

**ACADEMIC WORK AND PROLETARIANISATION:  
A STUDY OF HIGHER EDUCATION-BASED TEACHER EDUCATORS**

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

This article reports on a year-long, mixed methods study of the work of 13 higher education (HE) – based teacher educators in England and Scotland – their activities, social organisation and material conditions, as well as the teacher educators’ own accounts of their work. Our research shows how, under conditions of academic capitalism (Slaughter & Rhoades 2004), these teacher educators were denied opportunities to accumulate capital (e.g. research publications, grants, etc.) and were instead subject to a form of proletarianisation, turning them into a highly flexible population of workers, responsive to market pressures, and deprived of the capacity to appropriate surplus-value from their labour. The reasons for this stratification among academic workers were complex and structural but, in our analysis, we suggest that the importance of maintaining relationships with schools, and between schools and student teachers, in the name of ‘partnership’ teacher education was highly significant but also that the historical cultures of teacher education as an HE activity must be considered. Further, with reference to the international research literature, we suggest that the phenomenon is not unique to the UK. We conclude with a discussion of teacher education as a form of academic work and argue for renewed attention to the role of HE teacher educators in the complex, hybrid activity required for the transformation of teaching in schools.

## **2. ACADEMIC WORK, ACADEMIC CAPITALISM AND TEACHER EDUCATION**

In the UK, Tight (2004) has identified the interest in academic work - ‘what lecturers and other members of staff actually do, and how this is changing’ - as one of the key themes in higher education research.

Internationally, Martin (1997) earlier argued that it wasn’t a surprise that ‘the further industrialisation of education has led to the heightened awareness that what goes on at the university is work - and a highly organised division of labour at that’ (p. 4). Marginson (e.g. 2010), from an Australian perspective, and many others (e.g. Aronowitz 2000, Schuster & Finkelstein 2008) have shown how changing patterns of academic

activity and employment relations are related to the neoliberal marketisation and financialisation of higher education. One study of academic employment contracts and working conditions across Europe (Enders 2000) found that ‘the concept of a single academic profession might be an illusion’ (p. 7). More recently, financial crises have forced academic workers in most countries to face casualisation, redundancy, furloughs and cuts in retirement benefits as well as salary.

While there has been some recent, specific attention to teacher education as academic work, the research literature is still developing. In Canada, Acker and Dillabough (2007; Dillabough & Acker 2002) studied teacher education as ‘women’s work’, subject to a ‘gendered division of labour’ that positions them as the ‘good citizens’ and ‘nurturers’ of university Education departments (2007: 300 – 301). Maguire (2000, 1993), in England, has shown how ‘the job of educating teachers’ falls disproportionately onto women who have been more subject to regulation by new regimes of HE funding as well as to historical forms of social control. Liston’s (1995) analysis of teacher education work in US schools of education concluded that it constituted the ‘domestic labour’ of such institutions and, as such, was an effect of systemic segregation that had ‘created a “classed” system of labour in schools of education that harms, not hinders, the education of teachers’ (p. 91). Other notable research includes Tierney’s and colleagues (Tierney 2001) who, through an analysis of large US data sets, have provided evidence of the tension between teaching quality and research productivity that, while relevant across HE as a whole, is particularly apparent in Education departments (c.f.. Cuban 1999, Clifford & Guthrie 1988).

Generally, however, research into teacher educators as academic workers has focused on questions of identity (e.g. Murray & Male 2005, Murray & Kosnik 2011, Loughran 2011, Murray, Czerniawski, & Barber 2011, Swennen & van der Klink 2009, Swennen, Jones & Volman 2010), professional lives and career transitions (e.g. Carillo & Baguley 2011, Ducharme 1993, Harrison & McKeon 2008,) and induction and professional development needs, most especially concerned with research development (e.g. Boyd & Harrison 2010, Griffiths et al 2009, Murray 2005, Schuck, Aubusson & Buchanan 2010). Studies that have treated teacher education as work have often made gender a central focus of their analysis or have regarded labour mainly as an institutional concept, through which individual workers add value to institutional assets

(Dinkleman 2011, Kosnik & Beck 2011). Elsewhere in the HE literature, however, a line of research over the last fifteen years has situated academic work within a set of social relations described as ‘academic capitalism’.

## **2.1 Academic capitalism and higher education**

Slaughter and Leslie (1997) defined academic capitalism, in the US context, as ‘the pursuit of market and market-like activities’ (p. 17), a process they saw reflected in inter-institutional competition over tuition fees, competition over grant income, and the commercial significance of intellectual property rights. Rhoades and Slaughter (1997) also suggested that individual academic workers are invited to become “capitalist entrepreneurs” in order to survive or thrive within the system’ (p. 33). Based on their success in accumulating academic capital (grants, patents, prizes, endowments, etc.), Rhoades and Slaughter argued, they are ‘differentially invested in’ (ibid) by the institution in a way that mirrors the privatisation and deregulation of the HE system. According to Slaughter and Rhoades (2004), academic capitalism had led to a ‘blurring of boundaries among markets, states and higher education’, their earlier analysis of intellectual property extended to all the ‘core academic functions’, including teaching and research (p. 11). Developments in HE in England have led to similar analyses (e.g. Holmwood 2011), including comparisons with the US (Tuchman 2009).

### *2.1.1 Capital accumulation and proletarianisation*

Eagleton (2011) reminds us that ‘it is to Marxism that we owe the concept of different historical forms of capital’ (p. 2). Capital, for Marx, was not a thing; capital was *value* and it was the means of production of value that was key. Capitalism was the social relations within which commodities achieve value and Marx saw this as an antagonistic struggle: ‘as capital is accumulated by the bourgeoisie, labourers are proletarianised’ (Marx and Engels 1888/2008: 9). Within this process, commodities are seen to have two different kinds of value: use value and exchange value. Marx’s particular interest was in exchange values as these helped him reveal the capitalist relations of production and consumption (Harvey 2010). Moreover, exchange value in commodities is ‘congealed’ human labour (Marx 1887/1992: 142). In other words, it is not merely a specific type of labour than can congeal value in a commodity but a specific type of *social*

*relations* - exchange relations, in which the value achieved by labour and materialised in the commodity can be capitalised.

