Perceptions of the New Role of the Research Champion in Developing a New ITE Partnership: Challenges and Opportunities for Schools and Universities

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ABSTRACT

After a process of competitive tendering for the provision of initial teacher education in Wales, there is an opportunity to re-examine the relationship between schools and universities. With the growing importance of research for both student and serving teachers, the Cardiff Partnership developed a model where a school-based 'Research Champion' (RC) would be an integral part of the support for capacity building and developing excellence. Although this model has previously been used in different forms at Oxford and Manchester Universities, the role was new to schools in the Cardiff Partnership. Semi-structured one-to-one interviews were conducted with a representative sample of RCs in primary and secondary schools and university staff to reflect on the challenges and opportunities in the early stages in developing this unique role in the context of an evolving education context in Wales. This study uses data from these interviews to establish key ideas around the emerging role of the RC, the shift in working relationships between schools and universities and what is needed to bridge the gap between research and practice. Interviews were transcribed and, after open-ended thematic analysis, opportunities and challenges are reported. These themes include: bridging the gap between educational research and classroom practitioners; types of knowledge drawn upon by

teachers; changes in role and identity. Suggestions for further research monitoring the ongoing development of the role are suggested.

Key words: research champion, partnership, Initial Teacher Education

Introduction

The review of initial teacher education (ITE) in Wales has led to a repositioning of how universities and schools work in partnership. The criteria for the accreditation of the new programmes that started in September 2019 required fundamental changes, including 'Structured opportunities to link school and university learning' and 'The centrality of research' (Welsh Government, 2018: 2).

This study focuses on how the Cardiff Partnership for Initial Teacher Education has been addressing these expectations. The Cardiff Partnership is a partnership between Cardiff Metropolitan University and associated schools, in collaboration with the universities of Cardiff and Oxford, as well as local consortia (Central South Consortium, Education Achievement Service) and Cardiff City Council. It provides ITE programmes for PGCE (Secondary and Primary) and BA (Hons) (Primary).

As part of its partnership with Oxford University, the Cardiff Partnership drew upon the research-informed clinical practice principles of the Oxford Internship scheme (Burn and Mutton, 2013), including the commitment to negotiate all content, structure and pedagogical strategies with schools. The resultant *research-informed clinical practice* model of ITE was adopted in its new programmes that commenced in September 2019. Clinical practice, a term that derives from the medical profession, puts emphasis on the student teacher actively engaging in enquiry about learner needs, pedagogical choices and evaluation of outcomes (Burn and Mutton, 2013: 3). As well as developing the skills of the classroom, the novice teacher is enabled 'to interpret and make sense of the specific needs of particular students, to formulate and implement particular pedagogical actions and to evaluate the outcomes.' (Burn and Mutton, 2013: 3). Research-informed clinical practice seeks to promote actively a 'dialogue' (ibid.) between our understanding of teaching and learning from research sources and from experience sources.

A key innovation of the Cardiff Partnership's clinical practice model is the introduction of a new role within schools, in addition to the mentors

and senior mentors who have traditionally supported student teachers in school. Research Champions (RCs) have been appointed in all of the Partnership's Lead Partnership Schools/Alliances (LPSA). The remit of a RC will primarily be to promote and support student teachers' research engagement within the LPSA, particularly in regard to school-based research assignments. They will act as a positive role model and a practical source of support. The RCs will set out the research assignment focus for students, based on school needs, and then disseminate the research within the school. However, as well as this specific role, a wider ambition of the introduction of RCs is to encourage greater research dialogues both within the school, and between the school and other partners, such as the universities and regional education consortia. The RC role also addresses an acknowledged gap between research and practice in the teaching profession (McIntyre, 2005).

The introduction of RCs within the Cardiff Partnership is significant in other ways. For example, allocating the choice of the research assignment focus to schools marks a shift away from a university-dominated sphere. University staff and systems will still approve and assess the assignments, but the dissemination of the assignments within school means that the research should be more pertinent to the schools. Regular twilight support and development meetings for RCs and Cardiff Partnership colleagues will encourage greater dialogue and understanding between different partners.

It is important to note that the RCs were appointed by the schools themselves, based on information provided in the accreditation documentation, development meetings and a summary of the role developed collaboratively in a sub-group of teachers and university staff. The starting point for the role can be summarised as:

- act as a point of contact between the LPSA and the Cardiff Partnership for ITE for research-related information and actions;
- be a positive role model for student teachers and colleagues to enthuse them about the benefits of research engagement;
- meet with other Research Champions in a twilight session once per term to share findings from school-based research, engage with research-related surveys, and receive updates from the universities in the Cardiff Partnership for ITE;
- in relation to PGCE programmes, set briefs for school-wide research assignments for student teachers in the LPSA (two per year);

- in relation to PGCE programmes, collate and disseminate executive summaries and sign ethics approval of student-based research;
- meet with student teachers to discuss research (PGCE: three times per placement; BA (Hons) Primary: once);
- update the Partnership on the school's research focus/foci each year; and
- receive invitations to participate in larger-scale research projects in collaboration with university(ies) and other LPSA and consult senior management within the school to decide on whether to participate.

