

**‘Sitting alone in the staffroom contemplating my future’:  
communities of practice, legitimate peripheral participation and student  
teachers’ experiences of problematic school placements as guests.**

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*A recent Review of Teacher Education in Scotland (Donaldson, 2010) reports that 23% of respondents (n=2381) encountered variable or very poor school placement experiences. This paper uses Lave and Wenger’s ideas about Communities of Practice (1998) and Legitimate Peripheral Participation (1991) as analytical tools with which to understand the nature and impact of student teachers’ problematic experiences of school placement. 14 Professional Graduate Diploma in Education students on a one-year Secondary English course were followed through the practice elements of their Initial Teacher Education programme and data were constructed from learning logs and semi-structured interviews. Analysis provided a nuanced account of the student teachers’ difficulties in attaining member status as Legitimate Peripheral Participants in communities of practising teachers, with the concepts ‘joint enterprise’, ‘mutual engagement’ and ‘shared repertoire’ being found to be useful in explaining these difficulties. Limitations in the theoretical framework were also discovered and these are highlighted and developed in the paper.*

**Keywords:**

communities of practice, legitimate peripheral participation, student teacher placement, early professional development, identity formation, belonging.

**School Placements within Initial Teacher Education: The Scottish Context.**

In Scotland, the university role in Initial Teacher Education provision is ‘still a powerful one’ (McDougall, Mtika, Reid and Weir, 2013, p434). So, while ‘partnership’ remains an important guiding principle, the Scottish approach to this is ‘based in higher education and led from higher education’ (Gray and Weir, 2014, p578), with student teachers spending part of their programme in schools under the supervision and guidance of fully registered teacher colleagues. On the Professional Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE), a one-year qualification similar to the PGCE which preceded it and the context in which this research was located, student teachers embark on a 36 week programme, 18 weeks of which is spent in two different schools. Although it has been argued that Scotland’s teachers and their teacher education have retained ‘a well-deserved public and political trust’ (Gray and Weir, 2014, p584), concerns have however been raised about the variability of student teachers’ experiences while on school placement (Donaldson, 2010); HMIE, 2005; Johnston, 2010; McDougall, Mtika, Reid and Weir, 2013). This paper aims to explore and understand the nature of student teachers’ difficulties on placement.

## **School Placement**

The opportunity to teach in a school is a central element in the early professional development of teachers (Moody, 2009) and has commonly been described as one of the most influential (Ferrier-Kerr, 2009; Huang and Waxman, 2009; Trent, 2012; Wilson, 2006), critical (Mtika, 2010) and indeed pivotal (Donaldson, 2010) features of student teachers' Initial Teacher Education programmes. While experience on its own has been deemed insufficient (Schmidt, 2010) and unlikely to prepare student teachers fully for full-time teaching (Grudnoff, 2011), productive or educative school placements (Schmidt, 2010) have been widely seen as accruing significant benefits to student teachers (Zeichner, 1996; Zeichner, 2010). Early experiences of teaching are crucial in the process of identity formation (Day et al, 2005; Harlow and Cobb, 2014; Hong, 2010; Trent, 2012), essential to the development of new teachers' professional skills (HMIE, 2005; Donaldson, 2010), and important in the shaping of teachers' thinking and beliefs about pedagogy (Mtika, 2011). Practicum opportunities also facilitate student teachers' awareness of their broader responsibilities as members of a teaching community (Zeichner, 2010; ten Dam, 2006).

School experience has also been widely acknowledged as the most worthwhile and valuable component of Initial Teacher Education programmes – particularly by student teachers themselves, who often perceive the school as the site where the most important learning takes place (Beck and Kosnick, 2002; Hascher, 2004; Le Cornu, 2010). In Scotland, where Teacher Education has been a focus of a recent review (Donaldson, 2010), school placement was overwhelmingly identified by respondents as the most useful mode of learning, with 78% of 2381 participants claiming they had 'effective' or 'very effective' support on placement. Internationally, too, Caires, Almeida and Martins (2010) report that most students, during placement, experience growing levels of school belonging, an increased sense of self as teacher and improvements in levels of self-confidence and commitment to teaching.

However, - and ironically, given the high status of teaching practice - a small but important number of students every year reach the end of the process of teaching in a school frustrated and discouraged by the effects of an unproductive placement (McNally et al, 1994; Hayes, 1998; Maynard, 2001; Johnston, 2010). School placement is thus also one of the most challenging aspects of ITE (Huang and Waxman, 2009; Le Cornu, 2010), involving both struggle and excitement (Bloomfield, 2010). In Scotland, Donaldson (2010) reports that 23% respondents claim to have had 'variable or very poor' placement experiences (p43). Wider research evidence moreover suggests that some student teachers experience considerable distress and weariness (Caires, Almeida and Vieira, 2012) stress and burn out (Hong, 2010; Kokkinos and Stavropoulos, 2014), with some leaving their course altogether due to their inability to manage the range of demands that manifest themselves on school experience (Chambers and Roper, 2000). It is only by actually doing the job that beginning teachers can come to determine for themselves whether they are able not only to develop the requisite knowledge and skills, but also to become a valued member of the community of qualified teachers (ten Dam and Blom, 2006).

