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**How do secondary school subject departments contribute to the learning of
beginning teachers?**

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Introduction

I am currently analysing fieldwork data for a doctoral thesis titled ‘How do secondary school subject departments contribute to the learning of beginning teachers?’ For my fieldwork I was based in one secondary school for three school terms, looking at four subject departments, and working with pre-service teachers (interns) who were participating in the Oxford Internship Scheme (OIS); a one-year Post Graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) programme at the Oxford University Department of Education (OUDE).

This paper looks at one aspect of the data and presents the initial findings on the learning opportunities for beginning teachers specifically in relation to mentor meetings in two departments. Mentor meetings take place between mentors and interns as protected timetabled time once a week, and are designed to help support the professional development of interns in schools. This may involve enabling interns to analyse and evaluate their teaching and other lessons they have seen, to reflect on and evaluate their developing skills and to arrange learning opportunities and plan activities. I shall compare and contrast how learning is constructed across the learning opportunity of the mentor meetings, and consider the key features of each. Evidence will be forwarded by considering examples from the data. The findings indicate how the learning opportunities are constructed differently in the two departments (even though they are working within the same PGCE course). They also illustrate how pedagogical practices may influence what can be learned in a professional training situation.

The Research

As a former deputy head teacher in two large English secondary schools I have long been aware that departmental cultures can vary within schools and offer different learning environments for the teachers who work in them. The increasing involvement of schools in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) may mean that these differences have a relevance that extends beyond an individual school and its staff. Since the late 1980s in England schools have been given some direct responsibility for the training of beginning teachers, with that responsibility increasing over the subsequent decade. Currently two thirds of any English secondary PGCE course is based in school, and during this time the responsibility for beginning teacher learning is shared between schools and higher education institutions.

There has been little research undertaken on how school departments contribute to beginning teacher learning, but what has been described in the research literature on school departments is the complexity of their make-up. Some research suggests that deeper thinking about pedagogical and subject beliefs is often absent (Butcher, 2000, Maynard, 2001). The diversity of opportunities available to teachers in their department experiences is highlighted in McLaughlin and Talbert's discussion on professional communities (2001). In their research, many departments are characterised as weak professional communities where thoughts and practices are kept private. Departments can differ significantly in collegiality, and in beliefs about students, subject matter and good practice (Helsby, 1996, Visscher, 2004). A lot of research indicates the importance of the role of the manager/subject leader in departments as learning communities

(Busher, 2000, Donnelly, 2000, Eraut et al 2000). Consequently, there is limited understanding as to how departments might support beginning teacher learning, and this study aims to contribute to this area of ITE research.

Participants in the study are school and university staff involved in ITE, and the student teachers placed in the research school. I have generated data from an ethnographic perspective, observing school-based ITE activities, and interviewing the personnel involved about their understanding of and participation in all aspects of ITE. I am also examining relevant documentation available in schools, the University and the Teacher Development Agency (TDA), which oversees teacher preparation in England. The findings consider the learning processes to be found within and between the departments. I aim to compare these processes across departments and to examine how department practices are enabling beginning teachers to learn. Such detailed research and analysis into what is happening in the departments is therefore based on *what* is occurring and *how* it is occurring.

In order to address how secondary school subject departments contribute to beginning teacher learning, it is necessary to understand how the departments operate, and why they operate in the way that they do. The data generated from interviews with tutors responsible for the curricula on the PGCE course in my MSc research (Douglas, 2005), indicated that there were differences in the notions of teaching and learning both within and between subject departments. It is therefore important to highlight the possible

tensions and contradictions in the learning opportunities for beginning teachers working within subject departments. This is inherent in the first research question:

- 1 What are the opportunities for learning as constructed and reconstructed in different departments in one school?

The second research question seeks to explore why departments work differently, and identify the reasons for this:

- 2 To what extent and why are these learning opportunities constructed differently?

The responses to these questions will describe the similarities and differences noted in the way the departments work with beginning teachers, and give suggestions as to why this may be so. An interesting further question asks how professional learning is recognised in different ways, and consequently to what affect the different ways of working have on the professional training of beginning teachers. This is something I aim to consider in the conclusions of the study.