The aim of this study is to capture the emergent understandings and opinions of the developing role of the newly appointed RCs prior to its full implementation, as well as some of the tutors from Cardiff Metropolitan University. It uses data from one-to-one interviews to establish key ideas around the perceived role of the RC, the potential shift in working relationships between schools and universities and what is needed to bridge the gap between research and practice.

Literature Review

Types of Educational Knowledge

When describing the knowledge used by teachers in their day-to-day working lives, many authors emphasise the importance of drawing on a 'craft knowledge' built up with experience (Gore and Gitlin, 2004; Hammersley, 2005; Hargreaves, 1999; McIntyre, 2005). In Japan, for example, the transmission and development of this 'craft knowledge' is formalised into a model for teacher continuing professional development (CPD) (Shimahara, 1998). Historically in the UK and many other Western countries the development of this 'craft knowledge' takes place through 'a somewhat haphazard process of trial and error' (Huberman, 1992 cited in Hargreaves, 1999: 131), in which teachers value above all the practical applicability of the knowledge (Vanderlinde and van Braak, 2010: 306; Gore and Gitlin, 2004: 39) and its ability to facilitate speedy decision-making in the classroom environment (McIntyre, 2005: 360; Hammersley, 2005: 324).

When articulating how teachers build up their 'well-learned schemata' (Hagger and McIntyre, 2000: 496) of tacit knowledge, and considering how knowledge created by educational research might (McIntyre, 2005)

or might not (Hammersley, 2005) influence teachers' day-to-day practice in a more systematic and successful way, some authors have sought to classify and define the different types of knowledge created and used by classroom practitioners and educational researchers.

A number of authors (Cain, 2015: 494; Burn and Mutton, 2013: 2; McIntyre, 2005: 359) contrast the 'propositional' knowledge – the knowledge *that* – that educational researchers generate with the 'pedagogical' knowledge – the knowledge *how* – that is valued by practitioners (Gore and Gitlin, 2004; Winch, Oancea and Orchard, 2015). Earlier work (Biesta, 2007; 2010; Dewey, 1929; Hammersley, 2005 and McIntyre, 2005, cited in Cain, 2015: 494) starkly illustrates the opposing features of these two types of knowledge, presenting this divide as 'the knowledge problem' that prompts one to question 'whether research can contribute to educational practice at all' (Cain, 2015: 491). Hammersley (2005: 319–320) summarises the divide in the form of 'blame' placed by some on the generators of research, and by some on the users of it (into which category he places both practitioners and policymakers). McIntyre (2005: 361) proposes that these two extremes might be points on a continuum rather than discrete phenomena, and defines a 'continuum of kinds of knowledge' as follows:

1. Craft knowledge for classroom teaching;
2. Articulation of craft knowledge;
3. Deliberative or reflective thinking for classroom teaching;
4. Classroom action research;
5. Knowledge generated by research schools and networks;
6. Practical suggestions for teaching based on research;
7. Reviews of research on particular themes;
8. Research findings and conclusions.

Dealing with the knowledge 'gap'

Pessimistic commentators on the 'gap' between researchers and practitioners point to the fact that, by consciously producing research which is more closely associated with practice, researchers would accumulate significantly less 'academic capital' (Ellis *et al.*, 2014: 35), missing out on the 'institutional status and economic rewards' (Gore and Gitlin, 2004: 47) which flow from such 'capital'. Meanwhile, teachers, dealing 'with a *range* of issues simultaneously, and often quite quickly' (Hammersley, 2009: 324, italics original) have little option but to rely on 'distilled theoretical

knowledge and values derived from popularisations … through staffroom conversation rendered into homilies, maxims and reactive attitudes' (Winch, Oancea and Orchard, 2015: 209). Caught between these two camps are the university ITE tutors, facing academic 'proletarianisation' (Ellis *et al.*, 2014), 'increasing separation, and possible divorce, between teacher education and its research base' (Tanner and Davies, 2009: 374) and navigating the difficulties of relationships between student teachers, schools and university (Elton-Chalcraft *et al.*, 2018).