Thus, while advocates of school-based ITE curricula argue for a reconceptualisation of the nature of early professional learning (Hagger & McIntyre, 2006), and for teacher education to be increasingly located within the school itself, such proposals may mask the complex and potentially problematic nature of the school as a site of beginning teacher development (Johnston, 2010; Trent, 2013). Ongoing research is therefore essential if future decisions about Initial Teacher

Education are to be made in a forum where a wide range of evidence is available – evidence that will include analysis of student teachers’ own perceptions of the impact, both positive *and* negative, of school experience on their early professional development (Graham and Roberts, 2007).

This paper aims to contribute to the growing evidence base that has formed around the practice aspects of beginning teacher’s ITE experiences, by concentrating its focus on the difficulties encountered by student teachers in the schools in which they are placed. Such a perspective is needed firstly to validate the experiences of all students, not just those who have a happy, successful and productive practicum, but also those for whom teaching practice is frustrating, anxiety-ridden, unhappy and unproductive. Secondly, it is needed due to the relative lack of published work on this issue. Important studies of beginning teacher learning (Hobson, 2005; McNally, 1997, 2006; Hayes, 2001; Maynard, 2000) tend to give a balanced view of student teachers’ practice experiences, enabling only tentative glimpses of the most problematic areas. As these may highlight aspects of social processes that are hidden in more positive experiences (Lacey, 1977), they are worthy of more explicit investigation. And finally, as teachers’ early experiences of teaching may impact on longer-term development, affecting teachers’ decisions to stay in the profession (Jones, 2005; Gold, 1996), more needs to be known about the range of interacting processes (Caires, Almeida and Vieira, 2012; Caires, Almeida and Martins, 2010) that contribute towards this early sense of self as teacher (Graham and Roberts, 2007). Only with fuller understandings of the nature of student teachers’ experiences, as they begin to teach in schools, can ITE partners – the universities, local authorities and schools – work together cohesively to ensure consistently high quality programmes of support.

### **Theoretical Framework**

A second key aim of the paper is to examine the value of a set of theoretical tools - that have emerged from empirical studies of the social practices that underpin learning in the workplace - in researching the difficult or problematic school placement experiences of student teachers. The situated learning perspective, which has informed the research on which this paper is based, focuses on the integrated nature of the activities in which knowledge is built and the wider context in which the activities are located (Brown et al, 1989). Working within this framework, Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991; 1998) have developed their own particular analytical lenses through which they conceive learning in terms of the mutually constitutive relationship between the whole person and the contexts in which learning takes place (Wenger, 2007). Here learning is integral to participation in social practice (Barab, Warren, del Valle and Fang, 2006), or as they explain in their own words, ‘an integral part of generative social practice in the lived-in world’ (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p35).

As people engage in the joint enterprise of shared activities, they form relationships in what Lave and Wenger (1991) have called ‘communities of practice’ (CoPs). These are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do, have a clear sense of purpose (O’Sullivan, 2007), work towards shared facilitation of purpose through productive social contact (Armour and Yelling, 2007) and learn, through sustained endeavour over time how to improve their practice (Deglau and O’Sullivan, 2006). Socially interdependent, their participation in decision-making defines the community and is nurtured by it (Bellah, Madson, Sullivan, Swidler and Tipton, 1985). It is through participating in the community of practice that co-participants formulate a shared sense of what competence is in a given context (Barab, Kling and

Gray, 2004). According to Wenger (1988; 2007), CoPs define competence by combining three elements:

- **Joint enterprise:** where members are bound together by common practices (Barab, Kling and Gray, 2004), and a collectively developed understanding of what the community is about (O’Sullivan, 2007);
- **Mutual engagement:** where members build the community through interaction with one another (Armour and Yelling, 2007). In the process, they establish norms and relationships of mutuality (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 1992; Patton and Parker, 2012).
- **Shared repertoire:** where the joint pursuit of a common enterprise – self defined learning/professional interests (Macphail, Patton, Parker and Tannehill, 2014) - produces communal resources for negotiating meaning, including language, routines, artefacts, tools, stories, and styles (Barton and Tusting, 2005).