Although arising from an analysis of urban, manufacturing society in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, and the far-reaching consequences of the industrial revolution, Marx's two-sided process of capital accumulation and proletarianisation, and antagonistic relations between the bourgeoisie and wage-labourers, were never confined to top-hat wearing entrepreneurs and industrialists, factory workers and peasants. In *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels had already noted that the bourgeoisie 'has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its wage labourers' (Marx & Engels 1888/2008: 6). Debord noted 'the extension of the logic of the factory labour to a large extension of "services" and intellectual professions' (Debord 1977: §114). Harvey has recently pointed to 'an insidious process of proletarianisation' of the medical workforce and in higher education (Harvey 2010: 279). In other words, academics as a category of HE worker are at risk of proletarianisation even while some might survive or thrive.

Guillory, in a ground-breaking study of academic work in the humanities, refers to academic staff situated within a 'theoretical torsion' between alternatives of capitalisation and proletarianisation:

... the torque embodied in intellectual labour can be released in [either] direction...

This is to say that knowledge, like money, is only capital when it is capitalised, when it produces the effect of *embourgeoisement*; and conversely, that knowledge can be devalued in such a way that its possessors become indistinguishable from wage-labour – a process of proletarianisation (Guillory 1994: 125).

This torsion revolves around the kinds of work that are valued and those that are devalued. Under conditions of contemporary academic capitalism, work that produces research publications and grant income can be capitalised in the market-place for promotion, salary increases, release from teaching and other effects of academic *embourgeoisement*. Work that doesn't achieve surplus value leaves the worker vulnerable to downward social mobility, the 'vicissitudes of competition, to all the fluctuations of the market' (Marx &

Engels 1888/2008: 9). We will argue that the teacher educators in our sample have become particularly vulnerable to this process. Indeed, we wish to suggest that the concept of proletarianisation is worth examining again with reference to the labour of teachers educators just as it was examined in relation to teachers in the 1980s (e.g. Ball 1988, Lawn & Ozga 1988).

## **2.2 Teacher education, higher education and performance-based funding of research in the UK**

Teacher education in both England and Scotland has evolved around partnerships with schools, often in the geographic area around HE institutions. In England, since 1992 (DES 1992), these partnerships between HE institutions and schools have been the statutory organising principle around which programmes have been designed. In Scotland, without this statutory organising principle, cooperative partnerships between schools and HE institutions have also developed (cf. Christie 2003) and in both countries student teachers and teacher educators are required to cross the boundaries of different HE and school activity settings. In his research through the 1990s and into the 2000s, Furlong noted both the potential and the challenge of building genuine ‘collaborative’ partnerships between schools and universities where the pedagogical and epistemological assumptions of both partners might be questioned (Furlong et al 2000). Instead, he found that more bureaucratic, HE-led partnerships have evolved where universities became responsible for monitoring and quality assuring the enculturation of student teachers into the existing practices of the host school (Furlong et al 2009).

Historically, teacher education in English and Scottish universities has developed alongside profound systemic changes to HE overall in both countries, with independent teacher training colleges gradually being absorbed into polytechnics or universities. In England, polytechnics then acquired university status after the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act and the large Scottish colleges of education were also merged into the universities through the 1990s (Kirk 1999). As a result, in both countries, there are academic workers in university education departments who began their careers in very different sorts of institutions, often without a history of research activity (c.f. Maguire 1993, Murray et al 2009). Across the UK, universal auditing of research productivity and quality began with the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) of 1992 and subsequent exercises have further intensified the competition between institutions and individuals for

publication outlets, research funds and indicators of esteem. The RAE and its successor the Research Excellence Framework (REF) have measured both the productivity and quality of research by academics across all subject areas and disciplines. Minimum levels of research productivity have been set and minimum levels of quality for each output (based on a 4 star scale). Aggregated productivity and quality data produced through a lengthy peer review process, combined with other information such as research grant income, determine a numerical grade (or GPA, grade-point average) for each department in each university. On the basis of the GPA, that department is differentially funded for research over the next REF period.

Twelve years ago, Elton (2000) had already identified several unintended consequences of the RAE, such as a ‘transfer market’ for those who have thrived in the system, a proliferation of journals for research ‘outputs’, pressure on individual academic workers to be and remain consistently research active over a career, and the devaluation of teaching. Indeed, Tuchman (2009) has argued against replicating the UK RAE in the US for these reasons. Nonetheless, the measurement of academic workers’ research productivity and quality has become entrenched in HE systems in several other parts of the world, including the Excellence in Research in Australia initiative (<http://www.arc.gov.au/era/>) and New Zealand’s Performance-based Research Fund (<http://www.tec.govt.nz/Funding/Fund-finder/Performance-Based-Research-Fund-PBRF-/>). As others have argued (e.g. Murray et al 2009, Murray & Male 2005), it is teacher educators who have been particularly vulnerable to the negative consequences of such audits, and not only those at the start of their careers.

Within the UK, an Economic and Social Research Council demographic review of the social sciences (Mills et al 2006) noted the challenge of a large number of ‘second-career researchers’ in HE Education departments – principally teachers who become teacher educators. More than half of the academic staff in Education departments were found to be 50 or over at the time of this review with the smallest proportion across the social sciences aged under 34 (8%). The authors, noting the 2001 RAE report where two thirds of Education staff were not classified as ‘research active’ (Mills *et al* 2006), suggested that the structural challenges faced by those working in Education meant that ‘there exists no clear academic career structure’ (ibid. np). In the 2008 RAE, only 27% of full-time staff in Education departments were deemed research

active (HEFCE 2009a; HESA 2009), 404 fewer than in 2001 (Hazlehurst *et al* 2010). Declining numbers of teacher educators who meet the ever-increasing threshold for being classed as ‘research active’ is a structural problem. Meanwhile, in universities and colleges around the world, a large group of workers for whom the possibility of developing a research programme and progressing through a ‘clear academic career structure’ are fairly limited, get on with the job of educating teachers.