In calling for increased dialogue between researchers and practitioners, several authors identify the potential for an 'intermediary' role. Dimmock (2016: 46) suggests that schools should have a research department, with a coordinator on the staff and 'university personnel involved in school-university collaborative partnerships' – an arrangement bearing much similarity to the Cardiff Partnership's 'RC' role. Vanderlinde and van Braak (2010: 307) similarly found that '…teachers emphasised the importance of having an intermediary at the school level [with] a mandate from the school to follow educational research developments, and to translate research results to their colleagues.'

Cain's (2015) study in which he, as a researcher, engaged in dialogue with practising teachers about research papers resulted in teachers being able to transform the theoretical knowledge into practical knowledge through a variety of imaginative approaches. Another approach proposed by several commentators involves redefining schools as sites of knowledge production, rather than exclusively knowledge consumption and transmission. Stenhouse (1975: 143) calls for the teacher to engage in a 'personal research and development programme through which he is progressively increasing his understanding of his own work and hence bettering his teaching.' Dimmock (2016: 45) suggests 'schools will need to become the sites for research design, methodology and application', while Hargreaves (1999: 132) argues that the knowledge-creation cultures of technology start-ups could be applied to schools, producing 'knowledge-creating schools' which sit in the middle of McIntyre's (2005) continuum.

Changes in identity and role

Dealing with the knowledge 'gap' points to a change in relationship between 'creators' and 'users' of academic research in education (Hargreaves, 1999; Gore and Gitlin, 2004; Vanderlinde and van Braak, 2010; Cain, 2015). In this context, there is an implied identity change for schools as

sites of knowledge creation, as well as consumption (Hargreaves, 1999: 136). The proposed shift in school identity chimes with the resounding call for recognition that HEIs and schools are contributing to, and inhabiting, the same universe when making respective contributions to the wider knowledge base (BERA–RSA, 2014). Regarding the ITE clinical practice model pertinent to this study, Menter (2014: 58) also points to the requirement for change in role distinctions and relationships to prompt wider and more consistent integration of theory and practice in both university and school placement settings during ITE. He draws upon several other studies to elaborate further the rationale and practicalities of these role/relationship changes and notes that:

> These changes are intended to result in a professional community with an inquiring stance (Kriewald and Turnage, 2013) in which teaching, learning, researching and mentoring are shared roles and in which individual participants might change roles at different times (Grossman, 2010; NCATE, 2010; Zeichner, 2010; Kriewald and Turnage, 2013; McLean Davies *et al.*, 2013, cited in Menter, 2014: 58).

The inquiring stance that characterises the clinical practice professional community involves a model of decision-making outlined by Burn and Mutton (2013), which draws inspiration from models derived from the medical profession. Here, 'Professionals make decisions by drawing on evidence from a range of sources, relating that evidence to findings from a contemporary body of research, integrating into this their knowledge of the current situation, seeking further evidence if necessary, and deciding on actions' (McLean Davies *et al.*, 2019: 2).

We note from this description the implied interplay between theory and practice, rooted in an iterative process that inherently positions the teacher as both researcher and classroom practitioner. The advocation of a scientific, evidence-based, research-informed approach to the teacher's decision-making process could be said to mark (and require) a shift in student teacher identity. There is an implied synergy of body and mind for the student teacher in Burn and Mutton's (2013: 3) appropriation of 'clinical practice' whereby '…"judgement in action" calls not only for opportunities to rehearse and define such [practical] skills, but also for the chance to engage in the creative processes of interpretation, intervention and evaluation, drawing on diverse sources of knowledge …'

The desired emergence of a teacher with the skills, competencies and attributes to continue – and thereby grow through – this process of 'clinical reasoning' is one which perhaps heralds the 'clinical teacher [who] adopts

a stance of openness to new research evidence about quality teaching and student learning, and a commitment to maintain and refresh their knowledge around this' (Cochran-Smith *et al.*, 2009, cited in McLean Davies *et al.*, 2019). This perspective could be said to point to positive outcomes of greater teacher agency and efficacy, and the confidence to catalyse change in their own contexts. Pesti, Gordon Győri and Kopp (2018: 54) echo these sentiments in their conclusive remarks that '… being sensitised regarding educational, practice-oriented research, student teachers will enter the world of work with the ability to transform their everyday, classroom practices in an ever-changing social and cultural context with the aim of recognising and reacting to the newly-emerging challenges and needs.'

Drawing upon earlier work (Brouwer and Korthagen, 2005; Darling-Hammond and Bransford, 2005, cited in Munthe and Rogne, 2015: 17) the formative year(s) of teacher education are defined as a process of 'becoming' whereby student teachers '… become innovators and researchers in education, laying a foundation for continuous learning and change in the workplace'. However, Menter (2014: 63) warns of the conceptual challenges inherent in a clinical practice model, which are rooted in the '… problems with a simple conception of evidence-based practice' whereby student teachers may become disaffected by the '… (illusory) promise of certainty and progress in a profession that has been vilified for apparent lack of progress …'.

