of teaching in twenty first century schools.

International analyses of schooling often point to the ‘gold standard’ five year Masters-level ITE courses offered to both primary and secondary students in Finland (Sahlberg, 2012) and giving all the time to participate in both high level academic study and structured episodes of ‘research-informed clinical practice’ (BERA-RSA, 2014) in selected training schools. This model of ITE, with its balance across all the desired elements of

primary training identified by Alexander (2010) looks, at a distance at least, to be far superior to the current short models of post-graduate training which now predominate for primary teaching in England. Whilst it may seem unrealistic to some readers for us to advocate similar, five year Masters courses for all primary teachers in England, we would point to the steady growth of state investment in Masters level courses for teachers in other parts of Europe, notably Germany, Ireland, Norway and Portugal. We acknowledge that England needs time both to recover from recent experiences of economic austerity and to reverse the repeated ‘practical turns’ which have transformed ITE into merely the provision of practical and relevant training, based largely on experiential knowledge, but we feel it is important to place the issue of Masters level courses for all student teachers, primary and secondary alike, back on the agenda.

But, above all, our vision is that over whatever timeframes and in whatever forms it takes place primary ITE needs to switch from the ‘adapative’ models we have identified in current structures in 2014 through to what Engeström (2011) calls ‘developmental’ models of learning, based on inquiry and investigation, and giving student teachers the abilities to work in HE and in different types of schools, learning to teach in knowledgeable and skilful ways, adapted to the multiple needs of their pupils and the diverse communities in which the school is situated.

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<sup>i</sup> Primary schools in England usually educate children between the ages of 5 and 11. They may therefore be seen as the equivalent of elementary schools in other national education systems. Primary ITE or pre-service programmes educate students to teach in these types of schools.