BG Research Online

Puttick, S. and Wynn, J. (2020) *Constructing 'good teaching' through written lesson observation feedback.* Oxford Review of Education. ISSN 1465-3915

Constructing 'good teaching' through written lesson observation feedback

Steven Puttick, Jenny Wynn

Department of Education, University of Oxford, Oxford, England

Steven.puttick@education.ox.ac.uk

Constructing 'good teaching' through written lesson observation feedback

This paper explores the ways in which 'good teaching' is constructed through mentors' written lesson observation feedback during Initial Teacher Education (ITE). Written lesson observation feedback has received little research attention, yet represents a potentially powerful activity for teachers' development. It is also an important aspect of direct university-school-beginning teacher collaboration which is common across diverse programmes and ITE partnerships internationally. Data were collected from written lesson observation feedback given to beginning teachers (n=127) on one ITE programme in England across one year to a total of 508 lessons, and analysed through a typology of competing conceptions of teaching defined by Winch et al.; craft, executive technician, and extended professional. This data suggests that teaching is predominantly constructed through mentors' written feedback as a craft or technical activity. In response, we argue that there is scope to broaden the evidence considered, in particular, by bringing observed insights about beginning teachers' practice into dialogue with research evidence in order to construct a more expansive vision of teaching as a professional endeavour. Using this theoretical framework highlights the important contribution written lesson observation feedback might offer to broader attempts seeking to improve teachers' engagement with research evidence.

Introduction

The observed lesson ends. The pupils leave. The school and university-based mentors gather. The beginning teacher breathes. Wipes the board clean. Switches off the projector. Sits. Braces. Discusses. The content, purpose and dimensions of the ensuing conversation between beginning teacher and mentors have received significant research attention (Edwards & Protheroe, 2004; Land, 2018; Valencia, Martin, Place, & Grossman, 2009). Following this post-lesson discussion, the mentors normally give written feedback. Formal. Black and White. Lasting. Yet we know little about this

written feedback which has largely been ignored in favour of verbal post-lesson discussions.

This paper addresses the following question: how is 'good teaching' discursively constructed through the written lesson observation feedback given to beginning teachers? By asking how teaching is constructed we are particularly interested in the topics that are highlighted in the feedback, the kinds of claims that are made and the epistemological dimensions of these claims, including the evidence that is offered in support. Written lesson observation feedback constructs teaching in particular ways that have most immediate impact on the beginning teacher receiving the feedback, and the school-based mentor with whom the feedback is co-constructed. In the medium and longer-term these texts are a part of the rituals and praxis making up school and professional cultures. Alongside and in dialogue with other discourses, these written accounts contribute to the construction of what it means to be a good teacher, including; the dimensions of professional knowledge that are prioritised or marginalised, and the positionality of the teacher in relation to these different dimensions of knowledge.

This research contributes to debates about the relationships between research and practice in Initial Teacher Education (ITE). It is widely argued that there is scope to develop the relationship in general (BERA-RSA, 2014; Christie et al., 2012; Murray & Mutton, 2016; Mutton, Burn, & Menter, 2017), and our focus on written lesson observation feedback offers one way of developing this relationship in particular. Written lesson observation feedback offers interesting potential because it is an almost unique example of direct university-school-beginning teacher interactions (Maynard &

Furlong, 1993) which are: well-established and already programmed into teachers' and teacher educators' busy schedules; frequent, happening multiple times every year; and common across diverse programmes and ITE partnerships internationally. Critical understandings of this practice and subsequent insights to improve it offer a potentially powerful and largely untapped resource.

While there is a body of research around post-lesson discussions and mentor conversations during ITE, limited attention has been given to the written feedback. Previous studies (Bunton, Stimpson, & Lopez-Real, 2002; Lock, Soares, & Foster, 2009; Spear, Lock, & McCulloch, 1997) have argued that this is a significant omission because of the importance of written feedback to the beginning teacher who may have only partial recollection of the verbal discussion due to the heightened emotions generated by even the 'lowest stakes' observation. The pressure felt during these observations is partly caused by the status of the observers: mostly joint observations by university and school-based mentors who are in positions of power, being responsible for judgements about the beginning teacher's performance on the programme. Against this partial recollection, the written feedback is set 'in black and white'; the nuance may be returned to and reflected upon (Bunton et al., 2002), and it would be reasonable for beginning teachers to assume that the most valued aspects are those emphasised through the written account.

Conceptions of teaching

In asking how 'good teaching' is constructed through these accounts, we are drawing on the three areas of teachers' professional knowledge discussed by Winch, Oancea and Orchard (2015): situated understanding/ tacit/ intuitive knowledge; technical 'know

how'; and critical reflection. One aspect of critical reflection is associated with scholarship involving teachers critically reflecting on their practice 'in the light of what has been thought and said about teaching in the present as well as in the past in order to inform future thinking about what they are doing' (p.206). They offer a general example of recent university-linked PGCE (Post Graduate Certificate of Education) programmes encouraging beginning teachers to engage with 'selected readings, policy documents and official recommendations that help illuminate their thinking on the particular issues in classroom practice which concern and affect them most' (p.207). These PGCE programmes are one- or two-year post-graduate courses which normally include the award of masters level credits and recommendation for QTS (Qualified Teacher Status). This model, or similar variants on it (such as those with additional masters credits leading to a 'Diploma' rather than a 'Certificate') continue to be the main route for new entrants to teaching in England.

Each of Winch et al.'s (2015) conceptions of teaching (craft; application of technical protocols; professional endeavour) is characterised by valuing and emphasising - or, not valuing and marginalising - different kinds of knowledge. For example, the 'craft' conception 'overplays the value of situated professional knowledge at the expense of technical know-how and critical reflection' (p.208), and in reducing critical reflection it leaves 'little role, if any, for research-based knowledge in teacher professionalism' (p.208). Popular conceptions of good teaching as the application of technical protocols (teacher as 'executive technician') have little time for the situated knowledge of the 'craft'; this teacher should not interpret, but rather follow and implement trusted protocols. In this vein, 'pedagogy is often too narrowly defined as merely what teachers do in the classroom: the action, but without the values, theories and evidence that underpin it' (Rowe, Wilkin, & Wilson, 2017, p. 106). Interestingly, Winch et al. argue

that the craft-based and executive technician conceptions treat educational research as two sides of the same coin: both begin from concerns with the inherent uncertainty of research findings, to which craft responds by marginalising research in favour of 'common sense' and 'experience', whereas the technician responds by demanding teacher-proof maxims for action; a strong 'what works' agenda for research resulting in unequivocal propositions that teachers must follow.