Menter (2014: 60) suggests that the role and identity of HEI tutors must also adapt in response to the demands of the clinical practice model. As Furlong *et al.* (2006, cited in Tanner and Davies, 2009: 374) state, 'A research capacity within teacher education institutions provides the bedrock of a research culture for the sector'. The research of Tanner and Davies (2009: 376) reveals the significance of research to ITE tutors' identity and the potential ramifications for their student teachers as 'Becoming critical challenges the teacher-educator to re-assess preconceptions, question accepted orthodoxies, re-evaluate existing theories and develop and test new hypotheses. Integrating these perspectives into professional practice provides a model for students that will encourage the students in turn to become reflective practitioners.'

However, Menter (2014: 60) sheds light on practical challenges which may hinder the role of the HEI tutor in a clinical practice model, namely, the tension between HEI drivers/priorities (such as the regular production of academic outputs) and the demands of the model itself (which call for more time spent in schools). He also warns of the threat these tensions pose

for '… the fragmentation and status hierarchy between researchers, theorists and practitioners' (Menter, 2014: 60).

The aforementioned role of the intermediary is of particular importance to this study and one which has been defined in different ways in the body of literature consulted for this study (Hargreaves, 2009; Gore and Gitlin, 2004; Vanderlinde and van Braak, 2010; Dimmock, 2016). Key aspects of the intermediary role are identified across the studies and point to the potential they represent in facilitating the transfer and integration of knowledge from different sources, a process that Menter (2014: 33) says is 'a major, and overlooked, part of professional learning'. Literature suggests that the intermediary role:

- should be formalised and given authority in the school (Dimmock, 2016: 46);
- can support research consumption and production (Hargreaves, 1999; Vanderlinde and van Braak, 2010; Cain, 2015);
- should be resourced and afforded professional learning opportunities (Vanderlinde and van Braak, 2010: 309); and
- is a proponent of educational research (thereby, championing findings and calling others to 'arms') (Gore and Gitlin, 2004).

The changing (and growth of) roles of all stakeholders in the context of ITE can be characterised by a drive towards greater integration and collaboration. This echoes the key findings of Flores (2018: 633) highlighting '… a redefinition of university and school roles with a growing emphasis on strong, coherent and supportive partnerships … through the combination of teaching and research, researching teaching and teaching research.'

Methods

As this study was exploring the lived experience of the new RCs and university staff, a qualitative approach was adopted, reflecting its value as a paradigm of inquiry. (Nowell *et al.*, 2017).

The study used a purposive convenience sample (n=10) of primary and secondary teachers identified by schools as RCs, as well as HE staff, both English and Welsh medium as shown in Table 1.

All school-based interviewees had an established relationship with university staff, which helped to ensure trust, which is crucial for successful

Table 1: Sample group of interviewees

Sector	English-medium	Welsh-medium	Total
Primary	3	1	4
Secondary	2	1	3
HEI	2	1	3
			10

interviews (Potter, 2018). All interviews were conducted by academic staff, based on common questions developed collaboratively by the research team. Informed ethical consent was gained through established university procedures.

Questions had been constructed by the team around three central themes reflecting the aim of the study and current literature. First, the role of the RC. Responses here identified perceptions of the theoretical role, qualities of a role model, anticipated support for student teachers, as well as respondents' experience, current research activity and engagement with research networks. Second, the role of research within the teaching profession and for student teachers specifically. Further exploration covered the impact of research on individual schools and on the RCs themselves. Third, questions were posed around practical considerations for implementing the role of RC within the newly-accredited ITE courses at Cardiff Metropolitan University, including resource requirements, potential challenges and future recommendations. All interviews were recorded and transcribed.

The interview transcripts were analysed using an inductive, iterative process of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006; Russell and Vallade 2010). The analysis began with no preconceived codes (Morse *et al.*, 2009), acknowledging, however, our 'insider knowledge' of the system being researched (Clegg and Stevenson, 2013). To mitigate the impact of this knowledge, we used 'the actual data itself to derive the structure of analysis' (Burnard *et al.*, 2008: 429). This analysis identified 'recurring themes, patterns, or concepts and then describing and interpreting those categories' (Nassaji, 2015: 130).