It is argued that becoming a member of a community enables increasingly mature participation to take place (Shepard, 2000) - and thus learning (Barab and Duffy, 2000; MacPhail et al, 2014). Initially, as novices, newcomers lack the competence to engage as full participators at the heart of successful practice (Yandell and Turvey, 2007). They contribute, as apprentices (Shanks and Robson, 2012), at the level of their current competence however (Woodgate-Jones, 2011), in a process of 'legitimate peripheral participation' (Lave and Wenger, 1991), often initially observing others' practice before gradually taking more active part as their readiness for more complex activity pulls them into more central roles in the community (Cuddapah and Clayton, 2011). Novice participation is legitimate to the extent that its authenticity is accepted by other members of the community (Wenger, 1998). To be on an 'inbound trajectory', the newcomer must be granted sufficient legitimacy to be treated as a potential member (Ussher, 2010).

Participation is peripheral to the degree that it provides an approximation of mature performance and offers a sense of how the community operates (Davis, 2006). It involves lessened risk and relatively minor consequences of error. Trust and respect are important ingredients in engaged participation (Whitcomb, Borko and Liston, 2009), leading to the greater likelihood of risk-taking, innovative practices (ibid, 2009) and more secure feelings of belonging. A shift in power relations is also implied in the move from the periphery to more a more central position in the community (Yandell and Turvey, 2007), with more control over the decisions involved in their own development (Johnston, 2010). But if attempts at participation are rejected by either being denied legitimacy or being marginalised, learning becomes very difficult (ibid, 2010).

Secondary school teachers belong to several overlapping communities of practice (Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2004), comprising social relations which operate at different levels of scale – from the teaching profession in its widest sense, to the community of fellow specialists in a particular subject discipline, to whole-school institutional level and down to the particular department within a school in which an individual subject specialist might work. Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2004) argue that when discussing Communities of Practice, it is necessary to be clear about the sense in which the concept is being used. In this paper, it is the 'tighter' sense of subject

department that the concept Community of Practice will refer to. Student teachers, to some extent, fit the role of peripheral participants in subject department Communities of Practice as they do not belong to the central core of the practice which comprises the established, fully registered teachers who have full responsibility for the learning and well-being of the pupils in their classes. Student teachers, however, do not fit the concept of legitimate peripheral participant so easily in that they only join the community for a limited time so that they do not have the opportunity – nor are they expected – to move from the periphery to fully mature practice in the centre of community activity. In this sense, they are guests or visitors (Edwards, 1997; Valencia, Martin, Place and Grossman, 2009; Johnston, 2010). Yet, despite this, the concept of legitimate peripheral participant still has some purchase for student teachers, as they take part in the work of the practice, often becoming more fully engaged in a movement towards greater levels of skilful participation, often as co-participants in the work of the department. And to the extent that many student teachers do feel like real teachers by the end of their placement and not simply guests, it is clear that there are both objective and subjective experiences of peripheral participation (Cornford and Carrington, 2006).

A central contention of this paper is, therefore, that Lave and Wenger's theoretical ideas provide a useful but inadequately developed set of analytical tools (Hughes, Jewson and Unwin, 2007) with which to attempt to understand student teacher difficulties in participation in the school communities to which they become assigned on placement. By using data from the student teachers themselves, the paper ultimately aims to extend and enhance Lave and Wenger's situated learning theoretical framework, building on their own understandings of the potentially problematic nature of their model, giving more clearly defined illustration of their admission that communities of practice can be a potential 'cage of the soul' as much as a 'cradle of the self.' (Wenger, 1998, p85).

## **Methodology**

Qualitative research methods were employed in this study due to their appropriateness for exploring the meanings of social phenomena as they are experienced by individuals in a natural context (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The interpretive character of such a paradigm places emphasis on the purpose of generating understanding. By foregrounding the participants' voices in order to reveal the processes by which the student teachers construct meanings about their world, such research can report what those meanings were (Hull, 1997).

Volunteers were sought from participants in a one-year, full-time Professional Graduate Diploma in Education class (formerly the PGCE), students who were training to become Secondary English teachers. 14 were invited to participate in the study (8 females and 6 males) in an attempt to construct as varied a sample as possible in terms of age, previous experiences and school placement contexts.

The key research questions underpinning the study emerged from Lave and Wenger's Communities of Practice theoretical framework (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) and these constructs provided the 'reading glasses' (Malterud, 2001) through which the data were analysed and interpreted. The research questions were:

To what extent are students' problematic experiences on placement connected to difficulties in their developing:

- a shared understanding of key areas of practice in their work with host teachers? (Joint Enterprise)
- relationships of mutuality through their interactions with host teachers on placement (Mutual Engagement) leading to a sense of legitimacy in the eyes of colleagues?
- a shared repertoire of tools and resources, and in using these appropriately? (Shared Repertoire)

A range of evidence sources was accessed: learning logs written on placement and submitted at the end of each of the two 9 week placement experiences in different schools (in February and June); semi-structured, taped interviews of an hour's duration in June at the end of the course. Gathering information in multiple ways aimed to illuminate different facets of the students' experiences, helping to portray them in all their complexity. Triangulation of data methods (Cresswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998) also enabled comparison of perspectives, permitting patterns to be detected and dissenting accounts to be brought into focus.