### **3. DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

In our research, we have not been motivated simply to reveal the extent to which current policy determines what teacher educators ‘do’ but to examine the complex relationships between individual agency and social structure. Indeed, in aiming to examine *work* it is necessary to consider underlying economic values and social relations rather than seeing individual workers in isolation. Consequently, the design of our study was informed by cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) (Cole 1996, Engeström 1987, Engeström *et al* 1999; see also First author *et al* 2010), a set of practical and theoretical approaches to studying human development derived from the research of Lev Vygotsky. Vygotsky’s work (e.g. 1978, 1986) was premised on Marxian concepts and common interests in the relationships between culture, socially organised activity and human consciousness. Marx’s assertion that ‘Consciousness does not determine life; life determines consciousness’ (Marx & Engels 1845-6/1964: 37) became the basis for Vygotsky’s materialist psychology and in turn influenced CHAT’s interest in the social organisation of human activity and the changes in consciousness it might be possible to stimulate within activity systems through interventions (c.f. (Engeström 2007).

Understanding the social organisation of the collective work of teacher education was our primary goal. From this perspective, it was necessary to recognise work as embedded in specific social contexts and thus open to interpretation as a form of participation in these contexts (Reeves & Boreham 2006). Unlike some CHAT-informed studies that focus more on understanding the psychological processes of the research participants, we have adopted a more materialist and grounded approach to the analysis of teacher educators’ work, of the type advocated by Martin & Peim (2009).

In terms of design, we adopted a mixed methods approach that included semi-structured interviewing, statistical analysis of work diary instrument data, ethnographic-type observation, and a participatory data analysis workshop. Our inquiries were guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the HE-based teacher educator's work? What are their typical, professional activities and what are the material (social and cultural) conditions in which they carry them out?
2. How do HE-based teacher educators talk about their work?

The design of our research was intended to focus our analytic attention on the key CHAT categories of *rules*, *community* and *division of labour* – fundamentally, who gets to do what work and why? As with any CHAT analysis, however, these categories are not viewed in isolation but in relation to the people doing the work (the *subjects*, their desires, dispositions and motives) and the potentially shared *object* (goal and outcome) of their joint activity (Engeström 2007). Ethical approval of our research was granted by the [*anonymised*] committee, compliant with the revised ethical guidelines of the British Educational Research Association (2004). In securing informed consent, and in a participatory spirit, we also gave subjects the option to be named as co-authors on papers based on the data we generated with them.

### **3.1 Data generation and analysis**

#### *Constructing the sample*

We distributed a call for participation through a variety of channels in March 2010, specifying our sample criteria: we were looking for HE-based teacher educators in England and Scotland who had direct responsibility for working with student teachers and schools on pre-service teacher education programmes. These channels were email lists belonging to the Universities Council for the Education of Teachers (the main UK organisation representing universities involved in teacher education) and the Higher Education Academy (another UK organisation supporting the work of university Education departments), who also funded the research.



We received 20 expressions of interest by our deadline. Four of these did not meet our selection criteria. We invited 16 respondents to an initial meeting in May 2010 and 14 attended. Soon after, another participant withdrew following promotion. Information about the final sample is shown in Table 1.

No.	Pseudonym	Gende	Institution	Main Phase/ Subject Area	Years in HE	Highest qualification	Research active
1	Gould	F	England - OLD	Secondary - English	2	M s	√
2	Duff	M	England – NEW	Primary - History	6	M	
3	Drummond	F	England - OLD	Secondary - Science	<1	M	
4	Davis	F	England – FE	Secondary - Science	18	M	
5	Coodle	F	England – NEW	Secondary - Geography	19	D	
6	Brooks	F	England - OLD	Secondary - Science	4	M s	√
7	Brock	F	England – FE	Primary - History	17	B	
8	Alloway	F	England – NEW	Primary - Maths	1	D	
9	Monk	F	Scotland	Secondary - Maths	7	B	
10	Lenton	F	Scotland	Primary - General	4	M	
11	Hale	F	Scotland	Secondary - Geography	3	M s	√
12	Hacker	F	Scotland	Secondary - Geography	5	M s	√
13	Gresham	M	Scotland	Secondary - Music	17	B	√

*Table 1: The sample of teacher educators*

The institution column shows whether, in England, the participant was employed by a post-1992 ('new') university, a pre-1992 ('old') university or in one of the large further education colleges (FE – similar to US community colleges) with HE provision. The highest qualification column indicates whether the participant held a doctoral (D), a master's (M) or a bachelor's degree (B). 'M s' in this column indicates someone who

was enrolled as a doctoral student. A tick in the research active column indicates a participant who was working towards submission in the REF and/or had been entered in the 2008 RAE.

Sampling was purposive as we sought to recruit participants from a range of institution types, geographic areas and with different career lengths. Our sample was not intended to be representative of the population of HE-based teacher educators in England and Scotland. According to figures from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA 2009), 63.1% of academic workers in UK Education departments are female. In our sample, 11 out of 13 participants (84.6%) were women. That said, HESA does not differentiate between fields within subject areas so it is possible that the distribution of women in teacher education (rather than Education as a whole) is higher than 63.1%. HESA data, the ESRC Demographic Review (Mills *et al* 2006) and the RAE 2008 report (HEFCE 2009a, 2009b) nevertheless suggest that the levels of academic qualification and research activity of our participants are broadly typical. Our sample also reflected a range of experience (with roughly equal proportions of participants with more than 10 years' experience, more than 4 years' experience and less than 4 years' experience). A range of subject emphases was also present and, although the sample appeared to be biased mainly towards secondary teacher educators, in fact 5 of the 9 nominally secondary participants also taught on primary (elementary) education courses.