In an initial examination of all responses, three distinct themes emerged for further investigation:

1. Bridging the gap between educational research and classroom practitioners;

2. Types of knowledge drawn upon by teachers;
3. Changes in role and identity.

From a second examination of responses, sub-themes were identified that highlighted needs impacting on the three main themes. Final analysis of the data identified proposed actions to ensure success of the role and pitfalls to be avoided.

Results

Questions relating to the role of the RC

Respondents saw the role of a RC based around two broad areas. They clearly perceived a gap between current educational research and class-room practice and viewed the RC as a response to the need to connect the two facets. The strongest indication of the route by which the gap would be met was through university-based assignment work being aligned to priorities around the School Improvement Plan. Further, the idea of the RC acting as a role model was included in a majority of responses, with suggestions that this would include maintaining up-to-date knowledge, passing on new ideas and facilitating assignment completion.

Probing further the characteristics of a positive RC role model, a variety of attributes were suggested including being enthusiastic regarding research, being calm and patient, as well as being non-biased and a voice of reason. Half of respondents cited the need to be supportive, with many connecting support to being able to direct student teachers to relevant lit-erature. Most stated that RCs should be actively engaged in research; from these responses, a minority also included the notion that failure should not be hidden but seen as an integral part of being willing to innovate. Around half of school-based colleagues expressed a desire for the RC to learn from student teachers and to introduce research findings to the wider teaching profession. HEI-based colleagues reflected this view, but a majority went further stating the need for the RC to *persuade* more-experienced col-leagues of the value of research.

Turning to more personalised questioning, RCs were asked how they came to take on the role. Unsurprisingly, all stated that they were involved in research; however, there were considerable differences in the levels of experience and the types of research that had been engaged in. Detailing

current research interests, most specified school-based activity with a few engaged in externally-funded research. All RCs were involved in research networks, associated either with their school-based or external research. One individual was additionally involved in Master's-level study. Many had ongoing experience of ITE either as mentors or as senior mentors and a few had experience of leadership in other areas. A minority had taken on the role of RC after being asked to meet a professional need, based on their skills and experience. One individual, with less experience, but with a developing interest in research, had requested the role to deepen engagement. All respondents anticipated an enhanced role and greater activity within research networks in future.

Continuing to focus on personal engagement, RCs were asked how they saw themselves supporting student teachers with research in school. Around half of responses overlapped with those qualities described for a positive role model; for example, being supportive, enthusiastic and leading the student teacher to relevant literature. Other responses, however, were more varied, but settled into three broad areas. First, the idea of being instrumental in facilitating student teachers' research by developing links with university-based staff through to other school-based staff able to support the research process. Second, knowing exactly what the expectations are to be able to fulfil the role competently. Third, ensuring practicalities are met to enable regular meetings between all parties and that student teachers are assured of the availability of the RC.

HEI colleagues were asked how they saw RCs supporting student teachers and the responses were in close agreement with those received from RCs themselves; for example, linking with the university and a wider corpus of school staff and ensuring regular meetings take place. Other ideas described were related to responses from RCs but were more attuned to specific assignment support; for example, linking with the university to discuss assignment topic choice, School Improvement Plan discussion and sharing school data with student teachers.

Questions relating to the role of research

Participants were asked their views on the role that research plays within the teaching profession. All school-based colleagues responded that research is essential for improvement. Wider discussion included thoughts around opportunities to trial new ideas, keeping up-to-date and bringing deeper understanding to practice. Mention was also made of the value of

research in facilitating national change, its place within the Professional Teaching Standards and career-long engagement with more-experienced teachers learning from younger professionals.

Similar views were expressed by university-based colleagues, although the role of the Professional Teaching Standards was more prominent as a primary response.

Turning attention to the role of research for student teachers specifically, most school-based colleagues viewed connecting theory to practice as a vital attribute. Many saw research as imperative in improving practice, with a minority highlighting further a need to emphasise pupil progress and learning. Around half saw student teacher engagement in research being part of a wider team effort, with this activity also identified as being important in normalising research within the profession. This view was more prominent in responses from university staff, with all seeing research as an integral part of a teaching career. Further, the sense of change working its way through the profession and older professionals learning from newer entrants was clear.

Looking at the impact research could have on individual schools, all school-based colleagues noted the connection between relevant research and school improvement, with a majority framing the relevance around the School Improvement Plan. Other contributions included improving pupil progress, pedagogy and wellbeing. Many responses referred to a growing sense of community developing out of the research, with student teachers having a greater identity in school and their contributions being beneficial to all staff. All university staff commented on the raised profile of research within schools and a majority anticipated increased community expression around research foci.

The idea of a research community made up of student teachers, teaching staff, the HEI and wider research groups was further supported in responses relating to the personal development of research skills by RCs. Here, most saw the benefit of community engagement with specific detail given around growing knowledge, engagement with literature, new ways of thinking, removing bias and network membership.

