

The Exeter Model of Initial Teacher Education

The Exeter Model of Initial Teacher Education offers a Research-Inspired approach to learning to teach that enables progressive development to mastering the skills and knowledge required of teachers as codified in the Teachers' Standards¹. The model is firmly rooted in principles derived from sociocultural theories of learning. These are that learning to teach requires:

- Activity situated within the school context ('Community of Practice' – see Lave and Wenger, 1991)
- Opportunities for dialogue with others, particularly those more experienced (see Vygotsky, 1978)
- Scaffolded progress towards independent practice (see Bruner, 1978)
- Tools to make sense of the knowledge, skills and social and political contexts of teaching (see Engeström, 1999)
- Deliberately reflective thinking about teaching and learning, strengthened through engagement in classroom research.
- Understanding that contradictions (eg between theory and current practice or between a teachers' view and a trainees' expectations) are stimuli for exploration of why these differences occur and for new thinking and practice. They are points of creative growth for individuals and ultimately for the system.

A phased approach

In order to scaffold practice, the Exeter Partnership PGCE is explicitly designed to utilise key tools developed as part of the 'Exeter Model' within a phased approach to beginning teachers' development. Trainees begin to develop knowledge, skills and understanding in a supportive environment within the University before having two terms of school placement in contrasting experiences to enable them to be fully immersed within school communities of practice. Trainees begin with micro-teaching short 'episodes' with their peers at University, then teach gradually longer episodes with the support of subject tutors in school before moving to whole lessons and finally taking responsibility for the classes within their whole timetable over longer sequences of lessons. Their development against the Teachers' Standards through this process is tracked using the Formative Reflection on Achievement and Progress documents (FRAPs) in which they log evidence of their progress against each standard, making a reflective statement on their development within these standards and against a holistic view described within a 'phase descriptor' in which the language used is tailored to reflect development towards excellence in teaching.

Tools within the model

Alongside the usual lesson plans, evaluations and observations of practicing teachers, there are two key tools unique to the Exeter Model – 'Agendas' and the 'Framework for Dialogue about Teaching'. Each of these tools has been developed using theories of learning and are designed to support new teacher development according to the key principles outlined above. Each can also be used in a number of ways as the trainee's teaching becomes increasingly sophisticated.

Agendas

Parallel to the lesson plan which focuses on pupils' learning, the agenda tool enables trainees to focus on a particular aspect of their own pedagogical development. They consider this carefully and describe what they will do in the relevant episode/s within the lesson. An observing teacher notes non-evaluative comments on the trainees' actions in relation to their 'agenda' during the lesson, which the trainee uses to reflect *before* engaging in a discussion about

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teachers-standards>

the lesson with the observing teacher. Agendas are linked to focussed observations of a teacher ‘demonstrating’ the aspect of pedagogy which is the focus of the agenda. It may be helpful to the trainee to engage in ‘reverse mentoring’, where an experienced teacher writes and teaches an agenda which the trainee observes. This models for the trainee how to use the tool, and is helpful in providing insight into experienced teacher’s decision making. Once a trainee has evidenced that they have met the Teachers’ Standards and are in the position of extending and enriching their teaching, they may then use agendas within a ‘Lesson Study’².

The Framework for Dialogue about Teaching (F4D)

The Framework for Dialogue about Teaching encourages trainees to take account of the whole spectrum of issues that sociocultural theories identify as important in educational decision making. It is designed to aid teachers in reflecting on their work in relation to a specific aspect of practice by drawing attention to a number of interlinked aspects of the context in which they are working. The Framework prompts teachers to interrogate and discuss their practice by asking questions of themselves and each other in relation to their values and beliefs, their knowledge about their subject, about teaching, and about learning, the school ethos and community, and education policy. To support trainees and teachers, we offer a broad version of the framework, a version with some generic prompt questions, and some specific ‘framework tasks’ with targeted prompt questions focused around key issues such as SEND, Assessment and Challenging the Gap (amongst others). All of these can be used by trainees individually but, based on our sociocultural theory of learning, we advocate them always discussing ‘framework tasks’ with other trainees and with teachers, to aid their completion.

Using the Tools in different phases of development

All the tools within the Exeter Model can be used in a number of ways depending on the teaching skills being developed. As trainees move into the Developing Independence Phase, they will start to think about their classroom practice in a more holistic and challenging way. Trainees will choose a particular pedagogical focus for a period of two weeks and will select between two and four training tools (Demonstration and Agenda, Work Scrutiny, lesson observation, Framework for Dialogue), alongside one focussed observation, to develop that area of practice. At the end of this period one synoptic evaluation will be written, drawing on all the training tools that have been used as well as any academic reading on the selected theme

Pupil Learning Stories

In order to demonstrate impact on pupil progress, trainees will also prepare one ‘pupil learning story’ during each of their placements. The trainee will select a class (or a group of pupils) that they have been working with and compile a bundle of evidence which is used to describe and show the progress that the focus pupils have made with their learning, explaining how their input facilitated this. This pupil learning story is then discussed with both school based and university tutors.

² The linking of the Exeter Model tools with the lesson study concept was developed as part of a current research project into teacher motivation and ‘quality retention’ as part of the EU-funded ‘RETAIN’ project. Walshe et al (in prep).