In searching for the meaning of data, analysis involved trying to detect 'recurring regularities' (Guba, 1978) - patterns, links and relationships in the indigenous data (Patton, 2002) representing what students said - starting first with the learning logs, where initial broad categories were ascribed and significant passages in the data identified under key headings. In the later interviews, the categories, that had been highlighted in the first round of data gathering via learning logs, were further explored and extended. Note-making accompanied taping, with interviews being transcribed later and again significant portions labelled during analysis using the original categories, with supporting quotations gathered together under the original headings. An increasingly interpretive approach was then taken (Bogdan and Biklen, 2003), and the categories were then re-analysed to ascertain their consonance with the main constructs from Lave and Wenger's theoretical framework and to ensure coherence with the research questions. The original categories were then reconfigured in order to further refine and organise the data in line with the students' words. The final categories were finally located, for the purposes of presentation, within the three thematic headings as these related to issues of joint enterprise, mutual engagement and shared repertoire.

## **Results**

Analysis of the data supports the contention that beginning teachers not only have to learn the skills that will make them effective in working with young learners, but crucially have to become incorporated into both the social fabric of the community of qualified practitioners (Harlow and Cobb, 2014; Johnston, 2010; Olson and Osbourne, 1991; Wu, 1998) and into the professional norms that underpin their working practices (Schempp, Sparkes and Templin, 1993). Neither social nor professional acceptance is, however, automatic and cannot be assumed. Indeed, acculturation was never satisfactorily achieved in a small number of cases and differing levels of marginalisation were experienced during the course of the placements. The consequences of this were in terms of the student teacher's sense of well-being and their capacity to make the most of the learning opportunities afforded to them on placement.

## **Problems in negotiating a joint enterprise:**

### ***Absence of shared expectations***

All the student participants agreed that negotiating a clear set of expectations with class teachers as their teaching practice unfolded was crucial to successful development. Many were effective in this process. However difficulties were highlighted in certain student teachers' inability to develop an appropriate sense of purpose in relation to their host teachers' expectations. A common experience was of busy teachers, with other understandably pressing responsibilities and commitments, leaving students to get on with the job of planning lessons and teaching their classes without clear understandings around what to teach, how to teach it, what pupil outcomes to work towards, what to do if problems arise and, perhaps most importantly, whether the student teacher was working at an appropriate level with their classes.

*'What detracted most from my confidence was not being told explicitly, or not knowing what is expected of you. It's not explicitly told to you and I really honestly didn't know until the end of the placement. I was asking, is this ok, what do you expect from me? That was difficult, people not actually telling you, just leaving you alone, and me thinking are you leaving me alone because you can't be bothered or because I am doing well?'*

The impact on motivation could be significant. *'Every day I left school feeling demoralised because I never really knew how I was doing and I began to feel quite unsure of myself and not sure if what I had been doing was any good or if it was even what they were looking for.'* Thus, inability to get access to class teachers could disconnect students from developing a full, rich understanding of the community and its practices or an awareness of their developing sense of place as an effective practitioner within that community. Where students had difficulties on placement, it was often the sense of jointly negotiated expectations and the consequent inability to build clear understandings of the meanings of practice that was absent. This was exacerbated by their guest status as temporary visitors who had a limited amount of time to get up to speed in making sense of important community practices.

### ***Absence of shared professional purposes***

Professional validation from host colleagues was crucial to students' membership experiences. Such acknowledgement was perceived as having to be earned through success in key professional activities – like lesson planning and lesson delivery – that acted as public markers of progress and development.

Even when there was sufficient contact, there was evidence in the data of a lack of shared understanding as to the goals or purposes of the enterprise that they were involved in with their colleagues. While both parties are undoubtedly concerned with pupil learning and development, students perceived that some teachers tended to place greater value on activities centring around preparing pupils for assessments. In contrast, the student teachers themselves, who were much less responsible for formal assessment tasks, were more inclined to place emphasis on the planning of stimulating materials and activities that would engage pupil interest. Occasionally then, there would be a conflict of purposes with more experienced teachers taking ownership of lessons from students under the pretext of exam preparation.

*'She told me to forget about doing interesting things with them. They had to pass the exam at the end of the day and doing past papers would be the best way of helping them. I thought this was a very narrow view of teaching.'*

There were instances in the data, too, where the presence of conflicting pedagogic values caused problems in the interactions between student and host teacher, leading the student to feel vulnerable and insecure. What was particularly troublesome was when a clash emerged between the student's desire to try new ideas promoted in university classes and the class teacher's fear of the potentially negative effects on the class.