Against the craft and technician conceptions, both of which are critiqued for being narrow and reductive, Winch et al. (2015) position 'teaching as a professional endeavour' as an expansive vision which 'combines all three aspects of knowledge together in sound judgement' (p.210). A key part of this argument is related to the epistemological certainty with which claims about education might be made. The craft conception is expanded – not replaced – as practical judgement is enriched in the framing and challenging of developing understandings in particular situations. Teacher-proof maxims from educational research are also enlarged by teachers critically engaging with, interpreting and synthesising such findings to 'make defensible judgements about the ways in which they teach' (Winch et al. 2015, p.211). For beginning teachers, developing these judgements comes in part through responding to feedback from mentors.

Written feedback in teacher education

The wider literature on written feedback suggests that it is an important dimension of education (Carless et al., 2011; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Kelly & Richards, 2019), although the extent of its effectiveness is contested (Kingston & Nash, 2011), the quality of evidence available is relatively low (Elliott et al., 2016), and the attention that

has been given to written feedback in teacher education is relatively limited (Dowden, Pittaway, Yost, & Mccarthy, 2013). Existing accounts suggest the importance of dialogue, the possibilities for critically reflecting on written feedback for teacher educators' development, and the mediating role played by emotions.

Written feedback in teacher education has been conceptualised as *dialogue* (Agricola et al., 2020; Carless et al., 2011; Goodell, 2006) between teacher educators and beginning teachers, contrasting with the 'persistent narrative' (Dowden et al., 2013, p. 357) in higher education of written feedback as simply transmission. Kastberg et al.'s (2020) definition extends the teacher education ideal of feedback as dialogue by describing written feedback as an 'instantiation of practice' (p.131). That is, written feedback functioning as both a model of the practice of writing feedback and a process of improving teacher educators' practice. Critically analysing their own written feedback, Kastberg et al. (2020) and Ritter et al. (2011) highlight discrepancies between their ideals and the actual text. In Ritter et al.'s case, this is a contrast between their collaborative, democratic vision for teaching, and the individualistic cultural values their written feedback actually constructed. Differences between interpretations of written feedback from those giving and those receiving feedback also seems to be significant (Agricola et al., 2020; Elliott et al., 2016). The issue of conflicting interpretation is exacerbated by tendencies to overestimate the extent to which targets are consistently understood, which is particularly important because the specificity and challenge level of these targets are significant (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Dowden et al. (2013) also provide support in the context of teacher education for the claim made in the wider literature on feedback (Hattie & Timperley, 2007) about the affective dimension of receiving feedback. The potential for conflicting interpretations of feedback – even in terms of tensions between mentors' own values

and written accounts – and the mediating role of emotions may be heightened in the context of observed lessons, adding to the importance of critically examining written lesson observation feedback.

Written lesson observation feedback

Existing accounts of written lesson observation feedback (Bunton et al., 2002; Hudson, 2014, 2016; Lock et al., 2009; Ritter et al., 2011; Soares & Lock, 2007; Spear et al., 1997) suggest this written feedback constructs 'good teaching' in predominantly craft or technician archetypes. This is also similar to the findings from the larger body of literature on verbal post-lesson conversations, for example, as 'often superficial and centred on classroom management and procedures rather than learning or socio-political considerations' (Land, 2018, p. 494). Introducing these critiques raises questions about the purpose of feedback, which is argued by Spear et al. (1997) to be key to improving mentors' feedback. They suggest the following purposes:

> To convey the mentor's craft knowledge? To satisfy the student's desire for written feedback? To emphasise important points the student should focus on? To help the student engage in reflective evaluation? To provide a summary of previous discussion? To provide a record of a student's achievements and progress? (p.279)

These questions construct teaching through craft or technician archetypes: explicit engagement with research evidence is absent. For example, they might ask if the purpose of written lesson observation feedback is to extend the beginning teacher's critical reflections through identifying relevant readings? Or, to relate specific discussions about classroom practices to broader debates in educational research? Or, to stimulate critical discussion about 'common sense' practices?

Taking a different approach by focusing on the format of feedback forms (from highly structured to unstructured), Bunton et al. (2002) categorise this feedback as descriptive, questioning/reflective, evaluative, or advisory:

- *Descriptive:* describing what happens in a non-evaluative way; for example: Lesson illustrated with OHP transparencies and home-made maps. Teacher explains they will listen to a tape, which will act as a model.

- *Questioning/reflective:* asking the trainee genuine questions of inviting the trainee to speculate; for example: Why not introduce structures at this point? This is NOT a criticism, just a question.

- *Evaluative:* assessing strengths and weaknesses; for example: Very carefully planned lesson. Perhaps a bit vague as there's no context.

- *Advisory:* giving advice or making suggestions of what the trainee could or should do; for example: Don't rush through your plan.
  (Bunton et al., 2002, pp. 239–240)

There is overlap between these categories and Spear et al.'s (1997) use of descriptive, evaluative, and 'nature of advice given'. These categorisations are also similar to the broad ways in which the written lesson observation feedback in Spear et al.'s study constructs good teaching as craft or executive technician, with little or no research engagement.

Much of the written feedback presented in these studies is generic, in that the subject is rarely explicit. In response, Soares and Lock (2007) trained a group of mentors in subject-specific pedagogic feedback: 'PhySEP' (Physical Science Enhancement Programme), in which there is a strict focus on topic-specific pedagogy, and mentors

are not allowed to mention generic issues (such as 'class management'). They report a substantial shift in attention to topic-specific pedagogy, supporting claims about the importance of clarifying the purpose of feedback, and training mentors. However, despite the shift towards more subject specific discussion, the nature of this feedback is similarly associated with craft and technician conceptions: there is no mention of research evidence. Instead, the summary of most helpful aspects is dominated for both PhySEP and 'normal' science mentors by the same themes: 'Tips/advice/suggested strategies', followed by 'Evaluative' comments. It is also interesting that none of the 'least helpful' comments contest the mentors' feedback in any way. While this may be unsurprising given the beginning teachers' position (Puttick, 2018), it is interesting in light of findings about low levels of observer reliability and contradictions between observers' judgements (Hudson, 2016; Strong, Gargani, & Hacifazliog, 2011). Moving beyond craft and technician conceptions of teaching, the epistemological certainty of observations might be softened and brought into dialogue with other sources of evidence in order to create space for the kinds of reasoned deliberation (including disagreement) characteristic of teaching as a professional endeavour.