Resources, Challenges and Recommendations

Interviewees were asked what mentoring and/or resources were needed to support the role of RC, as well as potential challenges and recommendations for success. There was considerable overlap in responses around the

three areas, with clear thoughts on how best RCs could be supported. All RCs saw the need for ongoing contact, guidance and training to facilitate the role. Many indicated that bespoke support should be available to respond to individual needs and that a sense of community was vital, necessitating regular meetings with others and a degree of coordination by the HEI. A minority identified university tutors as being the expected faces of one-to-one contact, with similar numbers being less specific on where and how support should be delivered. University staff were equally strong in their support of the need to develop a research community; bespoke training reflecting local need and clarity in the role were also seen as crucial to success. Most RCs cited time or workload as the biggest challenge to fulfilling the role. Around half saw formal lists as useful that would include, for example, responsibilities and suggested reading. A few responses noted a potential hindrance to the role based on the seniority of the RC within school; less senior RCs would need to be given support to ensure the status of research in school could be raised effectively. Persuasion was considered essential to success by one university tutor, within a developing research community.

Recommendations not already covered above included the necessity for basic resources in a few schools, for example, work space, internet and computer availability. Transparency and learning from mistakes were also suggested, along with models of good practice and exemplar material when available. Interestingly a significant minority expressed a desire to see a dedicated coordinator in post to oversee strategic thinking around the role of the RC and to avoid the role being marginalised given competing pressures within provision of ITE.

Discussion

As stated above, coding of interview responses generated three themes around bridging a gap between educational research and classroom practitioners, the types of knowledge drawn upon by teachers and changes in role and identity within ITE. Each theme is discussed below, along with sub-themes derived from the analysis and recommendations for development of the role of RC.

Bridging the Gap

A gap was identified between high-level research outputs and the nature of action research within schools, which a RC could work to close. For example,

> I understand the role to be basically a bridge between teaching and school and pedagogy with the wider research community, because I think sometimes they can be quite separate, so as a teacher, obviously research has a massive impact on your pedagogy, but I think sometimes there's this big gap between researchers and what they're researching in education and then actually teachers in the classroom level. (Secondary, 1)

The idea of the RC being a 'conduit … for establishing the process and the research subjects or topics' supported the notion of a gap needing to be filled (Primary, 2), whilst another contributor expressed similar views, but elaborated on the benefits to student teachers:

> I think the role of research for the RC is bridging that gap between school-led practice and then university using the research within an enquiry based approach looking at what's being used currently within the school and how the students can manipulate that for their own gains, taking it back to university, trying something out and then bringing it back into school so refining everything that they're doing, taking it from university, trying it out here and then refining that process. (Primary, 1)

A view from a university tutor supports the existence of a gap between high-level research and school practice, but suggests that some relevant research is currently being missed by schools:

> I think at the moment there probably is still a disconnect there where a lot of educational research is sort of going over their heads I suppose or just sort of passing people by in schools for very valid reasons, you know, because people are busy or they're not sure how relevant it's going to be to what they're doing and I think a lot of teachers may well feel that they don't have the time or the resources or the skills to actually do it. (HEI, 1).

These observations support the findings of Ellis *et al.* (2014) regarding the gap between researchers and practitioners, recognising potential difficulties in relationships within ITE (Elton-Chalcraft *et al.*, 2018). Moreover, they give strong justification to development of the role of the RC by the Cardiff Partnership as an instrument of reconciliation where separation may otherwise become inevitable (Tanner and Davies, 2009).

A clear sub-theme of the need for dialogue was identified, based on all participants recognising the need for discourse between HEI and schools.

Noticeably, the level (and focus) of dialogue anticipated depended on the level of experience schools have with research. For those who are less experienced and skilled in research, their responses revealed a desire for HEIs to understand their basic needs in fulfilling the RC role, thus requiring *more* dialogue and of a pragmatic nature. Examples of requirements included 'university coming out to visit', 'someone to turn to', 'knowing who to turn to', 'a check-list', further reading', 'someone covering your class', a 'base' in which student teachers could work, 'sufficient space', 'bringing their own computers' and 'connection to the internet'.

Conversely, more-experienced teachers who had been nominated as RCs (in schools with a well-established research culture) and HEI tutor interviewees (with stronger academic skills), revealed the need for less dialogue to bridge the gap, and which is more heavily focused on the aspirational potential of research in education. For example:

> First of all [student teachers] are going to be assessed against the new professional standards for teaching and leadership so within professional learning and innovation there has to be evidence, if you like, that they are engaging with wider reading of research as well as taking part in research and innovation. I think more than that though, rather than just ticking a box, it's about the student teachers developing habits of lifelong learning, of continuing to question practice, to improve their own pedagogy and to share that across classes and teachers in their schools and across schools. Yeah, it's about being what a professional teacher means really in 2019. (HEI, 2).