*'I wanted to use Dylan Wiliam's methods such as the traffic lights things ... and I was told the kids will laugh at you, you try to do things like that and I was like, well can I just try it to see and they were like, please yourself but they'll laugh at you... So in a way you kind of felt maybe your own learning was hampered a bit by that, and you couldn't work to your potential.'*

Thus, rather than learning from colleagues in contexts characterised by a shared sense of purpose and trust, where they could develop their own pedagogic style and persona as novices in a supported and relatively risk-free situation, there was evidence of students, as guests in a host teacher's classroom, feeling the pressure to teach in ways similar to the class teacher. *'In that class, I just felt I was being dictated to ... this is what you have to teach ... like I was teaching through someone else and it was a horrible feeling because it wasn't you, it wasn't me and it's just horrible. I used to dread going in there, it made me feel rubbish.'* Those who experienced this found it an emotionally draining experience that detracted from their capacity to function fully and effectively in the classroom.

Students particularly appreciated being given the responsibility and power to try out their own ideas, take risks and find their own classroom style – even if this meant making mistakes - and many reported being given such leeway. However, those who felt more constrained by guidance they often perceived as being 'controlling' explained how they felt disempowered when put under pressure to teach in ways that were not in tune with their developing aspirations.

*'It was awkward when teachers had very set ideas about how they wanted things done, and they wanted them done in the way that they would do them, so rather than empowering you and getting you to sort of open up and try new things, you were too frightened to try the things that you wanted because you were frightened it was going to come back at you in some way.'*

It was in such situations that students became much more subjectively aware of their temporary, guest-like status, having to comply with practices which they felt were forced upon them.

## **Problems of mutual engagement:**

### ***Social Isolation***

Being unable to bring one's own purposes and goals into alignment with those of the community almost always had consequences with regard to the relational aspects



of learning to teach. The experience of feeling isolated within the department team was one which resonated with a small number of the student participants. Many students succeeded very effectively in becoming one of the team, despite their objective delineation as guest or visitor. They reported, for example, being involved in discussions at departmental meetings and having their views taken seriously; they intimated being deferred to at parents' evenings because of their knowledge of pupils; they expressed satisfaction at being valued because of their expertise in up-to-date technologies and through being able to bring new ideas and practices into the community. However, there were also reports of feelings of exclusion; one student was particularly distressed through encounters with staff who *'seemed very unwilling to take me on'*, while others spoke of being *'left out in the cold'* and being treated as *'irrelevant'*. Feeling *'in the way'* characterised these students' perceptions of certain colleagues who were often so busy that they had barely time to acknowledge the many and varied needs of the student. Students reported not being invited to department meetings, not being included in department memos, being discouraged from attending Continuing Professional Development seminars, and being missed out from social invitation. Such perceived lack of interest could be particularly distressing. *'I know people were busy, but I really felt that I was something they had to endure rather than as someone they were happy to have around them. It was all pretty discouraging really.'* As several students commented, staff seemed to have *'forgotten what it was like to be a student.'* But the cost of such emotional distance between students and colleagues was often an associated lack of commitment to the placement:

*'In a department where I was excluded from interaction (that's the student's corner'), I felt less able to participate in school activities. This also meant that my emotional engagement was not what it could be and I lost enthusiasm for the school.'*

The data also reveal a sense of marginalisation permeating the responses of a small number of students who, in appraising some staff colleagues as unfriendly, remote, unwilling to help or positively obstructive, became increasingly inclined to cut themselves off from further painful experiences of contact, trying to manage their problems on their own. This was often perceived to be to the detriment of learning. As one student suggested, *'I think the worry of looking stupid and seeming that you don't know anything about teaching puts you in the position of hampering your own learning through holding back from asking questions.'* Becoming separated from the potentially helpful resources of colleague support was a significant loss as students' needs, as novices, were often immediate and it was frustrating if they felt that there was no-one available to them to answer their pressing questions. Losing track of one's original aspirations as a would-be teacher was a commonly reported phenomenon in such situations and there is one particularly poignant example in the data of a student *'sitting alone in the staff-room contemplating my future.'* Indeed, one student did withdraw from the course after her first placement, indicating *'if this is what teaching is all about, I don't want to be any part of it.'*

The emotional intensity with which many of the student participants wrote or spoke about being denied access to the school community suggests that the extent of one's social acceptance within the warp and weft of communal life is essential to the ways in which student teachers are able to see themselves as potential teachers. Being made to feel like a temporary feature, a guest, indeed an unwanted guest, was not a

powerful position with which to engage with the host community. So, although by no means the rule in the data, it was highly problematic when students were unable to envisage a future that merged their initial ideals with the reality that was offered in the talk and actions of host teachers.