Methodology

We designed this study to explore how 'good teaching' is discursively constructed through the written lesson observation feedback given to beginning teachers (n=127) on one ITE programme in England to a total of 508 lessons (four per beginning teacher over the year), which included over 200,000 words of feedback. The written feedback on this programme is co-constructed during and following joint lesson observations conducted by university-based and school-based mentors. The feedback was recorded as a normal part of the programme on an online record of professional development. The

main purpose of this written feedback is, according to course documentation, formative. The lessons observed are not judged by being awarded a particular grade, although the beginning teacher may choose to use comments from the written lesson observations to support more summative purposes, such as providing evidence of meeting the Teachers' Standards (Department for Education, 2011). The lesson observation form on this particular course provides a structure that includes open text boxes for strengths, areas for development, and an action plan. There are also spaces to provide open text against each of the individual Teachers' Standards.

One ethical deliberation was around voluntary informed consent from the producers of the data, including 'consideration given to the presumed intent of the creators of online content, the extent to which it identifies individuals or institutions, and the sensitivity of the data' (BERA, 2018, p. 11). We changed the small number of names mentioned in the written feedback, and checked for any institutional names or identifiers (there were none). Issues over ownership of such data are contested (Markham & Buchanan, 2012), and we sought voluntary informed consent of the authors. Consent was important to gain particularly because they 'may not have considered the fact that it might be used for research purposes' (BERA, 2018, p. 10). In order to reduce burden by avoiding generating additional workload and possible additional stress on the participants we sought this consent only after all lesson observations had been completed, avoiding increased work of participants spending longer than normal refining their written feedback. This approach also adds to the validity of the data because the feedback was written in as 'natural' conditions as possible.

We analysed the data generated through four overlapping phases. This meant that we coded the data multiple times, including more open approaches to develop familiarity with the data, and *a priori* codes drawing from other studies. Each time we went back to the original data, rather than working from ever-refined and decontextualized portions of text. Codes used were: Teachers Standards (DfE 2011); Bunton et al.'s (2002) typology of descriptive, questioning, reflective, evaluative, and advisory; subject specific and generic; and Winch et al.'s (2015) craft, technician, and extended professional. Chronologically, we used these codes during four broad phases of analysis which, combined, contributed to a richer understanding of the data. Firstly, we collated basic descriptive statistics of the data, including the frequency of comments within the strengths / areas for development / action plan against each of the Teachers' Standards. The coding against Teachers' Standards is illustrated in Table 1 with examples against each Standard.

Teachers' Standards	Example written lesson observation feedback
1. Set high expectations to inspire, motivate and challenge	High standards readily enforced throughout - even with the potential disruption of a fire alarm.
2. Promote good progress and outcomes by pupils	Once again, your lesson plan contained the right ingredients for successful learning to take place. Learning objectives were clear, and the outcomes identified for all, most and some were appropriate for the age and stage of this group of learners. The lesson had a clear structured and contained a variety [of] learning opportunities which had the potential for children to achieve the learning objectives and to make progress in their learning…
3. Demonstrate good subject and curriculum knowledge	Well planned lesson, with some great activities: engaging city photographs to stimulate some good questions; map work using population data and representing this graphically…It was brilliant to see

	you using lots of subtle skills really effectively - small things that anticipated issues and helped students to make progress. E.g. noting distinction between Dakar & Dhaka.
4. Plan and teach well-structured lessons	Give attention to timings, ensuring that your lesson does not end in a rush of clearing up. The pace of the lesson was good in the early stages, but ways of keeping pupils on task during the main group work activity might have been developed further in order to curtail distractions and to prevent a rise in volume. Breaking the main task down into timed sub-tasks might have helped to do this…
5. Adapt teaching to respond to the strengths and needs of all pupils	Stretch and challenge - you need to remember to stretch all abilities within the group…
6. Make accurate and productive use of assessment	AFL [assessment for learning] began with self-marking of the starter followed by the opportunity to ask questions. Marking is in line with school policy…
7. Manage behaviour effectively to ensure a good and safe learning environment	Always make your expectations clear to the pupils. For example while watching the film adaptations, the pupils comments were as a result of engagement; insist on quiet and use your positive term 'Hold that thought' so that they do not comment through the film…
8. Fulfil wider professional responsibilities	You have attended parents/open/enrolment evenings; you have contributed to departmental resources at both A level and GCSE. You have liaised closely with a TA in your GCSE class to support a student with particular needs…

Table 1. Teachers' Standards with examples from coding

Secondly, we interrogated the text through an open process of reading, re-reading and noting points of interest and surprise. The aim of this phase was, before applying other *a priori* categories, to become more familiar with the text and intentionally devote time to allow for the potential of other themes to emerge. One important theme foregrounded during this open phase was the distinction between

subject specific and generic feedback, which we then refined and explored

systematically by coding the data as either subject-specific or generic. Text identified as

subject-specific included explicit mention of the subject, such as through the use of

subject-specific terminology (for example; 'your explanation of the difference between

circumference and diameter was very clear), or generic statements that were judged by a

test of whether they could potentially be applied to a teacher of any subject (for

example; 'you have developed great relationships with the students'). Through this

phase of analysis we also began to note apparent similarities between the nature of the

feedback that was given at the beginning and end of the programme. We interrogated

this further by, in the third phase, conducting a content analysis to provide an overview

of the dominant themes at each point during the year through which we might

understand potential changes over time. During the third phase we also analysed the

data through the Bunton et al.'s (2002) categories: descriptive; questioning; reflective;

evaluative; and advisory. Fourthly, as the culmination of the analysis, we analysed the

data by coding through Winch et al.'s (2015) categories of craft, technician, and

extended professional.

Consistency of feedback topics

Each of the previous studies explored a snap-shot in time. By collecting data

across a whole year of ITE, we were able to gain insight into changes over time.

Following the findings from broader work on formative feedback (particularly about the

importance of challenge), and assuming that beginning teachers' practice improves

during their ITE course, we might expect the challenge conveyed in written accounts to

increase over time. The word count frequencies (Table 2) illustrate that, albeit in a

decontextualized representational form, the kinds of words that observers are using in

the aspects for development are very similar across the four observations.

