***Building research-informed teacher education communities: a UCET Framework***

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***Abstract***

This paper presents a response to the challenge to produce a sector-wide plan to strengthen research-informed practice in UK initial teacher education. We affirm teaching as a profession underpinned by evidence-based knowledge and provide an accessible ‘thinking tool’ to enable teacher educators to interrogate and develop aspects of their existing practice in which research has been identified as having a significant bearing. This dynamic framework provides practical support for the development of high quality research-informed practice *wherever* teacher education occurs.

***Key Words***

Teacher Education; Research-informed practice; curriculum development framework.

***Introduction***

Teaching is an intellectual profession and as such its knowledge bases are underpinned by research, which may be thought of as new knowledge made public. However, within the education community, the concept of research is used in a variety of what might be thought of as loose ways, including, for example, reports of innovative practice, as a component of CPD, exchange of knowledge and the theory-practice nexus. This has important implications for teacher education (TE), both initial and continuing.

Initial teacher education (ITE) in the UK is rapidly changing. ITE has always occurred in a range of contexts and with varying partnership arrangements (between universities, primary and secondary schools, further education colleges and early years settings), but policy developments over the last decade have resulted in an increasingly complex and diverse ecology. The parts played by universities in designing, supporting and sustaining new models of ITE are many and varied. They now have an exciting opportunity to re-imagine the roles they play in teacher preparation partnerships. Understanding how research underpins, enhances and enriches ITE is a unique and crucial a contribution that universities make towards securing high quality ITE. This is also true for the provision by universities of professional development for practicing teachers, however, the key focus of this article is the centrality of research in the preparation of new entrants to the teaching profession.

Recognising the unique role of the University Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET), the BERA-RSA review, *Research and The Teaching Profession, Building the Capacity for a Self-Improving system* (BERA, 2014), recommended that UCET should “work with its members and partners to…produce a sector-wide plan to strengthen research informed practice *wherever this is required*.” (p29). This paper responds directly to BERA’s challenge and sets out a practical, dynamic framework that will support the development of high quality research-informed practice *wherever* initial teacher education occurs. The purpose of this is to enable teacher educators to engage in critical curriculum review, (Nunn, 2017).

UCET believes that teaching is a scholarly, evidence-based activity and that “Where possible, teacher educators should introduce new teachers to pedagogies grounded in a firm evidence base” (Royal Society and British Academy, 2018 p56) thus equipping them both to undertake their own high quality research *and* to “understand how to interpret educational theory and research in a critical way, so they are able to deal with contested issues” (Carter 2015: p8).  UCET also welcomes the positive call for “an agreed level of familiarity with current research in education, and evidence assisted practice in general” (Bennett, 2017 p2). In this paper we argue for equipping teachers to deal with ‘contested issues’ (Carter, 2015 p8) and push beyond the notion of research ‘familiarity’  to offer a bolder, more aspirational framework that sets new, more challenging expectations for the contribution of research to ITE.

This paper builds on the BERA-RSA (2014) review and BERA’s more recent report on the Close-to-Practice research project (BERA, 2018), to set out the position of UCET, which is to affirm teaching as an intellectual activity, in which research and researching enhances teachers’ capacity to make a positive and enduring difference to the lives of the children and young people with whom they work. The primary audience for this paper includes ITE programme leaders (e.g. of undergraduate courses carrying QTS and of PGCE courses) and curriculum developers, (both university- and school/college/Early Years setting-based); Deans of university departments of education; Head teachers/Principals in ITE contexts, (e.g. members of EY setting/school/college senior leadership teams with responsibility for ITE).

**Underpinning Principles**

The BERA/RSA (2014) report identified four specific dimensions of the contribution research makes to TE:

* **research-informed content**of teacher education programmes drawing on a range of disciplines;
* **research-informed design** of teacher education programmes and activities;
* teachers and teacher educators being equipped to engage with and be **consumers of research**;
* teachers and teacher educators being equipped to **conduct their own research,**individually and collectively.

**Research Informed content of TE programmes.**

UCET believes that initial and continuing TE courses should be informed by scholarship and provide an evidenced basis of knowledge and understanding, which is derived from research that has its origin in a range of academic disciplines and epistemological traditions. Central to this is the notion of university-school partnership in TE. As John Furlong has argued, “Educationalists urgently need to develop collaborative partnerships with teachers, schools and others; partnerships that are institutionalised and based on the genuine recognition that however important the university’s contribution, it is always only part of the story…... it is their commitment to the ‘contestability of knowledge’ that marks universities out as unique in society; and it is this commitment that goes to the very heart of what the university-based study of Education can contribute.” (Florian and Pantić, 2013: p8).