### ***Professional undermining***

While validation among professional colleagues was important in the process of moving beyond the identity of guest, students reported a similar need to be viewed as a credible teaching presence among the pupil audience. Although the majority of student teachers in the study were able to forge strong bonds with their host teachers, some observed that feelings of mutual trust and respect could be compromised by class teachers undermining them in front of pupils. There were reports of lessons being interrupted by the class teacher who would take over and in doing so challenge their authority and credibility. Such instances were reported in connection with a range of activities: behaviour management, with teachers sending pupils out of the class while the student was teaching; subject knowledge, with the class teacher 'jumping in' to highlight a mistake in the delivery of lesson content or a gap in the student teacher's explanation of a key point; standards of literacy, with teachers publicly criticising spelling or grammatical mistakes; and methodology, where the poor organisation or inappropriate timing of activities was picked up on. The public nature of the criticism could be particularly demeaning.

*'During some of my lessons, the head of this department would actually come in and question me in front of the pupils as to what I was doing and what I was using and why, so that was really quite belittling I felt at the time and a bit humiliating. And on two occasions she actually criticised what I was doing out loud. I think even the pupils were embarrassed.'*

Lack of validation by colleagues in such significant ways impacted on student teachers' classroom work with pupils and could exacerbate feelings of being peripheral to the department, an uncomfortable place from which to try to learn to be a teacher.

### ***Lack of student teacher involvement in decision-making***

When professional relationships were working well, student teachers reported being involved in important decisions affecting their development as teachers. The examples they gave were located around issues such as: how to be introduced to a class; when to be allowed to take a class independently; how to plan for individual lessons and extended sequences, what to teach, how to teach it, how much should be covered, what outcomes should be expected; what should be assessed, how and when; how to deal with difficult pupils. However, problems could surface if the power of decision-making was taken away from the student in ways that added stress to students who were already feeling uncertain. The difficult issue of taking responsibility for classes could lead to frustration and anxiety, with the timing of the hand-over process being particularly problematic if not negotiated fully in advance. Some teachers were clearly, and understandably, reluctant to hand classes over to students – particularly certificate classes with exams or assessments looming. While most students acknowledged this, such unwillingness was often perceived as

reflective of the teacher's lack of confidence in the student's abilities, a matter ultimately of lack of trust. This was where feelings of being an unwanted guest were again prominent. It was also noted that some teachers felt that the cost of error was potentially too high where pupil learning were concerned. But without sufficient classroom contact with pupils, students indicated that they found it hard to develop the kind of repertoire of approaches that would enable them to build confident, secure images of themselves as teachers.

Other teachers took the diametrically opposite approach, handing classes to pupils almost immediately. Students commonly reported feeling isolated and lost in situations where responsibility was given too early, without negotiation and without the kind of on-going support and advice that might enable them to plan and teach in anticipation of successful outcomes.

*'I took her class once and she then just left me to it. She said I am just going to let you run the whole unit - and that was not brilliant, with little or no guidance as to ... you know ... I knew obviously which text I was supposed to be working on but other than that, I really wasn't clear about what I was trying to achieve with them. She was very seldom there...'*

Students regularly commented on the benefits of watching others teach. Being left over to their own devices deprived them of this support, making learning harder through absence of available pedagogic models of what 'real' teachers did in their classrooms. In addition, if problems were encountered in the classroom, not having the opportunity for reparation through discussion with a colleague could leave the student floundering and vulnerable

## **Problems in developing a Shared Repertoire:**

### ***Clash of communities***

The language, tools and technologies developed by a teaching community reveal how learning and teaching is construed, embodying the community's perspective on the world. A typical problem was reported in the data as regards some teachers' cynicism about a range of practices that students had been led by university tutors to believe were important to effective teaching. Amongst those things most often reported as the focus of conflict were: lesson planning, which many teachers felt was overly time-consuming and remote from the practices of experienced teachers; theory, which many teachers reviled for its ivory-tower remoteness from classroom reality; group work or collaborative activity which many believed were dangerous and unworkable in the level of control to be handed over to pupils; formative assessment strategies and informal evidence gathering techniques, which some believed were overly cumbersome to manage.

Throughout the practice, therefore, difficulties in negotiating a shared repertoire of technologies that students could develop and use in bridging the transition from university to school were reported. As a consequence, there were feelings of being removed from the norms which governed the practices to which they were trying to become aligned, with students finding it particularly hard to integrate theoretical perspectives and practical challenges. There was a strong sense in the data that boundary crossing (from the community of learners in university to the community of practitioners in schools) requires all who are involved in supporting student teachers

on placement to consider the most appropriate ways of helping them to balance the role of ‘learner’ with that of ‘teacher’. If these were out of kilter – when students’ timetables were overly heavy with teaching duties, when they were asked to cover classes for absent colleagues with little notice, or when they were left to get on with preparation and teaching on their own, for example – their opportunities to learn from meaningful experiences in dialogue with experienced teachers could be diminished.