Observation 1		Observation 2		Observation 3		Observation 4		Overall Totals	
86	pupils	79	lesson	74	pupils	61	pupils	297	pupils
71	lesson	76	pupils	69	lesson	37	lesson	256	lesson
39	class	40	work	36	class	34	students	131	work
39	work	38	students	36	can	28	learning	127	students
30	learning	36	time	34	learning	22	class	127	learning
30	need	35	learning	33	work	21	time	117	class
29	can	28	use	31	students	20	activity	111	can
25	use	27	can	24	time	19	activities	104	time
24	students	25	need	21	activities	19	work	87	group
24	group	24	group	21	group	19	can	85	use

Table 2. Top 10 words by frequency across areas for development

There is a clear preference for calling those whom we teach pupils, and then students, and for frequent reference to the collective level of class / group. That which is being spoken about is learning; the term education is used just four times across all 508 observations. There is a focus on the unit of the lesson, and time and activities both feature highly. As an artefact of what, in the most general terms, mentors focus on this would be fascinating to contrast with other ITE programmes internationally, and at different periods of time. The discursive construction of teaching centres on themes echoing other analyses of this period of education in England, including learnification, discussion about how the 'subjects' of education are referred to (Biesta, 2009, 2010), and the way pupils dominate the feedback – rather than teachers. We might expect the feedback for beginning teachers to be most concerned with areas they need to develop and so be dominated by the term 'You…' or 'Your…' These terms are used, but only in reference to students or groups:

Allow the students to demonstrate what they know and how to tackle a problem before you show them.

Stretch and challenge - you need to remember to stretch all abilities within the group. (Observation one, area for development)

Similarities between the themes of feedback (beyond word frequency) are highlighted by the findings from comparison of all three headline sections of the written accounts (strengths, areas for development, action plans) between the first and final (fourth) lesson observations (**Error! Reference source not found.**), and in the comparison between the first (Figure 1) and fourth (Figure 2) observations.
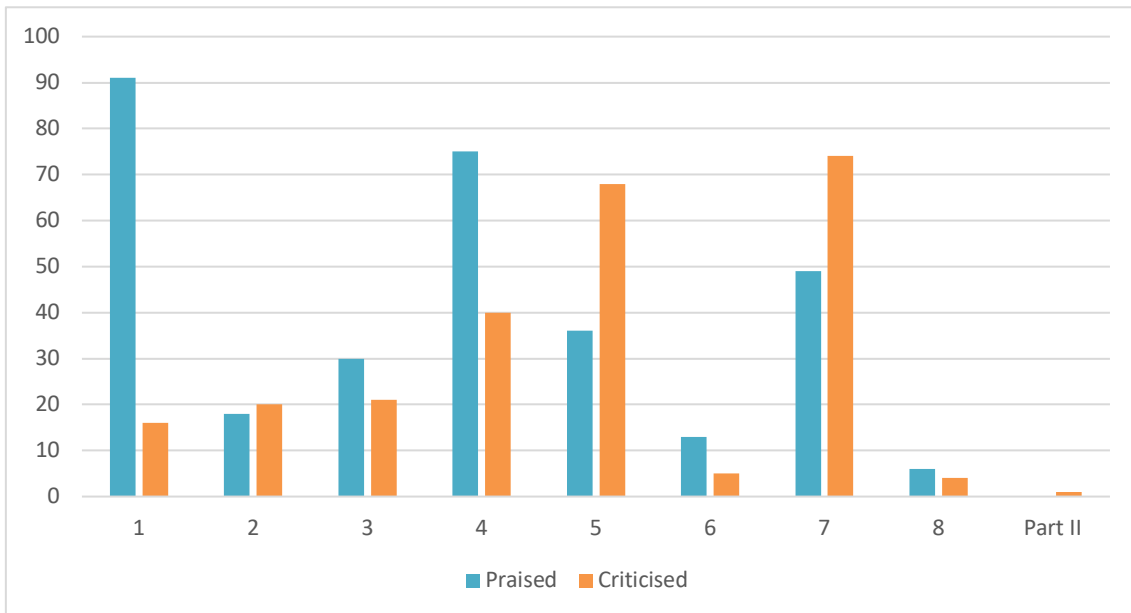

Figure 1. Summary comments coded by Teachers' Standards from first observations
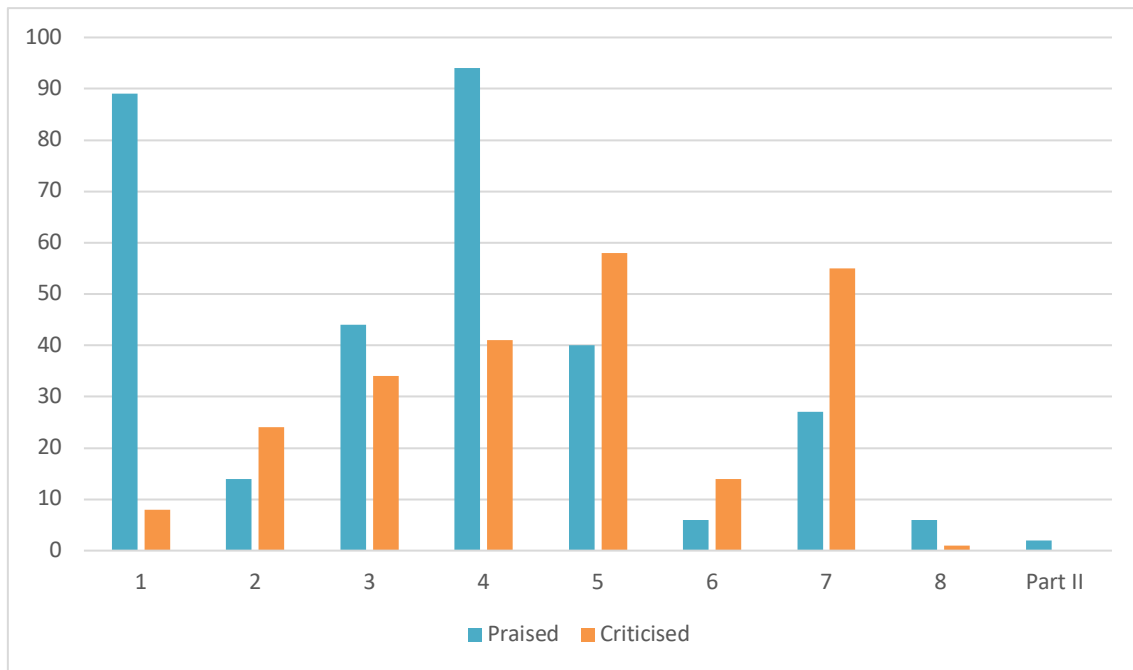
Figure 2. Summary of comments coded by Teachers' Standards from final (fourth) observations