The table below illustrates the nature of the data collection over the fieldwork year:

Nature of Data	S1	S2	Total
School Visits	59	21	80
School Interviews	24	31	55
Lesson Observations			
Department 1	9	2	11
Department 2	11	2	13
Department 3	9	2	11
Department 4	16	1	17
<i>Total</i>	<i>45</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>52</i>
Mentor Meetings			
Department 1	9	4	13
Department 2	12	3	15
Department 3	11	4	15
Department 4	15	4	19
<i>Total</i>	<i>47</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>62</i>
OUDE CT Interviews	0	6	6

CT – Curriculum Tutor (University based), S1/S2 – school placements 1 and 2

The data consists of field notes for observations and transcripts for all interviews.

Cultural and Historical Activity Theory (CHAT)

CHAT emphasizes how settings where people are working together on a shared task or common ‘object’ can be examined to see whether they are systems where learning occurs. What marks a setting or system as a site of learning is its capacity to allow people to problematise the task, recognise the complexity in it and respond to that complexity. The result of that process is therefore not simply individual learning, but learning at a collective or systemic level in which the problem is changed and people’s relationship with it is also altered (Engeström, 1999). Activity Theory therefore provides a device with which to look at a system of activity, and can be used as an analytical tool, and a way of understanding the processes of knowledge and skill construction within, for example, a school subject department. As Russell explains, the theory provides a broad

context by going beyond the individual to acknowledge the social and material relations that affect complex human learning, and people's interactions with others as mediated by tools (Russell, 2004).

The object or focus of the system implies an overall direction of the activity, ideally seen as a shared purpose or motive such as the professional development of a beginning teacher. By using tools, participants will act on the object in order to produce an outcome (Russell, 2004). So a teacher mentor might use a planning framework as a tool in a conversation with a student teacher. However, the object (the student teacher's learning) may be understood differently (or even contested) by participants in the activity system, who are likely to bring many motives to a collective activity. For example the head teacher may see the student teacher as an extra pair of hands, while the mentor is focusing on the student teacher's development.

Within the mentor meetings the object is worked on with just the mentors and interns, and therefore any systemic or outside factors may appear less visible. However, the department settings, tools and the attitudes shown towards the object influence the way the mentors and interns work, and this in turn will affect how they view the object. There is very little communication between mentors in the different departments (in school and the University), and therefore the department activity systems operate in isolation. This makes comparisons between the school departments important, and contrasts can be seen in their ways of working.

Activity Theory as an object-oriented system serves as a unit of analysis, which can capture the dynamics and purposes of specific departments. One can examine beginning teacher learning as the object of a department activity system. Therefore, by framing the case study of each department as an activity system, no matter how many people there are in the department, how it is structured or how the department operates, it is possible to compare its beginning teacher learning activity system with other departments' beginning teacher learning activity systems. The mentor meeting is part of this activity system and operates in each subject department in order to work on the object of intern learning.

Activity Theory is therefore being used as an analytic framework for studying departments as potential sites of learning. I am able to highlight the way the activity systems are viewed by the people involved in them, and therefore gain a fuller understanding of how the systems are seen. I can explore whether people (including the mentors) share their understandings of what the objects and outcomes of the systems are. Engeström's expansion of a representation of activity, which draws on Vygotsky's concept of mediation (1978, 1986), enables examination of systems of activity at the macro level of the collective as opposed to a micro level emphasis on individuals (Engeström, 1999a). This aims to represent the social/collective elements in an activity system through the addition of the elements of community (other people interested in the object), rules (the accepted ways of working in the activity system), and division of labour (the roles of those involved in the activity system) (see figure 1):

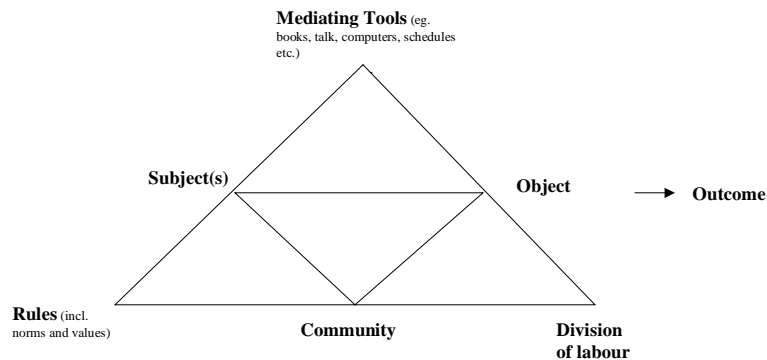
At the same time Engeström draws on Ilyenkov to emphasise the importance of contradictions within activity systems as the driving force of change and development. (Warmington et al, 2004)

However, it is important to note that Activity Theory will not be used as an interventionist or participatory method in order to work for change, as in Engeström's Developmental Work Research method (2006). This study will not shape opportunities for action and thinking, by working on the object (student teachers' learning) of the activity system through expansive learning alongside the people who work in the departments. Rather, the use of CHAT will be restricted to a 'framework that has considerable potential for researchers who are interested in how conditions for learning are created and in what is learnt' (Edwards, 2005, p.55). Therefore, the idea of an activity system is being used as a heuristic tool for descriptive analysis before any new learning takes place.