## **Discussion**

Although key concepts of Lave and Wenger’s ideas on legitimate peripheral participation within communities of practice (1991; 1998; 2007) offer a rich set of conceptual lenses through which to examine and come to understand student teachers’ difficulties during teaching practice, the data on which this study is founded suggest a number of theoretical limitations and indeed gaps. So, while Fuller et al (2005) and Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2004) suggest that the concept of ‘newcomer’ has to be extended to take account of experienced teachers who enter a new community of practice, this paper adds another category so far unconsidered in Communities of Practice theorising: the temporary newcomer, or guest.

The evidence reported here suggests that communities of practice may be more tricky to negotiate for newcomers such as student teachers on placement than Lave and Wenger (1991) have portrayed in their analyses of workplace practices, in particular due to students coming to feel the full force of their temporary, guest-like status as visitors. This observation resonates with the work of Fuller et al (2005) who challenge the benign character of communities of practice as being ‘stable, cohesive and even welcoming entities.’ (p53). Indeed, forging the relational bonds on which mutual understanding and a sense of a shared enterprise can be built is a highly problematic process (Ferrier-Kerr, 2009; Guile and Griffiths, 2001), particularly so in a practice like teaching which is ill-defined (Nias, 1996), complex and uncertain (Grossman, Hammerness and McDonald, 2009), hectic, stressful and emotionally laden (Caires, Almeida and Vieira, 2012; Caires, Almeida and Martins, 2010; Hargreaves, 1998). Wenger (1998) is aware that working together creates differences as well as similarities and that disagreement, challenges and competition are all forms of participation (p77), but these ideas are never fully explored or developed in his work (Fuller et al, 2005; Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2004), particularly in relation to newcomers’ difficulties in becoming accepted members of a school community to which their participation is, inevitably, short-lived.

The notion of legitimate peripheral participation which views peripherality as an empowering, temporary position in the newcomers’ trajectory towards full involvement is also challenged in this article, to some degree objectively because of their guest status, but more subjectively because their participation was not seen as legitimate by those more experienced colleagues who were well placed to validate students’ attempts at belonging. In order to feel emotionally engaged in their practice and fully committed to the enterprise of their school community, students expressed a need to become quickly integrated as an accepted member of the school team (Hayes, 1998; Maynard, 2000; McNally et al, 1994; Dewhurst and McMurtry, 2006) and to be made to feel ‘a Capital-T teacher’ right from the outset of the placement (Tickle, 1991). Many students, echoing the experiences of registrars training in general practice (Cornford and Carrington, 2006), reported significant discomfort with a

position on the periphery, expressing unease at being marginal people (Sabar, 2004), or unwanted guests. These feelings co-existed alongside a strong competing need to feel a rapidly developing sense of belonging to a welcoming community where they were recognised, valued and appreciated as having something worthwhile to offer (Johnston, 2010; Caires et al, 2012). If such needs were not legitimised by host teachers, motivation could decrease and learning become significantly more difficult. Being on an 'in-bound trajectory' towards the centre of practice cannot be assumed therefore as it is a complex process involving considerable effort, uncertainty and at times pain (Maynard, 2001). Certainly, though, everyone with a responsibility for supporting student teachers on placement should give consideration to the importance of helping students to build a sense of themselves as valuable and worthwhile members of a community for whom engaged involvement enables them to experience participation far beyond the guest status that their temporary position might suggest. Offering placements that give student teachers time to develop such identities is crucial and further research is required around issues of length of placements as well as the nature of community involvement which might support positive student identities of belonging.

An emphasis on power relations is, to some extent, anticipated by Lave and Wenger (1991) who identify a tension between 'continuity' and 'displacement', but their theorising fails to provide detailed, substantiating, empirical evidence, particularly with regard to the way power operates in the social relations between newcomers and their more experienced colleagues. The lack of social scaffolding reported in the data, in terms of colleague support (Rogers, 2000) - where power was never satisfactorily negotiated on the basis of relative equality (Patrick, 2013) - became crucial to students' early sense of themselves as teachers in the making, a finding that echoes others' emphasis on the emotional and relational aspects of identity formation (Day et al, 2005; McNally, 2006; Hobson et al, 2005; Trent, 2010; Trent, 2012). In interactions where important decisions had to be made, taking ownership away from the student teachers – on such issues as when to engage in autonomous teaching, what to teach, how to teach, how to manage problems – often had a discouraging effect, exacerbating their guest-like status and limiting further the students' confidence in asking questions, in taking risks and in becoming the kind of teacher that they felt they wanted to be. Power-sharing relationships (Patrick, 2013), where students feel able to voice opinions and decisions are made jointly (Le Cornu, 2010), seem to offer more scope for the development of confident, efficacious professional identities. Exploring the relationship between power and emotion should thus be a focus of interest for future research with the purpose of further developing theorising on communities of practice (Fox, 2000). Furthermore, discussions between the different partners in student teachers' development on placement should consider ways of nurturing and facilitating greater power-sharing so that student teachers have legitimate rights in shaping the nature of the support and guidance that they receive in a school (Johnston, 2010).