The similarity between the overall distribution of the themes at the beginning and end of the programme are striking. The main areas receiving praise (standards one and four; set high expectations, and plan and teach well-structured lessons) and those receiving criticism (standards five and seven; adapt teaching to respond to the strengths and needs of all pupils, and manage behaviour effectively) are the same at both points. Within the eight Teachers' Standards, the relative balance between praise and criticism is constant for all apart from standard six (making accurate and productive use of data). In the case of standard six, the decrease in instances of praise and increase in criticism – albeit both with relatively few references when compared with comments about other areas – seems to be associated with increases in expectations, both in relation to responsibility at that later stage of the course (such as, for marking), and with a view to the future. For example, to 'ensure that your class' books has the evidence of marking required to evidence the school policy' (Fourth observation; area for development), and, in terms of looking forwards:

Assessing pupils through grading and using indicators to plan work is essential in your NQT [Newly Qualified Teacher] year. (Fourth observation; area for development)

Strengths

Strengths were dominated by the broad categories associated with Teachers Standards' one and four (set high expectations, and plan and teach well-structured lessons respectively). Illustrative examples include:

The way in which activities and resources were planned was very good. The mix of teacher explanations, images / maps, video material all helped to maintain students' interest and engagement with the topic.
You have clearly built a positive relationship with the group.
You have a really great presence in the classroom that is positive and encouraging, and it was good to see you making explicit the high expectations you have for students.
Listening to feedback and taking on board advice given.
(Written lesson observation feedback: example strengths)

Analysed against Bunton et al.'s (2002) framework, the 'Strengths' area of feedback was mainly expressed in evaluative terms (Figure 3), judging that something was 'good', 'really great' and so on.
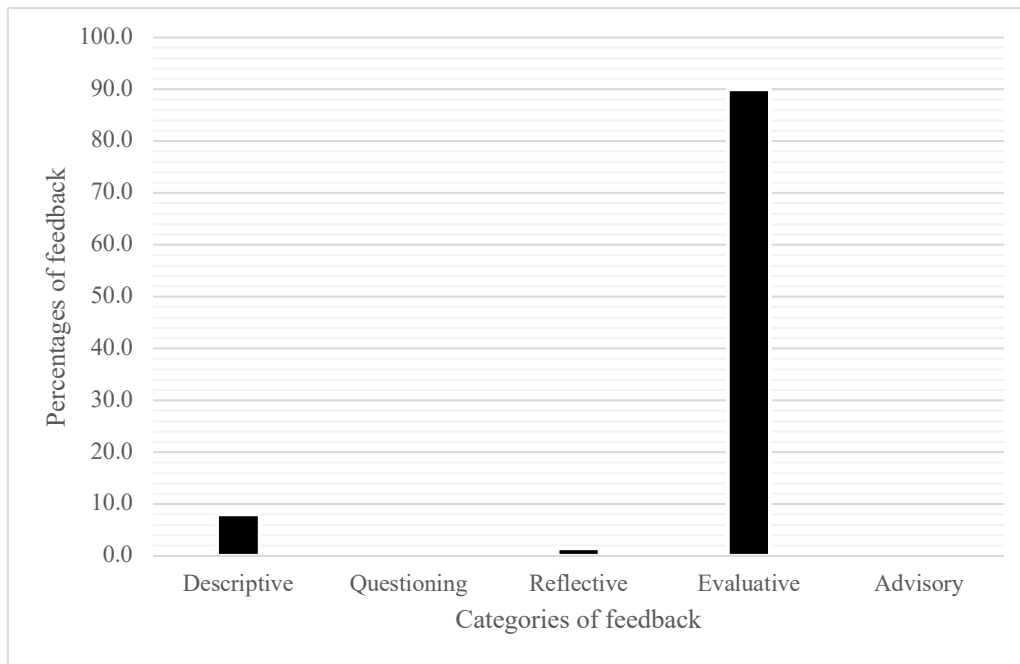
Figure 3. Percentages of types of comments used to describe strengths

In making these largely evaluative judgements, the written feedback presents a highly certain account. 'Seeing' is unproblematic for the observers, and the judgements are offered with the confidence that comes through clarity, repeating the assurance it was 'clearly' the case. These comments seemed to be used as positive encouragement for the beginning teacher, focusing on activities the beginning teacher was judged to have successfully completed. Planning and setting 'high expectations to inspire, motivate and challenge' dominated, with the latter including the teacher's personal attributes:

> Relationships with pupils - High levels of mutual respect clearly evident.
> Appropriate use of humour, regular use of praise and responding positively to
> pupils' questions and comments all helped with this.
> Planning - A well-planned lesson with a range of interesting activities that you
> were prepared to adapt to allow all pupils to access the learning.
> (Written lesson observation feedback: one full example of strengths)

There is a statement identifying the area (for example, 'relationships'), then the supporting rationale, such as a description of the area identified ('high levels of mutual respect clearly evident'), followed by further linked aspects that are believed to

contribute ('…humour, regular use of praise…all helped with this'). While we have used the term 'believed', the epistemological framing of this is actually far stronger. In this example, the assertion is 'clearly evident'. In cases where this kind of claim is not stated explicitly, the certainty is expressed through the unequivocal nature of the claims which meant that, across all lesson observations, we found very little softening or qualifying (through phrases that might have been used, such as; 'I believe…', 'it seemed…', 'it appeared that…'). Instead, these written lesson observations reinforce notions of certainty associated with the 'assumed epistemological objectivity with which observers make judgements' (Puttick, 2017, p. 62). Our analysis suggested two dimensions associated with these claims which contribute to and enable the high degree of certainty: firstly, the level at which the claims operate is fairly general ('responding positively…'); secondly, the substantive focus of the claims is fairly generic, in that it is rarely subject-specific (such as 'planning', 'relationships' and 'presence').