The point of this research is not to change the system but to develop an understanding of how departments are working and the beginning teacher opportunities they are affording, and in order to fully address this, it is necessary to appreciate the systems that are operating and the nature of their action. There is no emphasis on transformation at this point but this could be the subject of future research (for example, how universities work with subject departments in order to maximise opportunities for beginning teachers).

Figure 1

An Activity System (Engeström, 1999)



An Analysis of the mentor meetings in two departments

The mentor in the OIS is the teacher with responsibility for the interns' learning in school, as it relates to their subject teaching. The mentor 'contributes the experience of an established teacher (and the perspective rooted in that experience) to the development of competence in the intern' (PGCE Course Handbook, The Internship Scheme 2006/7, page 100). Below I explore how the mentors and interns in two departments work in the activity systems of intern learning, and then divide the analysis into four sections titled interaction, object, voice and tools illustrated in table 1.

Interaction considers how the mentors and interns work at the socially systemic level, and the ways they interact in order to work on the object of intern teacher learning. The position or status the mentor holds in relation to the interns and the department may also indicate how far the interns wish to emulate the mentor. The type of relationship the

mentor has with the interns and their relative position within this may also indicate the level of respect given to each, and provide a basis for the way they act when working with various people. How is this played out in the mentor meetings?

The **object** section is about how the systems' participants (the mentors and interns) construct the problem space (intern teacher learning), and how this object relates to the positioning of the participants. What form does intern learning take and how is this realised? The other aspect of the subject-object relation is **voice**. What are the voices at play in the systems and how do these mediate work on the object and are themselves dialectically constituted by that work? The stances of the mentors and interns reveal their opinions and attitudes shown in relation to ITE, school and education in general. They indicate their way of approaching how people learn and therefore their considered best ways of teaching, learning and mentoring. Their personal beliefs whether voiced or not may be indicated in the stances they take in relation to pedagogy and discussions on education, and how far they accept differences of opinion.

What types of conversations take place in the meetings? How far do the mentors act as advisors, and is the information taken on by the interns? What kind of advice is offered: practical, intellectual, emotional? Is the advice reciprocal? Are the mentors seen as learners in the meetings? How far do ideas debated reflect school and University perspectives, and are all opinions accepted as equal? Answers to such questions and how participants legitimise their own practice indicate how they see the object.

Finally, the analysis considers the **tools** that are at work in the activity systems (where, when and how they developed, and how they mediate the subjects' work on the object). The relationship between these tools and the rules for participation and for the division of labour is also important when analysing the activity systems.

Department 1

The mentor and intern rarely see one another outside the mentor meetings. Owing to school commitments the mentor is based away from the department setting. This necessitates extensive e-mail contact and agenda items are kept ready for the one to one meetings. Therefore, the meetings are focused with issues brought from both parties. Nevertheless, the formality is not business-like. On the contrary, the mentor is careful to discuss points at some length by considering a variety of perspectives and questioning the intern in order to open out the discussion, ensuring that for most pedagogical debates there are no easy answers. The intern refers to her learning as 'a never ending journey through a tunnel' (Field notes – 25th April) highlighting a continual exploration. The intern acknowledges how she is made to think ideas through carefully, and how she is encouraged to take risks and challenge her own perceptions of what teaching involves.

He does ask me to be specific about what went wrong in a lesson if I say that wasn't good. He doesn't like me just saying it was really rubbish. He wants me to tell him which bit was good, and why I think bits that didn't work should be analysed. It's a good hour I have with him.
(Interview – 19th February)

It is evident that the mentor is also considering issues afresh in their discussions, and this enhances a genuine sharing of ideas. When talking through resources, the mentor borrows and values new materials as much as the intern:

[Mentor] looks at sheet – this is really good, can I do a copy?
(Field notes – 10th January)

Consequently, both come across as learners, and although a novice, the intern appreciates that the object of the activity (her learning) is not set but evolving.