Wenger's (1998) theoretical framework, moreover, places insufficient emphasis on the complex interweaving of the emotional, psychological and behavioural dimensions of identity building, particularly as this relates to notions of 'belongingness' (Baumeister and Leary, 1995). The deleterious effects of failing to belong to the community cannot be overestimated, but tend to be underplayed in Lave and Wenger's theoretical analyses, where belonging seems to be associated with an almost inevitable process of becoming a core member of the community of practice. According to Baumeister and Leary (1995), the need to belong is a psychological

need, a fundamental human motivation involving relationships with people that are characterised by regular contact and an ongoing bond of positive attachment. Moreover, denial of such basic needs can have a range of significant consequences, leading to anxiety, stress and diminished performance. The research which informs this paper suggests that the difficulties in engaging jointly in professional interactions with more experienced teachers in order to negotiate a shared sense of purpose, and the sense of distance from core membership that this brings if students feel like unwanted guests, can affect students by preventing them from developing the kind of confident, reflective practitioner identity that might enable them to make the most of the learning opportunities afforded by the experiences of working in a school.

Being unable to develop a sense of belonging to the school as a community of practising teachers – as instanced in the reported experiences of a small number of students in this study - highlights the close links between affect and cognition. Such insights are, however, notably absent in Lave and Wenger's work (1991). Socio-cultural perspectives on the emotions conceive of them as inseparable from the contexts in which they take shape (Ria et al, 2003). Indeed, emotions are embedded both in the relationships that are formed as student teachers work with adult colleagues and young learners, and in the ways in which student teachers' purposes and aspirations are worked out in relation to others' purposes (Hargreaves, 2001). Thus the quality of relationships that are forged as class teachers work together with students will have a significant impact not only on the student teachers' emotional well-being, but crucially on their capacity to learn effectively on placement. In the more formal, professional contexts around lesson preparation and implementation, the data indicate that problematic interactions with teachers, leading to inability to experience 'belongingness', arouse negatively charged emotional reactions (Ussher, 2010; Houggard, 2013), often culminating in an increase in a decline in self-belief.. Thus, where students are denied acceptance or valued recognition, anxiety and fear can take root (Ingleton, 1999), with fully engaged participation being jeopardised by threats to the learner's identity (Ashworth, 2004). The positive experience of social relationships, therefore, can engender confidence in promoting active participation (Jarzabkowski, 2002). Strong relational bonds (Ferrier-Kerr, 2009; Harlow and Cobb, 2013; Le Cornu and Ewing, 2008) can thus help students develop belief in their own competence, enabling them to learn in a situation where the risk to self is minimised and where there is relaxed attention to what is to be learned (Ashworth, 2004). This is particularly important in countering student teachers' subjective feelings of being a guest whose capacity to become more deeply embedded within the community is limited in terms of time and scope. Useful discussion between Initial Teacher Education providers could therefore explore issues around the most effective ways of helping all student teachers develop a sense of belonging to the schools to which they become affiliated.

## **Conclusion**

Close attention to the argumentation in their work demonstrates Lave and Wenger's clearly defined sense that we should not 'romanticise' CoPs or idealise them. 'Connotations of peaceful co-existence, mutual support and inter-personal allegiance are not assumed' (Wenger, 1998, p77). Moreover, 'peace, happiness and harmony are therefore not necessary properties of a community of practice' (p77). Such a community is neither a 'haven of togetherness' nor, 'an island of intimacy insulated from political and social relations' (p77). Disagreement, challenges and competition can all be forms of participation (p77).

Despite acknowledgement of the complex mixture of pleasure, pain, conflict and power that underpins the community of practice as a conceptual unit of analysis, what their analytical framework requires is a much more explicit development of the construct, with a more detailed examination of the causes and consequences of problematic issues, based on a wider range of empirical evidence and focusing more explicitly on how notions of the self interact with social structuring to shape particular identity trajectories (see for example Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2004; Hodkinson et al, 2004; Houggard, 2013). This paper is one attempt to shed light on the nature of the difficult experiences faced by a number of student teachers on placement and through this to extend and enhance the analytical value of Lave and Wenger's theoretical ideas.

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