We recognize the limitations of our small sample in terms of representativeness and generalizability. Creswell (2002), for example, identifies 15-20 participants as being the ideal range for theoretical sampling. The logic, however, behind our purposive selection of participants was that 'the sample should be *information rich*' (Morse 1994: 229; emphasis in original) in that it should afford a deep, case-oriented analysis of the work of a cross-section of teacher educators, drawing on a complementary blend of qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection. In developing and theorizing our understanding of the work of teacher education, we have therefore attached much importance to the collection and analysis of data, to the extent that we are respectful of a more evidence-based paradigm precisely because we have developed a particular empirical conceptualization as a foundation for connecting to international theory and research.

### *3.1.1 Interviews*

All participants were interviewed in May 2010 with our questions designed to elicit their talk about their work, their educational biography and employment history and their sense of their future.

Audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed. Two analytic passes were made. The first, by three members of the research team, made a life history analysis using concepts from life history research derived from Mandelbaum (1973; see also Goodson 2008). This analysis revealed how the participants talked about their trajectories of social practice – the turning-points and adaptations made and how these related to their work conditions.

The second pass involved Membership Categorisation Analysis (MCA) (Freebody 2003, Hester & Eglin 1997) which looks at the attributions made to particular categories in the discourse of research interviews (e.g. the verbs and adjectives), the ways these attributions are substantiated (e.g. through personal narrative or invocation of policy texts) and what lines of reasoning these attributions and substantiations afford. MCA was conducted by the first author and his analyses checked and subsequently agreed by the other members of the research team.

### *3.1.2 Work diaries*

Participants were asked to complete a work diary instrument. This involved keeping a record of activity in increments of one hour for the duration of what was, for participants, a ‘typical’ working week (up to 7 days). Data was collected at two points in the year: May and October 2010. We selected these time-points as it was felt they reflected the different types of work undertaken by teacher educators in the UK over an academic year: in May, most student teachers would be out on full-time field placements in schools (and be visited by teacher educators); and in October, most student teachers would be mainly based in the HE institution, taking classes. All participants completed the May 2010 instrument. One participant, Gresham, did not complete the second.

The first set of work diaries was analysed by two members of the research team. The diaries were divided alphabetically according to participants' pseudonyms into two sets. Working individually, each researcher made a list of the activities of the teacher educators as they had recorded them. This process resulted in a total of 70 items, which contained numerous duplications. The two lists were reviewed, and the items grouped into a reduced number of 32 categories, from which a final combined list of 10 job dimensions was agreed.

The second set of work diaries was analysed using this framework; no supplementary definitional precision was called for during this round of analysis, nor were further job dimensions required to be created. In this way, for each of the weeks recorded, the number of hours allocated by the teacher educators to each of the job dimensions could be calculated. The statistical outcomes from this process were then examined in relation to fieldwork data from observation/work-shadowing. Questions about these initial job dimensions were generated by the research team and taken to the participatory data analysis workshop. As an outcome of this analysis workshop with participants, some of the job dimensions were renamed to reflect more accurately the nature and purpose of the work being categorised. The final list of job dimensions was:

1. Course management
2. Personnel activities
3. External examination at another institution
4. Examination at own institution
5. Marking
6. Professional development
7. Research
8. Relationship maintenance
9. Working with a group of students (teaching)
10. Tutoring an individual student (academic supervision, lesson observation/de-briefing)

A comparison of the data suggested that despite being six months apart in time, the two weeks may be broadly comparable in terms of work categories recorded and effort expended.

### *3.1.3 Observation – ‘work shadowing’*

We planned to observe all thirteen participants for at least one working day. They were asked to choose a ‘typical’ day– typical in terms of the range of work planned at that time of year, October 2010 to January 2011. The researchers made field notes – including some near verbatim reconstructions of spoken interaction - and also took photographs. Due to severe weather conditions in Scotland in winter 2010/2011, Lenton was not observed.

Field notes and photographs from each observation were written into narrative form. These narratives were then collated and the entire set subject to an initial, inductive coding. Two further codings of the data set were made. The first used categories derived from CHAT. Particular attention was given to the socio-historic organisation of the activities in which the teacher educators were engaged – how the work was organised and between whom (the division of labour and the social conventions). The second coding used the ten job dimension categories produced in the analysis of work diaries.

### *3.1.4 Participatory data analysis workshop*

Participants were invited to a data analysis workshop in March, 2011. Seven participants attended; the remainder could not attend due to work commitments. The purpose of the workshop was to introduce selections of the data to the participants and to work with them to understand this data using CHAT. Although not an application of DWR (Engeström 2007), the research team’s intention was to do more than seek respondent validation of their interpretations but rather to extend the analysis further by attempting to bring participants’ insights into articulation.

The workshop was audio-recorded and a member of the research team also took handwritten notes of the meeting. Selectively transcribed episodes from this workshop were analysed using MCA with a particular focus on how the categories (the ten job dimensions) were being built in participants’ interactions.

## 4. THE WORK OF TEACHER EDUCATION

### 4.1 The ten job dimensions

By focusing our analytic attention on the rules, the community and the division of labour, we were able to generate some simple, descriptive statistics about the work of the teacher educators in our sample. The average number of hours worked each week was 49, ranging from 32 hours to 71, with 7 participants (over half the sample) completing in excess of 45 hours' work. Primary teacher educators worked on average for 51 hours during the week; secondary educators worked 48 hours. Overall, across the job dimensions and in relation to the sample as a whole, no relationship could be inferred between the number of hours worked and the geographical locations of participants, the type of employing institution or their length of service.

Table 2 provides the means and standard deviations for the hours attributed to the job dimensions that were in evidence during the week recorded in May 2010.