Areas for development and action plans

The broad categorisation of the types of comments used to describe areas for development shifted from the primarily evaluative nature of strengths to some evaluative statements alongside advisory statements (Figure 4).
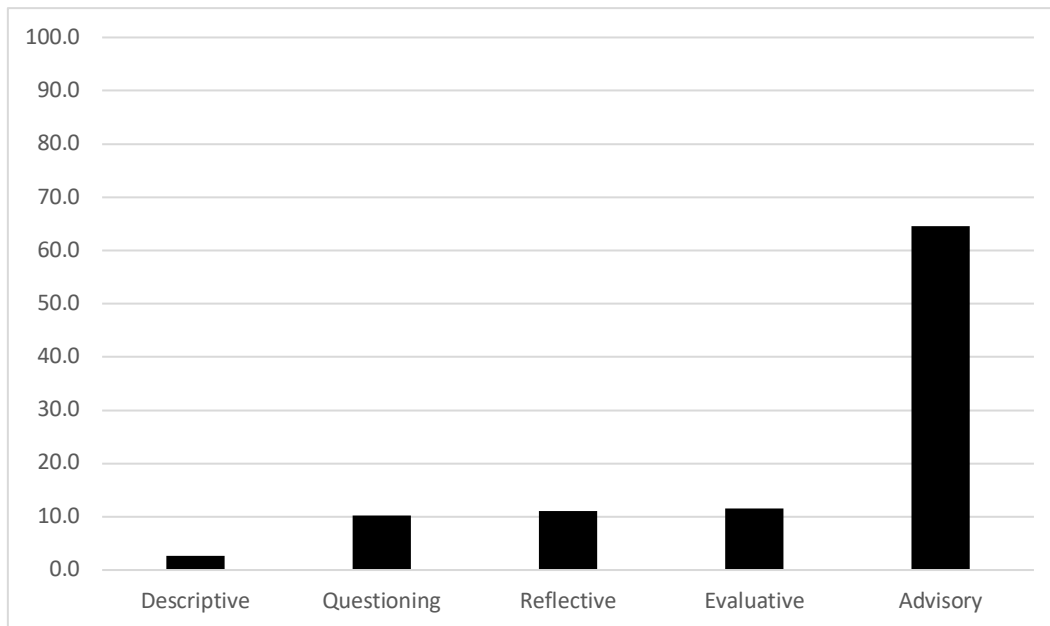
Figure 4. Percentages of types of comments used to describe areas for development

The broad categories of the areas for development contrasts against the dominance of 'evaluative' in the strengths that were identified. Little space is given to descriptions of what was observed. As such, it would not be possible for someone else to read these accounts and, based on the account provided, come to their own judgement about the strengths and areas of development. One consequence is that the beginning teacher has little evidence about the claims. Instead, the observer's testimony bears much of this weight. The shift between evaluative and advisory seems to represent the different purposes intended by the observers. Illustrative examples of these areas for development include:

> Some pupils shout out answers and do not give others a chance - this is something you need to work on without discouraging these pupils.
> In order to get silence you raise your hand - this is an excellent strategy but you need to ensure that when pupils respond by raising their hands that they do not continue the chatter.
> Planning - think carefully about areas where there might be confusion or misunderstanding.
> (Written lesson observation feedback: example areas for development)

Strengths simply include positive assertions with no further development or questions, whereas, the areas for development begin with assertions which are then linked to and followed by critique of the observed practice, concluding with normative statements about what the observer believes ought to be happening. For example:

> You used a random name generator with the clear intention to have most of the class answering at least one question. However this is most valuable when you ask your question first, everyone should be engaged in thinking of the answer and then a name appears on the screen. Otherwise the majority sit back and let one individual do all the work as soon as their name appears.
> (Written lesson observation feedback: area for development)

The assertion 'You used…' is linked in this example to the advice using 'However…'. This includes a practical instruction for the teacher to follow 'ask the question first', the observer's normative assertion 'everyone should…' and their reasoning that acts as the justification 'otherwise the majority sit back…'. The aspects for development were then followed by an action plan, providing specific activities the beginning teacher can do in order to address the areas of development:

> Remember the sequence should be;- question - thinking time - selection of pupil to answer the question.
> (Written lesson observation feedback: action plan)

The beginning teacher has a clear technical instruction to follow. In this case, they simply need to carry out certain activities in a new order. They are exhorted to 'remember' the correct procedure about what 'should' be. There is a logic provided, which makes explicit the basis on which the judgement is being made, and the associated beliefs about student motivation. Teaching is constructed in this situation as a technical activity: there is a right way to carry it out which can be distilled into a maxim that the beginning teacher must remember.

The one particular way in which 'research' was referred to in some of the written lesson feedback was as a task for teachers to undertake with the outcome of providing solutions. For example, as one part of the action plan:

Areas for development:
Learning objectives - These need to be more manageable within a single rather than stretching over several lessons.
Subject knowledge - Consider possible misconceptions before a lesson so that you can be more prepared to cope with questions. Use key terms within your lessons more frequently.

Action plan:
- Provide learning objectives in smaller steps so they are achievable in a lesson.
- Identify misunderstandings more quickly during group activities so that you can adapt your plan more quickly if needed.
- Insist on pupils using key terms in their answers and questions.
- Research and trial different approaches to stretch and challenge the more able.
(Written lesson observation feedback from one lesson)

This feedback was the most explicit reference to research across all of the data, presented as a source of practical approaches for the teacher to try. The action plans can broadly be categorised as those constructing teaching as a technical activity, such as the example above, and as a craft. Constructing good teaching as a craft, action plans prioritised learning from other, more experienced teachers by 'seeing how' they do it, for example:

Observe how other colleagues address these points.
See how teachers approach differentiated learning.
Try to observe some teachers who are naturally quiet, but effective in the classroom and look out for the strategies they use.
Try to take stronger ownership of the classroom. The following may help in that (along with further experience of teaching!!): teaching from different parts of the

room; being clearer in your mind to give clearer messages; ask for quiet with meaning; whatever you ask for, hold the pupils to it…
(Written lesson observation feedback: examples from four different action plans)

Because the observation of more experienced colleagues is used on its own, rather than in dialogue with other sources of knowledge such as research evidence, teaching is constructed here as a craft. While nearly all feedback was expressed with a high degree of certainty, the one area where some ambiguity or tentativeness was introduced was in the action plan. In the first two sections (strengths, and aspects for development), we found many strong claims, illustrated through the repetition of 'clearly…'. The following 'strength' provides a further example: 'Good learning was clearly taking place, and there was evidence from the final 'test' images and from their written work that pupils understood the concepts that you were focussed on'. Having established certainty over the strengths and aspects for development identified, there was some scope for slight qualification; a softening to 'consider' or 'you might…' in some of the action plans. For example, in some cases a question was posed: 'Ensure you are clear about the purpose of everything you ask pupils to do and that this purpose is clear to the pupils. For example, the paper sort was then followed by copying correct answers from board; could you have used feedback from their responses more effectively?'

