

BEING A TEACHER EDUCATOR WITHIN A UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

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I have worked in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) for nearly ten years. I am responsible for leading and managing all aspects of the Primary Education provision in my University and, like all academics, I am required to balance my teaching, administration and research responsibilities. I am passionate about teaching and about research. However, ITE in England is a highly regulated field. It is regulated by Ofsted (the independent inspectorate) as well as the University and the latest Ofsted inspection framework for ITE is certainly an inspection framework 'with teeth'. Many institutions have been bitten by this framework which, in many respects, places unrealistic expectations on university providers of initial teacher education. Increasingly, my time is spent ensuring compliance with the latest and ever-changing Ofsted frameworks. These frameworks demand different things (in relation to quality assurance processes) than what is required by the University. Very often ITE lecturers are servants of two masters but we need to remember which master is paying our salary! Both Ofsted and the University demand different things and it is sometimes challenging to satisfy both giants. I often focus more on ensuring compliance with Ofsted requirements rather than University requirements because failing an Ofsted inspection or being down-graded could mean that we lose our teacher training provision. Currently we are outstanding in terms of Ofsted but the new framework has significantly raised the bar in terms of what we need to do to maintain our position. I spend my days, when I am not teaching, focusing on developing quality assurance mechanisms which will satisfy the inspectors. This of course means that there is little, if any, time available for research. Although time is allocated for research, the reality is that this time gets eaten away in order to ensure that we are 'Ofsted ready'. Meetings are dominated by discussions of 'Ofsted readiness' rather than engaging in intellectual and stimulating academic debate with colleagues and this is no fault of the University. Although I fundamentally believe that teaching is a research-based profession it is ironic that this aspect of my role as a university lecturer is marginalised when, in actual fact, it is this aspect which is the most critical. My colleagues across the sector position themselves fundamentally as 'educators' rather than 'trainers' but the Ofsted lexicon emphasises training above education. The ITE Ofsted inspection framework now speaks directly to the Ofsted framework for schools. There is complete synergy between these two frameworks and inevitably this means that the vast majority of my time, and that of my colleagues, is spent focusing on the practical application of teaching rather than developing our students' theoretical understandings of education. The Ofsted framework uses the term 'trainees' but universities use the term 'students' which suggests that there is a dichotomy which needs to be resolved. Teaching has always been an academic profession. It is not a craft which must simply be mastered. The best teachers are also great thinkers and great researchers. They are able to reflect critically and rigorously on all aspects of education and they are able to research their own practice. If we lose this focus then we are in danger of developing the next generation of carbon-copy teachers who simply replicate what they have observed.