No agenda items are taken at face value and the mentor's constant questioning helps to consider the reasons for doing things and for working in certain ways:

If they [the pupils] don't want to do it you need to explain why they are taking notes in that way. Does this help exam practice for example? Give the purpose for why they are doing it in that way.
[The mentor considers the theory behind the practice – make pupils understand why they are doing tasks in the way they are doing them, and justify why you are doing it. If you can't justify that, then you are taken back to your initial planning.]
(Field notes – 17th January)

This helps to open out discussions and frequently personalises the debate beyond the school context. The intern's previous experiences and home life influence her understanding, and these are discussed along with the mentor's own beliefs and background. The relationship is therefore an open and personal one, further enhanced by the mentor adapting the subject handbook schedule to specifically meet the intern's needs. The handbooks are viewed and used very differently in the mentor meetings.

This mentor unlike the others does not refer to the handbook regularly or let it drive the meetings, as it is very comprehensive and prescriptive in setting out the suggested activities on a week-by-week basis. However, the mentor is aware of the requirements but feels that the course ‘is a bit full on’ (Interview – 23rd January) during the early weeks. His independent approach conveys a confident stance to his mentoring, and consequently the intern values his flexible reading of the course expectations.

The mentor welcomes differences of opinion and considers all issues to be relevant. (‘Have your children’s teachers’ attitudes to you changed since you started the PGCE?’ Field Notes – 10th January.) This carries over to a belief that the object is a fluid one – different styles of teaching are discussed and valued with the intern not expected to mimic them, but to see in them opportunities for personal development.

Communal learning and sharing of ideas is promoted with the whole department involved at all stages in the compilation of the mentor reports, which are thoroughly reviewed in both mentor and Curriculum Tutor (CT) meetings. The lesson observation sheets from other teachers in the department are systematically collected and filed, and the mentor meeting provides an opportunity to use these as a stimulus to talk about classes, with the intern proactively and candidly sharing her feelings about her learning along with other teachers’ thoughts about this. If she disagrees with comments made, she feels comfortable in challenging them.

This intellectual approach (extensive debate and discussion from a variety of sources including educational research literature) is demanding, and at times the intern feels daunted and in awe of the mentor's expertise and intellect. The mentor greatly values academic engagement and has many links with the University for his own personal and professional development. He has worked extensively with the CT who was instrumental in the inception of the OIS, and is admired for the 'wisdom' he brings to mentor meetings at the University. His perception of the OIS is therefore heavily influenced by its original principles of debate without consensus, and the value in questioning all types of knowledge (both contextualised and decontextualised). Noticeably, the style of meetings differs little to those with the Curriculum Tutor.

Although never feeling a need to compete with the mentor academically (and always fully prepared with a purposeful and focused attitude to her learning) the intern works alone outside the mentor meetings, and does not get many opportunities to talk informally with the mentor. Hence, e-mail provides further contact, which although well utilised (with the mentor marking, advising and commenting on assignments) provides a less immediate and personal form of interaction. The language of meetings is characterised by educational terminology, which is discussed in some detail.

Department 2

Interaction with the interns in department 2 is more regular than in department 1. Sharing a small working space in the department team room enables an almost continuous dialogue with regards to general progress and incidental and informal chats. A more

focused discussion on how the placement is going takes place in the mentor meetings where one priority is the detailed preparation for Curriculum Tutor visits from the University.

As an experienced teacher and mentor, like the mentor in department 1, she works with the interns on a personal as well as professional level, but instead of debating their opinions on education and their past experiences which have informed these, she concentrates on their experience as trainee teachers and the demands that come with following a PGCE course. She is especially aware of the pressures of being seen and evaluated (albeit informally) on a day-to-day basis, and is keen to protect the interns from excessive criticism:

They are being attacked and pressured from everywhere – their essays have got to pass, they have got to read up, fill in all this paperwork, they go into classes and they are being observed – everything and anything depending on whose room they are in might be pulled up on, what is not, may be pulled up in the next. How often do they leave and nobody has said anything negative to them? As I said at the start, these are people who are not used to criticism. They probably take it desperately to heart because it is not normal for them. So they are all trying – OUDE(S) pick high-flying people so they are people who like to do well, and yet they are being asked to do so many things very well. It's not right – it's the one time I sometimes get cross with colleagues who are saying – I think I should let you know that the last few weeks they have not done as well, or I don't think that lesson was prepared for Tuesday or whatever. I try and get a sense from the intern if there is a reason, and they'll say I was up until 2 in the morning trying to finish my assignment.
(Interview 10th January)