Planning

The theme of planning emerged strongly, including across strengths and areas of development, and throughout the 'journey' of lesson observations, being mentioned at the start of the year, during the year and again in many of the final lesson observations. The following examples represent the ways in which planning was identified as an area

for development:

> Ensure that differentiation is clear within your plan as well as G&T, SEN etc and
> that your pupils can be stretched.
> Introduce timings when planning and articulate how long pupils have to complete
> tasks.
> Use data on pupils to assist in planning.
> Consider more carefully how the different parts of a lesson link together to allow
> pupils to progress in their learning.
> Include levelled learning objectives in your lesson plan.
> (Written lesson observation feedback: five example areas for development)

Interestingly, the strong craft aspect drawn on elsewhere (such as observing more experienced colleagues' practice) was not mentioned here: beginning teachers were not guided to look at their colleagues' plans. There seemed to be a tension between this and the later implication that planning is essentially a craft. While planning was constructed in some ways as a technical activity (being praised for dimensions including 'detail', 'precision' and 'variety'), it was also seen as something in relation to which the beginning teachers ought to become increasingly flexible. For example:

> Peter has made great progress towards a more ordered, structured and controlled
> learning environment. Having achieved this successfully, he now needs to work on
> ways to maintain it with less rigid planning and with more potential within that
> planning for pupil-centred learning. (Written lesson observation feedback: example
> area for development)

There is a sense of this kind of feedback beginning to push towards something akin to challenging beginning teachers to 'undertake responsible deliberative action', which means doing more than simply 'ensur[ing] that the curriculum is delivered' (Edwards & Protheroe, 2004, p. 195). However, based only on these written accounts, there seems to be a 'jump' between the initial assertion and the 'less rigid planning' that is aimed for. There are also questions to explore further around the apparent tensions

between the kinds of things that are initially praised (order, structure, and control), and the kind of aims towards which the beginning teacher is encouraged (flexibility, and pupil-centred learning). Rather than critiquing this example of feedback for being contradictory, instead it perhaps illustrates something of the complexity of teaching. Our argument is that, in order to construct teaching as a professional endeavour, there is scope to frame the claims made about observations more tentatively and to expand the kinds of evidence to which beginning teachers are introduced. In this specific example this might include theoretical conceptualisations of 'planning' and the complex relationships between 'planning' and 'practice', research evidence on effective planning, and – possibly most importantly – discussions related to subject-specific considerations of planning *for this particular topic*.

Conclusions

We set out to understand how good teaching is discursively constructed through written lesson observation feedback by analysing over 500 written lesson observation forms on one ITE programme. Drawing on Winch et al.'s (2015) categories of teaching (craft, technical, extended professional), we have argued that our findings suggest teaching is constructed in these accounts in primarily craft and technical terms. We have found little evidence of teaching being constructed in ways that reflect the broader vision of teaching as extended professional.

Cutting across themes, the epistemological dimension of the feedback is dominated by certainty, both in terms of the strength of claims and the framing of further recommendations. The propositional directives which the beginning teacher must follow act to construct teaching as a technical endeavour. The additional sources of knowledge that beginning teachers are referred to in order to further develop their

practice are overwhelmingly more experienced teachers, the extensive and uncritical use of which further contributes to the construction of teaching as a craft.

We have argued that good teaching is constructed through this written lesson observation feedback in craft or technician terms because of the: epistemological certainty of the descriptions of practice observed and advice given; reliance on the authority of the more experienced observer and more experienced other teacher on their own (that is, without this knowledge being brought into dialogue with other, particularly research-based, knowledges); wider absence of explicit engagement with research, including as support for claims made in the observations, and as a source of further knowledge supporting the rationale presented to beginning teachers through which to build their own conclusions about their emerging praxis.

It is easy to say ITE programmes ought to involve deep, mutually enriching links between 'research and practice'. However, the written lesson observation feedback we have analysed suggests that, in line with findings from the small number of previous studies, there is significant scope to improve the dialogues between research evidence and practice through this particular activity. The dominance of the 'craft' and 'technical' conceptions of teaching constructed through these texts seems to undermine claims made elsewhere about research-engaged ITE aimed at developing good teaching as a professional endeavour. Written lesson observation is a potentially powerful opportunity for ITE partnerships to demonstrate the kinds of rich integration between theory and practice they expect of beginning teachers. It offers a concrete opportunity for ITE partnerships to model what they mean by applying research to practice. The wider context of ongoing debate about university-school relationships and research

engagement in teaching more broadly, and particularly within ITE, add to the importance of this work to critically explore written lesson observation feedback. The questions raised in Elliott et al.'s (2016) review about type, volume and frequency of written marking, and their suggestions of areas for research to focus on, might also be usefully applied to questions about written feedback during ITE.

We suggest that further research build on the limited existing body of work we have contributed to, asking: how is teaching constructed through written lesson feedback across different ITE partnerships and internationally? How do different phases of education (for example; early years, primary, further education) construct teaching through written lesson observation feedback? Are our assumptions about the importance of written lesson observation for beginning teachers valid? In what ways do beginning teachers interpret and respond to written lesson observation feedback? How do beginning teachers perceive the interactions between written lesson observation feedback and other elements of ITE programmes (for example, in supporting and modelling, or undermining and subverting)? How might written lesson observation feedback increasingly empower beginning teachers to 'make defensible judgements about the ways in which they teach' (Winch et al. 2015, p.211)?

References

Agricola, B. T., Prins, F. J., Sluijsmans, D. M. A., Agricola, B. T., Prins, F. J., Impact, D. M. A. S., & Prins, F. J. (2020). Impact of feedback request forms and verbal feedback on higher education students ' feedback perception, self-efficacy, and motivation. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*, *27*(1), 6–25. https://doi.org/10.1080/0969594X.2019.1688764

BERA-RSA. (2014). *Research and the teaching profession: Building the capacity for a*

self-improving education system. Retrieved from
http://www.bera.ac.uk/project/research-and-teacher-education

BERA. (2018). *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research*. London.