Dialogue between RCs and student teachers was also considered necessary to elevate the status of research outputs (e.g. assignments and evaluations) beyond a 'tick-box' exercise to something that has the potential to have an impact in the classroom (and beyond):

> I think the role of the mentor in a school is so important and I think they need to give themselves more credit. Because I think they're experts and I think sometimes, I know that for myself, I haven't realised that actually, I'm an expert in this classroom and this context. And so, the role [of student teachers writing lesson evaluations] might still fall as a tick-box task. (Secondary, 1).

What this participant is suggesting in their response, although they focus on the output of lesson evaluations, is that a skilled mentor/RC can help hone the student teacher's critical thinking and research skills by engaging with the outputs via regular dialogue. This has the potential to raise the status of written assignments from measures of academic success to essential professional learning activities in a teacher's arsenal. Further,

this approach responds to the need for applicability whilst promoting the academic rigour, often absent (Winch, Oancea and Orchard, 2015) in a school context.

Associated with the need for dialogue, the role of the HEI tutor emerged as an intermediary enabler for the RC. In this example, the need for a general support figure is clear:

> I think maybe the fact that we aren't going to have all the answers. They're going to turn to us (for answers) and maybe we'll need someone to turn to too, you know? We're not going to know everything and if everyone is going down completely different tracks, you have to maybe know a little bit more about all these different things in order to be able to help them and to lead them. (Primary, 3).

However, the HEI tutor is also viewed as crucial in convincing RCs about the significance of research to teaching and learning:

> … there is a place for RCs to help to promote research within … the school community, to be a role model and to lead perhaps on research projects and to discuss with other members of staff, specifically with mentors but …they also need to be vocally in favour of research [and] being in close contact with the University from the perspective of research. (HEI, 3).

As noted previously, a job of the RC envisaged by Vanderlinde and van Braak (2010) would be to translate research results to their colleagues. Whilst transfer of theory (research-based knowledge) into practice is not absent from this study, there is little to indicate that schools feel confident in this area at present. Positively, however, student teachers (and research in ITE) are presented as a potential catalyst for transforming the research culture in schools:

> [published research] can kind of sit in this ivory tower where it's quite difficult to understand. And so I think if student teachers do it, it just brings it down to an accessible level because every student teacher, it will just be natural to them and so it will bring through then this generation of teachers who it's just in them and it's just natural and they think that…that it's so important. Because otherwise it just becomes a monotonous job of, "Well, I've taught this scheme of work for 10 years, so I'll just carry on doing it because no-one's ever really complained." But I don't think that's good teaching. (Secondary, 1).

This sentiment is echoed in both the primary sector and within HEI:

> There may be a lot of staff in the school who were trained years ago and perhaps need more information. So it's quite useful then that there are younger people who are coming into the profession and who can run the latest research and maybe offer new ideas, new ways of teaching. (Primary, 1);

> I think it's definitely increasingly the case that schools and departments see having a student teacher in that light that they will expect them to come in and investigate, research and bring fresh things in. (HEI, 1).

Clearly, the shift of knowledge creation into schools (Dimmock, 2016; Hargreaves, 1999) has not yet fully emerged within Wales, but the signs of change are becoming more apparent.

Types of Existing Knowledge

Emerging predominantly from the idea of the need for knowledge to be transformed, but distinct from bridging activity, a theme was identified around the types of knowledge drawn upon by teachers. Results indicate a gap in understanding by RCs of the types of knowledge they will need to develop and draw upon to play their intermediary role well. As highlighted above, many RCs listed pragmatic needs to help them fulfil their roles, with no apparent perception of any further requirements. RCs with more experience, however, showed better understanding of their own needs. For example, the need to hone academic skills, and the impact on student teacher development: 'If data is going to play an essential role for their essays, [we would need] clear guidelines on how to support and analyse that data and what that means when coming to different interpretations and perceptions … doing things such as inference tasks.' (Secondary, 3).

The experience of the RC was often linked to the culture of research within their school. Where school development plans had been impacted and influenced by research, for example, the RC was able to articulate a direct influence on their own practice:

> I think that maybe it shows already how research has had an impact on our school already by changing the School Development Plan in accordance with what we've discovered through research. So, you know, being able to open a different door, or maybe we notice that the thing we're doing at the moment is the best thing or perhaps it will show up areas where we need to adjust here and there in order to improve our pedagogy. (Primary, 4).