The interns sense this caring approach and greatly appreciate the mentor's support and her praise of their teaching efforts. Their discussions are characterised by talks on

classroom management, resources and lesson planning, with the mentor questioning interns on what they have observed and learned from their experience in the classroom. The mentor is forthright in her opinions and uses anecdotes to illustrate practice, frequently taking on a dominant role in meetings. The interns (who always meet as a pair) listen actively and appear content to take on the mentor's advice and chip in with anecdotes of their own. They particularly value the sharing of resources in the meetings and often spend an entire meeting discussing lesson materials and sharing experiences of how they can be used effectively.

The mentor's self-deprecating humour and outspoken opinions are enjoyed by the interns ('I have never done a plenary in my life. The bell rang on Monday afternoon and I said to the class, what is that? (Because this clock is broken and I never wear a watch.) I said what is that for? End of the day miss – and I had got 6 other activities I was hoping to do!' Interview – 10th January). There is no indication that the mentor is considering her learning anew. She does not expect the interns to emulate her style of teaching but does believe they need to grasp the basics and then build their own style:

I'm not saying I am right and they are wrong – you can only be true to a degree. You'll only be happy teaching if you are true to yourself rather than in a place that says you must be on page 20 by October. (Interview – 10th January)

However, the interns do not criticise the school department or mentor's point of view at all during the mentor meetings, but do critically evaluate some aspects of the department at other times (for example a perceived over emphasis on examination grades). This

suggests that potential and contestable discussions do not occur in the mentor meetings due to a respect for the mentor and for what she and the department are doing in supporting the interns.

The relaxed nature of the interaction, the content of which is often initiated by the interns asking questions, tends to be unstructured with the mentor occasionally checking how much time is left. A communal feeling is established with each taking it in turns to buy food from the dining hall to accompany the hot drinks made in the team room. The mentor does not use the subject handbook and structures the meetings around what the interns want to talk about, but 'still keeping an eye and making them keep an eye on the enormous amount of paperwork' (Field notes 10th January). Instead of treating the handbook as 'common ground' between the University and the school, she often uses it to represent the face of the University, and hence a somewhat idealistic document with academic intentions that are rarely realistic in the 'real world' of school:

Intern 2 – questionnaire; a year 7 class in the autumn term – not done
Mentor – drat I am going to ignore that feedback and just keep nagging you
Intern 1 – there must be people who just don't do it
Mentor – tick off what you have done – cobble some kind of survey together. You have to create a questionnaire so do one together.
(The interns are very negative, and the mentor does not attempt to change their minds in the value of the handbook tasks, only in the value of not getting into trouble for not doing them)
(Field notes – 31st January)

In contrast to this are the meetings prior to University visits (Assessment Reference Points, (ARPs)) where the emphasis is on detailed lesson planning for the upcoming

observations. The nature of the interaction changes as assessment considerations take over. The build up to the visits is palpable with an emphasis on performance and delivery. It is an opportunity to show what the interns can do and to impress the tutor. Consequently, the interns are encouraged to create lessons that particularly highlight their teaching skills and put into practice the modelling and routines that the tutor has introduced at the University. This places the interns in the role of performers (often referred to as ‘stars’ by the mentor) with the tutor as a member of the audience. The mentor adopts a director’s role, protective of the interns, wishing them success and willing them on.

The tension of the coming ‘assessments’ is conveyed to the interns very clearly in the mentor meetings. The purpose of the CT visits as outlined in the PGCE Course Handbook (2006 – 2007) is for CTs ‘to work with mentors to develop specific aspects of intern competence’ (page 99). It is stressed that these visits are not ‘intern assessment visits’. However, the mentor and CT do also share responsibility for ‘implementing the principles of assessment for the Internship Scheme and assessing growing intern competence (page 99).’ One can therefore see the CT visit as a tool to work on the object of developing intern learning by exploring intern practice in order to open out the problems of teaching and learning. However, they are frequently referred to as ‘assessment visits’ by teachers in the school, the interns and by some University staff.