Work of teacher education: job dimensions	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Relationship maintenance	13	3.0	31.0	<b>13.192</b>	6.9986
Marking	13	0.0	28.5	<b>7.115</b>	8.5736
Tutoring an individual student	13	0.0	30.0	<b>6.500</b>	7.9373
Working with a group of students	13	0.0	16.5	<b>6.385</b>	6.6525
Research	13	0.0	23.5	<b>5.923</b>	8.6671
Course management	13	0.5	15.0	<b>5.192</b>	4.1660
External examination at another institution	13	0.0	19.5	<b>1.500</b>	5.4083
Examination at own institution	13	0.0	18.0	<b>1.423</b>	4.9827
Professional development	13	0.0	11.5	<b>1.077</b>	3.1678
Personnel activities	13	0.0	5.0	<b>.615</b>	1.4456

*Table 2: Job dimensions (in hours) May 2010: Descending means, and standard deviations*

The job dimension on which the greatest number of hours was expended is *relationship maintenance*. In the case of *relationship maintenance* (mean, 13.192; SD, 6.9986), there is less variation in the number of hours worked than those spent on *research*, for example, where the standard deviation (8.6671) is higher than the accompanying mean (5.923). To exemplify this in the terms of the data generated, 7 participants (or 54 per cent of the sample) carried out zero hours of *research*, whereas everyone undertook a measure of *relationship maintenance*. For one person this amounted to only three hours; for everyone else, however, eight and a half hours (equivalent to more hours than might be prescribed as constituting an average working day) was the minimum time allocated. Of the 12 participants remaining, 11 spent between eight and a half and 19 hours on *relationship maintenance* during the week, with one further individual expending an outlying 31 hours on this activity.

In spite of conventional expectations across higher education, only 6 out of 13 participants undertook any *research*. According to the results set out in Table 1, it may be possible to consider as ‘customary’, or as ‘defining’, those dimensions of the teacher educator’s job which accounted, on average, for 5 or more hours of effort during the week (*relationship maintenance; marking; tutoring an individual student; working with a group of students; research; course management*). Of these dimensions, *research* was most often omitted within individuals’ profiles. Indeed, were it not for two participants who undertook 20.5 and 23.5 hours of *research*, the latter could hardly be categorised as being a dimension of the teacher educator’s work, as it might be classified according to the mean values in the table above.

Table 3 provides the means and standard deviations for the hours attributed to the job dimensions in evidence during the week recorded in October 2010. When compared to the results in week one, a number of similarities and differences become apparent. The most obvious difference is that a much greater number of hours was expended in October on *working with a group of students*, as we expected. The most apparent similarity is the number of hours spent on *relationship maintenance*.

Work of teacher education: job dimensions	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Working with a group of students	12	1.5	36.5	18.458	12.0632
Relationship maintenance	12	3.0	42.5	16.500	11.1049
Tutoring an individual student	12	.0	17.5	4.625	5.0728
Course management	12	.0	14.0	2.958	4.4694
Research	12	.0	14.0	2.917	5.1027
Marking	12	.0	9.0	2.708	2.9190
Professional development	12	.0	7.5	.875	2.1755
Personnel activities	12	.0	5.0	.417	1.4434
External examination at another institution	12	.0	.0	.000	.0000
Examination at own institution	12	.0	.0	.000	.0000

Table 3: Job dimensions (in hours) October 2010: Descending means, and standard deviations

In order to compare the mean scores for the two groups, six months apart in time, a paired samples t-test was carried out. In the event, only one significant difference was revealed by the test: the increase in the number of hours spent working with groups of students ( $t = -3.640$ ,  $p < 0.004$ ). The importance of this finding to the results in general is in suggesting that the changes in the remaining mean scores are not large enough or consistent enough to refute the null hypothesis, which implies that for these dimensions of the job at least there was no measurable difference in the two weeks selected.

As comment-worthy as the rise in hours undertaken by the teacher educators' in *working with a group of students* may prove to be, it is still the case that *relationship maintenance* accounted for both the highest maximum individual allocation of hours, as well as the highest minimum. For this sample of teacher educators, *relationship maintenance* appears to be the prevailing and defining characteristic of their work.

#### 4.2 What is *relationship maintenance*?



In our observations of 12 participants, we identified numerous examples of *relationship maintenance* in all but two cases. The widespread nature of this job dimension was unsurprising given the analysis of work diary data and the observation data was therefore both confirmatory and explanatory. Superficially, the tasks underlying *relationship maintenance* could appear to be, in part, general administrative work: making and receiving telephone calls; writing and reading emails; writing letters; talking to a student, colleagues at the university and in schools. And all unrelated to one of the other job dimensions such as *tutoring an individual student*, for example, where the focus was either on academic progress or lesson observation. On closer analysis of the work diaries, however, and through observation, we found that the object of this communicative activity was in fact aimed at maintaining relationships with students, colleagues in schools and at the university. The majority of this work came under the broad heading of 'partnership'. Indeed, even when the focus was individual student health and well-being, the stress involved in crossing partnership boundaries between university and school was often the significant factor.

We observed our participants writing and responding to emails from student teachers as early as 7.30am (Alloway) and one reported staying at work the evening prior to the observation to 9.45pm to clear such an email back-log (Monk). Brock spoke about the usefulness of a Bluetooth connection in her car so that she could make and receive such phone calls 'on the move' between school visits. These phone calls were often from or about student teachers under stress - absent from school or barely sustaining their attendance. In one case, that of Drummond, 90 minutes on the day observed was taken up with dealing with one student who had absented herself from school and whose mentor, senior school staff and university link tutor were all concerned and/or angry. Drummond's *relationship maintenance* activity involved voice mail messages to the student (in bed, asleep, when Drummond called) and the school's senior staff (teaching when Drummond called); writing long, carefully-worded emails when telephone calls weren't possible; answering telephone calls that respond to voice messages; informal conversations with concerned university colleagues; and a 40 minute meeting with the student teacher herself. In another case, Brock made a home-visit to a student teacher signed off sick with stress, a visit that took one hour including travelling time. Email was an important channel for *relationship maintenance* and participants were observed being highly responsive. In several cases, participants used audible signals on their computer to announce an email's arrival and one,

Hale, had turned up the volume and was observed to be hyper-responsive to a high volume of email. During a short lunch break at her desk, Hale wrote four emails while simultaneously eating and drinking and also answered two telephone calls. During her attendance at a meeting lasting just over an hour, she received nine emails requiring the sort of work we are describing as *relationship maintenance*.