There appears to be a correlation here between those RCs who have experience as researchers or are embedded within a school culture of research and their ability to identify needs to help them fulfil their role. This observation highlights a potential need for HEIs to work closely with RCs to ensure understanding of their role and to be able to offer bespoke training and support, as appropriate.

A further aspect of the influence of research and the types of knowledge drawn upon, linked strongly to specific needs within a particular phase of a teaching career or to initial training: '[I] was trained most recently so because of that perhaps I can relate better to students at the moment. I've also recently conducted my own research as part of the course.' (Primary, WM 2).

Interestingly, however, these individual elements of research were not viewed in isolation, but were connected into a wider sense of community:

> There's a greater emphasis on research when you are training to become a teacher. I think you're left more to your own devices once you've qualified. But as a student teacher you are given topics to study and write papers on. But I think again it's important to deepen knowledge, to understand how to be the most effective practitioner and how to work as part of a professional team. (Secondary, 2).

Moreover …

> It's vital. I don't think it should be seen as isolation or something that you do on a one-off occasion. It's something that permeates throughout your teaching career and profession and as you go on into leadership I think it's vital that staff are given opportunities to see new research that's coming out, old research that's coming out, manipulated again and actually find what works for them using questions such as how can we make this work in our classroom, creating proxy indicators, and actually using it as a tool for improvement and if it doesn't work, why doesn't it work for us and what can we do to sort of improve it or actually find something else that might work for the classroom teacher. Not everything works for everyone. (Primary, 1).

A further challenge for the RC, therefore, is to respond to the research needs of the student teacher, but also to ensure integration within a wider research community.

Changes in role/identity

The third theme to emerge from this study related to changes in role or identity of those involved in ITE. Some RCs expressed pragmatic responses, focussing on what they will need to do on a day-to-day basis, such as:

> providing opportunities for them to interview experienced members of staff or maybe recently qualified teachers and also to provide access to students so if they want to carry out any questionnaires or interviews with students based on their learning experience we can put groups of people together to help. (Secondary, 2).

Other responses were more aspirational, taking the role beyond functional capabilities leading student teachers in consumption and production of research. For example,

> using the new publications whilst also considering their academic basis, the aim of promoting the research … to implement new ideas, to give students and teachers in the profession [the ability] to question perceptions and challenge themselves and to practice the Standards, practice what they have learnt on the classroom floor, for the benefit of us, as a profession, but more importantly, to highlight the progress of the children. (Secondary, 3).

This view was echoed closely by one HEI tutor who stated that:

> I suppose the RC is potentially going to have two parts to their role. One is going to be to start to become knowledgeable about the research that's out there and then to try to sift that and translate that so that they're able to disseminate useful bits of research within the school that they work in. So, they'll be a sort of person bringing in research from the outside, but then I suppose the second half of their role is going to be to champion and to facilitate the doing of research within their school by student teachers and hopefully eventually by their colleagues, so that the school is producing its own research that it can find useful in order to improve. (HEI, 1).

These two contrasting pictures highlight the need for HEIs to ensure that all RCs take on the identity of a researcher, rather than view themselves as 'servants' of the ITE programme and ITE tutors.

A very encouraging indicator of the potential that the RC has to connect effective engagement with student teachers with enhanced professional practice by teachers, is seen in the language used by one respondent:

> I think that it ensures that we are on top of our game really, in terms of what we know about education. We'll have to do a lot of reading and a lot of research of our own in order to be able to support the students. I think it will be of benefit to us as teachers just in that we'll have to keep abreast of the latest news. (Primary, WM 2).

Concluding Recommendations

From this study, the authors consider several recommendations are appropriate to ensure initial and ongoing success in the implementation of the role of RC, as outlined below:

• The need for a culture shift in how schools and HEIs work together to develop the capacity for integrating both consumption and production of research within schools and ITE;

- The need to seek out HEI ITE tutors' perspectives on their needs in facilitating research-informed clinical practice as there is perhaps an automatic assumption that they will be able to do this; however, many come from a school background and therefore possess academic skills deficits themselves;
- The need to design a diagnostic tool to identify the needs of RCs, their skills/knowledge deficits and a subsequent plan for implementing bespoke professional learning opportunities;
- The need to exercise the responsibility to promote and use schools that are working at a higher level of research as an example to others of aspiration within the Cardiff Partnership;
- The need to create a community of RCs, with access to wider academic input from within Cardiff Partnership, so that they can peer-mentor one another and help facilitate progress, in addition to support from ITE tutors;
- The need to create a taxonomy of skills/knowledge for RCs to use to self-assess and reflect on their progress after year one in their role.

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