This creates a division between the interns’ experiences of learning to teach in school, and the assessment requirements of passing the course. Hence, the object of the activity

system is understood differently, from working on the interns' learning to creating lessons specifically designed to meet the assessment requirements of the course. Thus, the object has changed into a rule; it is no longer the problem space being worked upon but a necessary part of the activity system:

Mentor: We'll sort [intern] out for Tuesday. We know [tutor] is signing the thing. If you hadn't been so glaringly honest he would have signed it. Just say thank you and stop talking. Let him find out from trawling through the paperwork, which he won't do. Don't say that some days you are not sure that the classes are learning, show your mark book and say I am pleased, and here is the evidence.

Intern: I have got to stop shooting myself in the foot (a phrase that had been used by the mentor previously).
(Field Notes – 28th March)

The mentor's advice gained from the experience of mentoring other interns who have passed the course (and who are referred to fairly regularly in mentor meetings) is prioritised by the current interns who do not question the recommendations put to them for their lesson plans. The mentor reports are written subsequent to visits by the CT, thereby having lower status than those in department 1, and operating as a rubber stamp on progress once this has been agreed. Similarly, lesson observation sheets are given a low status and not looked at by the mentor at all. Instead, she values talking to the other teachers about the interns' progress in the team room, anticipating that any concerns will naturally arise in discussions.

The mentor has worked with the CT for many years and both regard one another highly. The mentor sees her role as defending hard working and competent interns, and

promoting their capabilities during the CT visits. Therefore, the interns (who are aware of this and the relationship between the mentor and CT) may not want to jeopardise such support.

Interaction in the mentor meetings highlights differences between the practice of the teaching placement and the expectations of the University. The interns are in accord with the mentor, and therefore remain loyal to the practices of the school. This is also reflected in their adoption of some of the language used by the mentor (the importance of ‘drumming in’ certain subject matter for example), which adds to the idea of them all sharing the same perspective, and is in contrast to the language used to describe the promoted pedagogy of the course, which is dominant in discussions about CT visits.

Table 1 Comparison of Mentor/Intern Meetings

	Department 1	Department 2
<p>1 Interaction (ways of working at the socially systemic level)</p> <p>In what ways do the mentor and the intern interact in order to work on the object of intern teacher learning?</p> <p>Includes <i>relationship</i> and <i>status</i> and approaches <i>division of labour</i> and <i>rules</i> (the historically-developed expectations and rules for participation of both mentor and intern in their working relationship)</p>	<p>Expert and novice – both learners sharing ideas</p> <p>Mentor constantly questioning – variety of perspectives sought</p> <p>Focus on debate with reasons behind practice paramount – meetings worked on own schedule (adapted handbook)</p> <p>Mentor as resource for intern-led agenda</p> <p>Intern fully prepared beforehand (admires mentor’s intellect and expertise)</p>	<p>Mentor as protector (from excessive criticism) imparting ideas from experience</p> <p>Positive reinforcement from mentor although forthright and outspoken (closes down discussion?)</p> <p>Interns questioned on practice – various opinions acknowledged (anecdotes)</p> <p>An unstructured help desk, but detailed planning for CT visits</p> <p>Interns value and seek experienced advice (especially with regards to</p>

	Both are purposeful in discussion yet relaxed	the course and teaching resources) Dominance of mentor dictates interns' reactions to discussions
<p>2 Object (how the problem space is constructed by the system's participants) How does the subject mentor construct the object (the intern teachers' learning)? How do the interns differentially construct the object?</p> <p>A key concept here is also how the object relates to the (subject) positioning of the participants.</p>	<p>Purpose of education Intellectual debate about learning and different perspectives</p> <p>Detail in discussions got from mentor marking assignments and e-mail contact</p> <p>Object open and multi-faceted (developmental)</p> <p>Intern – 'a never ending journey through a tunnel' (no easy answers)</p>	<p>OIS expectations Need the basics from which to build one's own sense of pedagogy</p> <p>Anecdotal examples of management issues and bags of games for activities</p> <p>Object divided between the ability to show and defend practice, and to meet course requirements</p> <p>Interns respect and value practical help – a bias to school issues with the balance of passing the course</p>
<p>3 Voice (the other aspect of the subject-object relation)</p> <p>What are the voices at play in the systems and how do these both mediate work on the object and are themselves dialectically constituted by that work?</p> <p>Includes <i>stance</i>, <i>advice</i> and <i>debate</i> and indicates how the mentor sees the object. E.g. How is practice legitimised?</p>	<p>Values ideas and promotes risk taking (how learn)</p> <p>No set pedagogical style – seeks alternatives and sees value in sharing thoughts</p> <p>Believes in communal learning and seeks whole department opinion and input (encourages challenge)</p> <p>Interns' experience and differences of opinion welcomed</p> <p>Extensive build up to intern reports across department and OUDE</p> <p>Language of education – 'progression', 'differentiation'</p>	<p>Lots of valid ways to teach but need to find your own and justify yourself</p> <p>Finds inspiration in practical ideas to meet teaching objectives (resources key)</p> <p>Differences in department voices acknowledged but by S2 interns should know their style</p> <p>Interns never disagree with mentor and value advice/short cuts</p> <p>Reports written after the event to rubber stamp progress (low status)</p> <p>Contrast in the language of the mentor and that of the subject research at OUDE</p>