Biesta, G. (2009). Good education in an age of measurement: on the need to reconnect
with the question of purpose in education. *Educational Assessment, Evaluation and
Accountability*, *21*(1), 33–46. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11092-008-9064-9

Biesta, G. (2010). Learner, Student, Speaker: Why it matters how we call those we
teach. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, *42*(5–6), 540–552.
https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-5812.2010.00684.x

Black, P., & Wiliam, D. (1998). Inside the Black Box: Raising Standards Through
Classroom Assessment. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *80*(2), 139–148.
https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm

Bunton, D., Stimpson, P., & Lopez-Real, F. (2002). University tutors' practicum
observation notes: Format and content. *Mentoring and Tutoring: Partnership in
Learning*, *10*(3), 233–252. https://doi.org/10.1080/1361126022000037060

Carless, D., Salter, D., Yang, M., Lam, J., Carless, D., Salter, D., … Lam, J. (2011).
*Studies in Higher Education Developing sustainable feedback practices
Developing sustainable feedback practices*. *5079*.
https://doi.org/10.1080/03075071003642449

Christie, D., Donoghue, M., Kirk, G., McNamara, O., Menter, I., Moss, G., … others.
(2012). Prospects for education research in education departments in higher
education institutions in the UK. *UCET/BERA Report*. Retrieved from
http://www.ucet.ac.uk/downloads/4372-Prospects-for-Education-Research-in-
Education-Departments-in-Higher-Education-Institutions-in-the-UK.pdf

Department for Education. (2011). Teachers' Standards. https://doi.org/DFE-00066-
2011

Dowden, T., Pittaway, S., Yost, H., & Mccarthy, R. (2013). Assessment & Evaluation
in Higher Education Students ' perceptions of written feedback in teacher

education : ideally feedback is a continuing two-way communication that encourages progress. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, *38*(3), 349–362. https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2011.632676

Edwards, A., & Protheroe, L. (2004). Teaching by proxy: Understanding how mentors are positioned in partnerships. *Oxford Review of Education*, *30*(2), 183–197. https://doi.org/10.1080/0305498042000215511

Elliott, V., Baird, J.-A., Hopfenbeck, T. N., Ingram, J., Thompson, I., Usher, N., & Zantout, M. (2016). *A review of the evidence on written marking*. Retrieved from https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/Publications/EEF_Marking_Review_April_2016.pdf

Goodell, J. E. (2006). Using critical incident reflections: a self-study as a mathematics teacher educator. *Journal of Mathematics Teacher Education*, *9*, 221–248. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10857-006-9001-0

Hattie, J., & Timperley, H. (2007). The power of feedback. *Review of Educational Research*, *77*(1), 81–112. https://doi.org/10.3102/003465430298487

Hudson, P. (2014). Feedback consistencies and inconsistencies: eight mentors' observations on one preservice teacher's lesson. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, *37*(1), 63–73. https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2013.801075

Hudson, P. (2016). Identifying mentors' observations for providing feedback. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, *22*(2), 219–234. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2015.1055446

Kastberg, S. E., Lischka, A. E., & Hillman, S. L. (2020). Characterizing mathematics teacher educators ' written feedback to prospective teachers. *Journal of Mathematics Teacher Education*, *23*(2), 131–152. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10857-018-9414-6

Kelly, E., & Richards, J. B. (2019). Medical education: giving feedback to doctors in training. *BMJ*, *4523*(July), 1–5. https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.l4523

Kingston, N., & Nash, B. (2011). Formative assessment: A meta-analysis and a call for

research. *Educational Measurement: Issues and Practice*, *30*(4), 28–37. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-3992.2011.00220.x

Land, C. C. (2018). Examples of c/Critical Coaching: An Analysis of Conversation Between Cooperating and Preservice Teachers. *Journal of Teacher Education*, *69*(5), 493–507.

Lock, R., Soares, A., & Foster, J. (2009). Mentors' written lesson appraisals: The impact of different mentoring regimes on the content of written lesson appraisals and the match with pre-service teachers' perceptions of content. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, *35*(2), 133–143. https://doi.org/10.1080/02607470902770963

Markham, A., & Buchanan, E. (2012). *Ethical decision-making and Internet research 2.0: Recommendations from the AoIR ethics working committee (Version 2.0)*. https://doi.org/Retrieved from www.aoir.org

Maynard, T., & Furlong, J. (1993). Learning to teach and models of mentoring. In D. McIntyre, H. Hagger, & M. Wilkin (Eds.), *Mentoring: perspectives on school-based teacher education*. London: Kogan Page.

Murray, J., & Mutton, T. (2016). Teacher Education in England: Change in Abundance, Continuities in Question. In G. Beauchamp, L. Clarke, M. Hulme, M. Jephcote, A. Kennedy, G. Magennis, … G. Peiser (Eds.), *Teacher Education in Times of Change* (pp. 57–74). Bristol: Policy Press.

Mutton, T., Burn, K., & Menter, I. (2017). Deconstructing the Carter Review: competing conceptions of quality in England's 'school-led' system of initial teacher education. *Journal of Education Policy*, *32*(1), 14–33. https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2016.1214751

Puttick, S. (2017). Performativity , guilty knowledge , and ethnographic intervention intervention. *Ethnography and Education*, *12*(1), 49–63. https://doi.org/10.1080/17457823.2015.1110039

Puttick, S. (2018). Student teachers' positionalities as knowers in school subject departments. *British Educational Research Journal*, *44*(1), 25–42.

https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3314

Ritter, J. K., Powell, D., Hawley, T. S., & Blasik, J. (2011). Reifying the Ontology of Individualism at the Expense of Democracy: An Examination of University Supervisors' Written Feedback to Student Teachers. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 29–47.

Rowe, N., Wilkin, A., & Wilson, R. (2017). "Good teaching": A UK Review. In A. Pollard (Ed.), *Readings for Reflective Teaching in schools* (2nd ed.). London.

Soares, A., & Lock, R. (2007). Pre-service science teachers' perceptions of written lesson appraisals: The impact of styles of mentoring. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, *30*(1), 75–90. https://doi.org/10.1080/02619760601120056

Spear, M., Lock, N. D., & McCulloch, M. (1997). The written feedback mentors give to student teachers. *Teacher Development*, *1*(2), 269–280. https://doi.org/10.1080/13664539700200019

Strong, M., Gargani, J., & Hacifazliog, Ö. (2011). Do we know a successful teacher when we see one?: Experiments in the identification of effective teachers. *Journal of Teacher Education*, *62*(4), 367–382. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487110390221

Valencia, S. W., Martin, S. D., Place, N. A., & Grossman, P. (2009). Complex Interactions in Student Teaching. *Journal of Teacher Education*, *60*(3), 304–322.

Winch, C., Oancea, A., & Orchard, J. (2015). The contribution of educational research to teachers' professional learning: philosophical understandings. *Oxford Review of Education*, *41*(2), 202–216. https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2015.1017406