We also observed *relationship maintenance* built in to how individuals and institutions acted together at a strategic level. Davis spent ten minutes of a meeting with the school placement coordinator working out which student teachers could be sent to which schools as mentors had very specific criteria for the student teachers they would accept. One secondary Science mentor, for example, strongly implied that he only wished to work with male students of Pakistani heritage backgrounds and another mentor in a private, single-sex, religious school would only take female students observant of that religion. Davis's institution was in a geographic area where there was fierce competition for school placements among four HE institutions so a level of *relationship maintenance* that took into account the preferences of individual mentors was deemed necessary. The two exceptions to *relationship maintenance* being observed during our field work were Brooks and Hacker. Brooks taught a whole morning and part-afternoon session during our observation and her activities around this were preparatory. Hacker was observed visiting schools but not to observe students she knew. Hacker's university (for financial reasons, it had said) had abandoned subject- and phase-specific visiting and Hacker, as a secondary Geography specialist, was observed visiting primary schools.

In the participatory data analysis workshop, Brooks commented that when feeling vulnerable as a new researcher, it was sometimes tempting to devote more time than you should to tasks one you know you are good at, usually having been good at them in school: building, maintaining and repairing relationships. This comment produced a mixed response from the participants. It was clear, however, that good relationships (with students, colleagues and schools) were explicitly recognised as a priority by all participants – in interview, during observation and in participatory data analysis - as being key performance indicators under most evaluation, quality assurance and inspection regimes.

### **4.3 Teacher educators' talking about their work**

The interviews elicited the teacher educators' accounts of a diverse set of practices and material conditions. Their teaching loads, office space, resources, contracts, etc. - were impacted by both local institutional and national policy-level tensions concerned with teaching in HE (and in FE, in two cases) as well as the accountability, quality assurance and regulatory constraints associated with teacher education policy in the two countries. By their own accounts, this sample of teacher educators worked hard and was successful. They spoke about multiple transition points in their professional lives and represented these transitions as 'new challenges'. A great deal of the reward they reported from their work was from what they described as the personal and 'socially transformative' nature of their teaching - the success of the individual student in becoming a teacher and the year-on-year 'production' of new teachers for the profession, as well as, at times, the social mobility a teaching job might afford some students. Research did not consistently figure (or, in some cases, *ever* figure) in their accounts of their motivations to become teacher educators or in talking about their work. For some, it was not a contractual requirement; for others, it was merely a desirable 'extra'; for others again, it was deemed important by their institutions but they were given little or no guidance as to how to develop it. Through attributing phrases such as 'socially important' and 'a real buzz' to their work, and substantiating these attributions through personal narratives, the teacher educators in our sample conveyed both the pleasure they derived from working with student teachers and what they saw as the transformative project of teacher education.

Brock, for example, directly linked her work to widening access to higher education and improving social mobility and talked about research she had started on the topic but abandoned due to time constraints. Teaching was also described as 'high-octane' and sometimes this was explained as a consequence of the need they felt to demonstrate exemplary practice and be a 'role model'. All of our sample responded very positively to our question about how they felt about their work as a teacher educator and connected their responses directly to their work with student teachers face-to-face. Three of the 4 participants with most experience (all based in England) were regretful about what they saw as policy-dictated changes in their roles and the new importance of what Coodle described as 'a mainly quality assurance' function – ensuring partnership arrangements with schools 'ran smoothly', that mentors and students were 'satisfied' and did not

complain, presenting a face of 'high quality provision' to Ofsted. What they actually taught, some felt, was no longer so important.

The teacher educators saw their work changing over time. For those relatively new to the job (with less than 6 years experience), this was most often accounted for in relation to research and scholarship. Brooks, for example, articulated her awareness of identity shifts, asking herself the question, '*Am I an academic?*' Brooks, as we noted, was unusual for the amount of time she allocated to research so it was interesting she still asked herself this question. Hacker spoke about her transition into the Education department of a Scottish university using the metaphor of a game: 'it's a new game and you need to learn the rules of that game, and the rules quite often change'. She reported the conditions of her probationary period being changed to raise the stakes from completing a Master's degree to having 'REF-able' publications. Along with all of her colleagues, she had been publicly 'colour-coded' by the management of her department to indicate current research activity and future potential. Hacker was 'green', the lowest point on this scale. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, she described writing for publication as 'keeping the wolf from the door'. The arbitrary nature of this game was also visible to Hacker and to Brooks: they may work hard and produce publications but there was still no guarantee they would be of sufficiently high quality to be entered in the REF and to be counted as 'research-active'.

Teacher educators who had more experience often spoke about the ways they had had to adapt to the changes within their own institutions. Duff, for example, talked about the developmental trajectory of the teacher educator as not being linear; he saw his own development as contingent and reversible, saying, 'as soon as you get reconciled to, you know, what you're doing, they change everything . . . . So you either revalidate the degree that you're working on, or they drop your specialism, or they reorganise the department that you're working in.... so it never quite sort of flows from one end to the other.' The overall impression was of a group of people who were good at navigating the transitions of a life-course, highly flexible, responsive to demand and adaptive to new situations.