<p>4 Tools (how do they mediate work on the object)</p> <p>What are the tools at work in the activity systems? Where, when and how have these tools developed? How do the tools mediate subjects' work on the object?</p> <p>What is the relationship between these tools and the rules for participation/division of labour?</p>	<p>Personalised agenda, flexible for the interns – open discussion (part of communal learning)</p> <p>Handbook/SBAs (S1) Own version of book created geared specifically to intern's needs (CT wants them to work with reality and not distort it)</p> <p>A thorough, demanding and directed document</p> <p>Observation feedback Department does not talk regularly – ad hoc meetings</p> <p>Feedback sheets act as stimulus for debate about classes</p> <p>Intern proactive in sharing thoughts and ideas about teaching</p>	<p>Detailed planning especially for Assessment Reference Points Many meetings full of anecdotes (no paperwork)</p> <p>Handbook/SBAs (S1) No handbook use by mentor but keeps an eye on paperwork Face of University with academic intentions seen as partially realistic</p> <p>A rule for gaining qualification (benefits to object incidental) Seen as hassle by interns – academic underpinning accepted</p> <p>Many optional activities ignored in the handbook</p> <p>Observation feedback Mentor does not look at observation sheets at all but talks to department teachers</p>
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SBA – School Based Assignment

Comparing and contrasting the two departments

The analysis indicates that to a certain extent the two systems understand the object differently. The object is the problem space of intern learning. The mentor in department 2 also emphasises the rules of the course as a main problem space to be worked on. She concentrates on protecting the interns from the demands of their training, and acts as their representative (repositioning herself as the subject in the activity system).

However, in department 1 the object is primarily viewed as opening up the problem of intern learning, and this is done through questioning and challenging all aspects of pedagogy. Unlike department 2 where learning appears as an almost fixed state (for the mentor), for the other mentor it is a continual and evolving exploration with no easy answers.

There is less evidence of argument and challenge in the second department (both with the interns and amongst the staff), and one senses that this is in part due to the protective nature of the teachers. Different opinions are accepted provided they are justified by what are considered to be successful school practices. Contentious issues are seen in the differences between the University and the school practices, and these are mainly acknowledged outside the University CT visits.

This divide is not seen in department 1, as the mentor like the intern is a learner too, and consequently views all ideas as contestable. He brings his experience to work on the object (like the mentor in department 2) but unlike the other mentor, his priority is not to elucidate successful teaching and learning through anecdote and experience, but to open up intern learning by encouraging ongoing exploration and debate.

A key feature in the use of tools in department 1 is the relative formality in how they are utilized. As opposed to incidental team room chats, very little attention to paperwork and the relaxed sharing of experiences in department 2, the meetings in department 1 are more formal, especially as the opportunities for the mentor and intern to get together are

fewer, and therefore there seems to be a greater urgency to complete the mentor meeting 'agenda'. Reports and observation sheets are also used formally, and focused debate on educational research literature from the wider academic community occurs with the mentor having read and commented on the intern's assignments. He also reads academic literature out of interest and is aware of the research work happening at the University.

Although not using the subject handbook on a week-by-week basis, his confidence in adapting the tasks to the needs of the intern comes from a long-standing relationship with the department at the University and his work with the CT. Their close working relationship has meant a shared understanding of the principles of the OIS and indicates a historical determination of the activity. The similar language and educational terminology used in both the mentor and CT meetings highlights this familiarity.