**Research-Informed design of TE programmes.**

The development of pedagogical reasoning, (Shulman, 1987), is a fundamental element of all good i ITE courses. Far from being a simple ‘pot-filling’ exercise, learning to teach is complex and involves an appreciation of the problematic milieu of the classroom, described by Schon (1983 p42) as “the swampy lowlands” of practice where important but messy issues arise that cannot simply be resolved by technical management.  Loughran, et al. (2016) argue that understanding the development of pedagogical reasoning and how it influences practice is a challenge for all ITE programmes. UCET contends that this is central to any ITE curriculum and further, that teacher educators’ own research should continue to inform this corpus of educational knowledge.

**Teachers and Teacher Educators as Consumers of Research**

UCET thus corroborates the assertion in the BERA/RSA report (2014) that ‘to be at their most effective, teachers and teacher educators need to engage *with* research and enquiry – this means keeping up to date with the latest developments in their academic subject or subjects and with developments in the discipline of education’ (p6). This continuous informing and updating of the knowledge bases of teaching enables an upward spiral of increased understanding that characterizes successful pedagogies, (la Velle and Flores, 2018).

**Teachers and Teacher Educators-as-Researchers.**

UCET recognises the current tensions between research activities and regulatory regimes, such as OfSTED, and the Research and Teaching Excellence Frameworks (REF and TEF). Nevertheless, there is universal recognition that teachers researching their own practice can generate unique ‘insider knowledge’ that provides valuable new insights and conceptualisations of educational processes and practices, (Burke and Kirton, 2006).  BERA, concerned to characterise high quality in this close-to-practice (CtP) research, have defined it as “…… research that focusses on aspects defined by practitioners as relevant to their practice, and often involves collaborative work between practitioners and researchers” (Wyse et al. 2018, p1). In terms of quality indicators for CtP research, they go on to state: “High quality in CtP research requires the robust use of research design, theory and methods to address clearly defined research questions, through an iterative process of research and application that includes reflections on practice, research and context” (ibid. p2).

**The UCET Research-Informed TE Framework**

Structured around BERA-RSA’s four dimensions of research engagement the ***UCET Research Informed TE Framework*** provides a structured ‘thinking tool’ for use in a practical way to spur development and change in local contexts. By working through the framework, users are prompted to interrogate and develop aspects of existing practice that research has identified as having a significant bearing on successful practice. The framework supports users to:

* **Explore** existing attitudes and approaches to research production and usage in their own context;
* **Engage and collaborate**with the institutional community (university, college, school, EY setting)  to develop better understandings of using and producing research in their own contexts;
* **Create**new meanings, identities and roles in relation to research;
* **Drive** innovation and implement change;
* **Improve**quality and outcomes for teachers and the schools, colleges and Early Years settings in which they work.

The framework design is underpinned by enquiry, encouraging inclusive, collaborative and co-constructionist approaches to institutional growth and development in relation to research engagement. The process is context-sensitive and starts with reflexive engagement with the everyday experiences of participants in the specific TE community or context. Teacher educators are enabled to ‘work towards change’ that is distinctive, highly differentiated and tailored very precisely to the needs and aspirations of their particular institution and the communities they serve.

The framework is designed to support research led development of teacher education in any mode (pre-service or in-service) and any setting (university, school, college, private provider) and aims to enable:

* **strategic ITE leaders** to be bolder about their expectations of the role research engagement can play in securing high quality ITE learning cultures/communities that secure more socially just outcomes for young people in education;
* **ITE operational leaders** to identify practical steps to building a research informed community;
* **teacher educators** to become more ambitious in the way they engage with research (as both users and producers);
* **all participants in teacher education**to make greater and better use of research (as content and process) towards achievement of more ambitious classroom impacts/outcomes for learners.

The framework may be particularly useful for teacher educators working in contexts without established research traditions as a means of opening up institution-wide conversations about the role, value and importance of research to successful and meaningful teacher education. Hand in hand with this comes the imperative adequately to resource opportunities for teacher educators and participants in teacher education to engage with and in research.

**Using the Framework**

The framework makes use of Neary’s (2010) five-point assessment scale, which users may find useful to enable benchmarking and cross-institutional comparisons. However, it is recognised that numerical judgements may or may not be useful depending on purpose and priorities. The framework can be used by those with different roles in teacher education, to achieve a range of outcomes. This process may reveal that the various stakeholders interpret the elements of the framework very differently. In turn, this creates productive opportunities for professional dialogue and development.

*Please put framework here*

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