## 5. THE PROLETARIANISATION OF TEACHER EDUCATORS

In our research, we have been working with Marxian concepts we believe are relevant and meaningful in relation to the data we have generated, situating our examination of the value of teacher educators' labour in the exchange relations of contemporary academic capitalism. This approach was taken some time ago in relation to school teachers by British sociologists of Education (e.g. Ball 1988, Lawn & Ozga 1988) and we believe it is fruitful to do so now with reference to teacher educators. We have studied the labour of teacher educators as academic work, a topic in which there is growing research interest. So our argument is not call for a class struggle, pitting proletarianised teacher educators against a putative academic bourgeoisie. Nor do we argue that teacher educators alone are vulnerable to processes of proletarianisation; in many respects it is one of the vulnerabilities of academic life under current conditions. We have also not sought to make substantive comparisons between the English and Scottish contexts our primary focus. Indeed, within our sample we found no significant difference between the experiences of English and Scottish teacher educators, either in our analysis of work diary data or in our analysis of observations and interviews. So we do not regard any specific differences in policy (such as the English inspection regime) as significant in relation to our data. Instead, as we have said, we have been interested in trying to understand the relationships between structure and agency in the work of teacher education, specifically the relationships between value, social structures and labour.

### 5.1 *Relationship maintenance* as necessary work

In answer to our first research question, we found that *relationship maintenance* was the prevailing, typical and defining activity of the teacher educators in our sample. *Relationship maintenance* included building, sustaining and repairing the complex and fragile networks of personal relationships that allow initial teacher education programmes, school partnerships and, indeed, HE Education departments to function. Whether at the beginnings or ends of days, while driving a car, eating and drinking, we found teacher educators acting both strategically and reactively on the social relations of partnership and institutional life. *Relationship maintenance* is the sort of 'good citizen' work that Acker and Dillabough, in Canada, noted in relation to the women teacher educators in their research, work that incorporates 'social expectations for endlessness that women's work everywhere has at its core' (Acker & Dillabough 2007: 301). In Liston's terms, in the US,

*relationship maintenance* is the 'domestic labour' of HE Education departments, labour that 'entails the necessary, ongoing and time-intensive (reproductive) tasks of "keeping house" (Liston 1995: 104). Given that Acker & Dillabough and Liston are writing about the Canadian and American contexts, it's also clear that relationship maintenance, as we are defining it, is not purely an English or Scottish contemporary phenomenon but one associated with the historical cultures of teacher education in HE institutions. Cuban (1999), Clifford and Guthrie (1988), Maguire (1993), Nuttall *et al* (2013) and others in the US, the UK and Australia have pointed to tensions between research and teaching in teacher education that arise out of the historical evolution of both teacher education and HE generally. We believe this is a tension that has been exacerbated as partnerships with schools (whether formal or informal) have gained in importance (cf. Furlong et al 2009).

Also, in answer to our first research question, we found that there are at least three kinds of pressures that had the effect of raising *relationship maintenance* to the pre-eminent position it occupied, specifically with reference to partnerships with schools. First, the requirements of the quality assurance and inspection regimes and the risks of reputational damage to HE institutions who are obliged to compete as 'brands' (and, in England, literally compete for funding on the basis of inspection outcomes) necessitate a relentless focus on being seen to offer 'high quality provision'. 'High quality' is defined in part by the absence of complaints and smooth bureaucratic arrangements of partnerships with schools. Second, and related, in the wider context of educational reform, HE institutions cannot afford to disrupt the social practices of schools 'delivering' those reforms, disruptions that may well lead to opportunities for learning by schools and by HE but are disruptive nonetheless (cf. First author 2010). So the teaching methods of schools must be perpetuated in the practices of student teachers even if they run counter to the practices of the HE teacher education programme. *Relationship maintenance* operates both to try to assure this difficult truce in advance and to mop up the mess when practices are (intentionally or accidentally) disrupted.

Thirdly, we also think it is important to recognise the underlying historical cultures of teacher education as an activity within HE institutions and also the residual identities of teacher educators as teachers. In answer to our second research question and how the teacher educators talked about their work, we found that for

some in our sample, research was not a motivation to leave school teaching and join an HE Education department. They articulated instead strong commitments to ‘spreading good practice’, to seeing future generations of school children well-taught and also believed they were doing good, ‘socially transformative’ work (specifically in terms of the class mobility of their student teachers). In their talk, they produced their work as teacher educators in relation to teachers in schools as much or more than they did to their colleagues in HE.

Some of our participants' contracts did not require them to be research active (the FE college lecturers), however. And while other institutions did expect research, they were reported as making little effort to provide guidance and did not create the conditions (particularly with regard to time) for teacher educators to be successful. In an earlier study of advertisements and job descriptions for HE-based teacher educator positions published in this journal (First author et al 2012), we found that 45% of them made no reference to research whatsoever. Professional identities and institutional cultures formed over long periods of time, structured but not determined by academic capitalism and neoliberal technologies of reform and surveillance, can perpetuate an idea of the HE-based teacher educator in England and Scotland as a ‘super-teacher’.

## **5.2 The meaning of proletarianisation**

As Eagleton (2011) reminds us, “‘proletariat’ comes to us from the Latin word for ‘offspring’, meaning those who were too poor to serve the state with anything but their wombs” (p. 169). The necessary, nurturing, materially unrecognised and unaccountable *relationship maintenance* work of the teacher educators in our sample allows organisations such as school partnerships and Education departments to function but simultaneously denies them opportunities to accumulate academic capital. Founded on a division of labour between the education of teachers and the education of researchers, our data suggests that the work of teacher educators might well support the reproduction of the labour power of research in Education departments from which a class of worker described as ‘researchers’ benefits. Liston identified this situation in his analysis of teacher education in US universities nearly 20 years ago (Liston 1995: 105). These are structural inequalities with material conditions for teacher educators sometimes profoundly

different to colleagues who work on other programmes (in one case, office space shared with 6 colleagues, for example, rather than one for sole use). For these teacher educators, what is usually part of the academic's workload (teaching, and maintaining the good relationships necessary for teaching) has become intensified to the extent that it is a defining characteristic.