With a clear understanding of the university department's advocated teaching and learning methods, the mentor in department 2 emphasises the differences between these and those methods used in the school. Acknowledging the benefits and features of both, the interns are given clear alternatives, and conversations on the relative effectiveness of different teaching methods are frequent especially when planning ARP lesson observations. These are reviewed in relation to past successful interns' lessons with advice as to how the CT will evaluate them. Noticeable here is the contrast in language use between the subject terminology associated with the University's advocated teaching methods, and the more personalized terms forwarded by the mentor (for example the importance of 'drumming it in').

A sense of historicity is also present in the second department with the existence of an ex mentor who now works part time for the University. This teacher also has extensive links with the OIS and research at the University, and was work-shadowed by the current mentor before she took on the mentor's role. With both of them viewing visits by the University as formal assessments and as a check on interns' progress, a contradiction in the division of labour in the activity system is highlighted, as the role of the CT is reified, and therefore positioned differently (as a subject) in the system. The 'threat' of the University seems to be an issue for the teacher/tutor:

I don't want them [the interns] to think of me as a [University] person but more as a teacher here. I would say I probably do distance myself more from them than some of my colleagues, because I don't want them to think I could be checking up on them or reporting back to [tutor] or anything like that. (Interview – 19th June)

Another noticeable contrast between the two departments is the amount of open criticism and debate. The interns' loyalty to the school department in department 2 means that the only criticisms voiced are those aimed at some of the beliefs of the University, which is not represented in the mentor meetings. However, this does not occur in the discussions with the CT present. Here the priority is to conform to those practices deemed successful in passing the ARP. In department 1 no such divide exists, as all practices are openly considered and analysed. Interns are equally challenged in the CT visits. However, in department 2, one is much more aware of a hidden agenda created by the pressures of being in an assessment type situation.

Interestingly, this feeling of assessment is reversed in relation to the division of labour in the two departments, where the reliance on formal written feedback and communal intern report writing in department 1 lends itself to a greater feeling of evaluation. The mentor comments:

I think there was an extent to where [intern] felt that she was being assessed all the time by everyone she was working with, and found it hard to see herself as an equal colleague as well, able to play a part in the team. I don't know how far being on her own affected that. (The intern worked in the placement on her own instead of being part of a pair, as the other intern left the course.)
(Interview – 27th June)

In department 2 the feedback from the teaching staff is much more relaxed, informal and reactive to situations rather than directed by the proactive work (the sending of e-mails and collation of observation sheets) of the mentor. Mentor meetings in department 1 are always in the staff room (where the intern usually works in her non contact periods).

Thus, the discussions take place outside the department setting. However, in department 2 the mentor's classroom (and occasionally the subject team room) is used, with other subject teachers often present in the vicinity.

There appears to be a contradiction between the object and the tools in how the activity systems are working. For department 1 the tools that are designed for supporting the intern's learning are used explicitly for this, and to an extent override the opportunities for incidental discussions and day to day support (other conceptual tools). Although, this is available more with the teachers of the classes the intern is teaching than with the mentor. However, in department 2 the tools used specifically for the OIS course

(observation sheets, the subject handbook) are sidelined in favour of more general support and personal interaction on issues arising directly from the teaching practice. This furthers the feeling of division between the school and the University and both the interns and teachers talk of work done only with the course requirements in mind (one intern does not indicate certain practices he uses in his course portfolio as he feels these go against the practice of the University, and the other intern talks of how she varies her teaching when she is being observed by the CT from the University). This highlights how the object of the activity has been understood differently. In later analysis I shall consider the effect this may have on the interns' learning.

The intern in department 1 has feelings of constant assessment throughout the placement but this feeling is less intensified (compared to the other department) when the University CT is involved, as the divide between the practices advocated by the school and the University are not evident. However, greater informal support may have enabled the intern to feel more at ease with the placement, and therefore with the learning opportunities offered.

Concluding comment

It is evident from this paper that there are differences in the way learning opportunities are constructed in the school subject departments. In aiming to analyse what these differences are, and why they exist, I hope to indicate the effects this may have on professional teacher education in schools. The research will look further into how the experiences of the interns working in the subject departments are affected by all

interactions, and not only those with the subject mentors. This necessitates looking at other activity systems that work on the object of intern learning (visits from the Curriculum Tutors and working alongside department teachers whose classes they are teaching). I shall also consider how different mentors', Curriculum Tutors' and subject teachers' pedagogies may be influenced by their understanding of the epistemology in their subject areas. I intend to explore how being members of the subject departments may also help contribute to intern learning.

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