These teacher educators were also required to be flexible, adaptable and resilient, almost infinitely capable of dealing with contractual complexity. As regulations and bureaucracy changes, they were expected to respond immediately. As income streams diversify, they were expected to take on additional teaching, with the work associated with Teach First (the UK partner of Teach for America), for example, added to an existing workload of undergraduate and graduate-level teaching. Moreover, they can even be expected to go beyond their own areas of subject and phase expertise with one of our sample, Gould, a secondary English specialist, required to teach primary Science on her institution's Teach First programme. This hypothetically endless flexibility and adaptability was a key characteristic of the proletariat for Marx – a disciplined class of potentially skilled workers but with built-in redundancy (c.f. Harvey 2010: 318). For the teacher educators in our sample, proletarianisation has put them at the sharp end of cuts to budgets as they take on more teaching and *relationship maintenance* on new courses, as they cover for colleagues who had retired or taken voluntary severance and, in one case, as their labour was sold to another university in the same town to run the same course there.

What proletarianisation means, then, for the teacher educators in our sample is that their expertise is unacknowledged and devalued - unc capitalised within the political economy of Education as a discipline - and underexploited in the education of teachers.

### **5.3 The consequences of proletarianisation**

It is not merely sentimental to comment on the consequences of proletarianisation for teacher educators. A lack of a sense of one's future and a denial of one's agency – at the same time as others are seen to accumulate the capital required for institutional recognition and advancement – is not a basis for meaningful work, even when aspects of a job are said to be enjoyable. The fact that the proletarianised teacher educator



has office space and, sometimes, a car and, occasionally, the flexibility to go to the dentist during the day, should not detract from an analysis of their labour within the social relations of academic capitalism. As Horner (2000) points out, we should not confuse:

... a degree of apparent freedom in concrete labour practices with freedom from the extraction of exchange value from those practices, ignoring the larger social location and organisation of scholarly labour. (p. 5)

We are not claiming that any of the teacher educators in our sample were labouring under a false consciousness but it is not adequate simply to accept that because they said they enjoyed aspects of their work the current situation is satisfactory. The consequences of proletarianisation are wider than the individual teacher educator; they are cultural and systemic. We believe that our research points to these potential consequences in terms of how school teachers and teaching are produced, discursively and materially. In Marxian terms, proletarianised teacher educators are likely to develop proletarianised teachers of the kind that Ball (1988) and others identified nearly 30 years ago.

For example, the teacher educators in our sample had deep professional knowledge and expertise; we can speculate that this was often the basis on which they were appointed. It is reasonable to speculate that people like this could have a much stronger impact on the development of teaching and learning in schools than is currently the case where their labour was mainly directed at sustaining the parallel operation of separate school and HE activity systems, arbitrating and counselling when smooth operation is disrupted, and writing this up as quality assurance. *Relationship maintenance* may be necessary work but it is not necessarily academic work. Indeed, it may be the sort of domestic labour that schools themselves can do or that may not be as necessary if schools take on greater responsibilities for initial teacher education. The professional knowledge and expertise among the teacher educators in our sample seems under-exploited and uncaptialised.

It also seems reasonable to suggest that teacher educators like those in our sample have great potential to engage in research that has genuine impact on professional practice, research in which teachers and student

teachers might be genuine collaborators. The potential of the teacher educators in our sample to engage in practice-developing research that might also improve our theories of practice was also unrealised. Therefore, our argument concerning the consequences of the proletarianisation of teacher educators has two claims: first, school improvement is not being promoted and supported as effectively as it might be; second, the same is true of opportunities for educational research that is motivated by educational interests and that has a real chance of impact on schooling (c.f. First author 2012). The consequences are therefore in two directions - for schools and for HE - but perhaps it is for HE to take the lead in transforming current conditions, especially given its residual status and reach.

In 1997, Rhoades and Slaughter proposed new forms of 'hybrid' organisation and activity in HE that might mitigate the effects of the academic capitalism with which they were concerned:

In our view, if faculty are to regain some influence over their work lives and workplaces, they must move beyond the ideological position of being independent professionals and connect their work and their professional ideology to the interests of the immediate communities and broader publics which they serve. (p. 24)

There is an argument about realigning the motives of academic workers and the objects of academic work to produce knowledge that has value for more than the individual academic capitalist. Burawoy (2011) has made a similar argument in response to the recent crisis of public universities. These are arguments applicable to every academic worker in the discipline of Education and not just teacher educators (c.f. First author in press, Zeichner et al 2012). Teacher educators are not 'a problem', as our participants often heard within their own institutions; the problem is the system. Any progress towards a solution will involve system leadership. In our view, Harvey (2010), in his commentary on Marx's *Capital* asks the right question: 'to what degree do our ordinary employments corrupt the courage of our minds?' (p. 187).

## **6. CONCLUSION**

It is something of a cliché to conclude that further research is required but we believe that, for teacher education, the need is urgent. In particular, research is needed that addresses the materiality of academic

work in Education and teacher education in particular. It is surely time to extend our discussions of educational research as a purely abstract phenomenon with an analysis of academic work in the Education discipline sensitive to the specific material social circumstances. What Debord (1977) described as the ‘spectacle’ of capitalist accumulation – embodied in the figure of the ‘star’ or celebrity researcher – does not necessarily have meaning outside those individuals’ economic rewards and their institutions’ reputations and marketing. The socially transformative, knowledge-creating functions of public HE institutions exist within an entirely different set of social relations and we believe that the tensions between spectacular images of research productivity and the public and potentially democratising functions of HE will become even starker as current teacher education experiments in the US and England develop. So, does HE take the money, get teacher educators to maintain some difficult relationships, quality assure and accredit student teachers, allowing an ever smaller class of ‘researchers’ to accumulate academic capital? Or does it reconsider its purposes, integrate its activities *and* workers and seek to make a difference to practice and to research on terms that are recognisable to the profession and the wider publics? The leaders who will be forced to confront such stark questions in the years ahead will certainly need courageous minds.

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