A New Teaching School Logic:

The Interplay between Teaching Schools, Portal Tasks and Resident Teaching Consultants

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Introduction

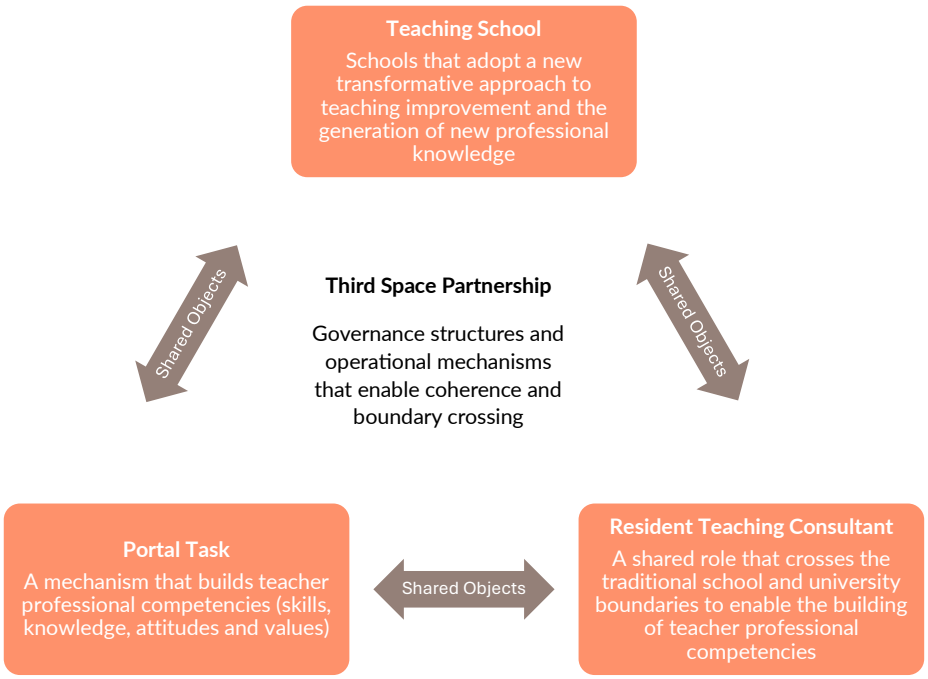
This paper outlines three mechanisms necessary to reimagine teacher education in Australia that, together, inform the Teaching School Model. The paper first reframes the Teaching School – a school–university partnership that is becoming ubiquitous in discussions about initial teacher education (ITE). We provide a rethink of the Teaching School concept, extending beyond the current, widespread approach in Australia of a convenient school–university partnership arrangement that is intended to deliver a 'better' practicum experience. Instead, our Teaching School Model presents a potent vehicle for teaching improvement and transformation.

The concept of the Teaching School first appears in the literature surrounding the Bachelor of Learning Management, which ran between 2000 and 2009 at Central Queensland University (Knight et al., 2013; Smith et al., 2003; Turner, 2006; Turner & Lynch, 2006). We argue that this iteration has not fulfilled its potential to transform the teaching profession. Focusing solely on ITE, the original Teaching School model has been constrained by the increasing pressures of teacher supply and the constraints of prevailing schooling and university paradigms. We contend that the concept of the Teaching School has been reduced to merely an enhanced professional experience – an approach that only presents further minor modifications to an archaic ITE model.

The transformative promise of the Teaching School has not been realised due to it being but one in a necessary triad of elements that includes a new approach to building the required competencies of the teaching profession called the 'Portal Task', and newly designed shared role that crosses the tradition boundaries of the school and the university known as 'The Resident Teaching Consultant'. We contend that by integrating new engagement mechanisms into teacher education through designated Teaching Schools, we can bridge the frequently discussed theory–practice divide in ITE programs.

To clarify our Teaching School approach, we begin by explaining 'the Third Space'. This refers to a school–university partnership arrangement that has extensively informed recent research surrounding the disjuncture between university coursework and field experiences and serves as a foundational rationale for the Teaching School. We then introduce the other two elements of the proposed triad: the Portal Task and the Resident Teaching Consultant. In addition, we outline the roles of 'shared objects' – mechanisms that facilitate the necessary boundary crossing in partnerships. We present the model in *Figure 1*.

Figure 1: The Triad of Teaching School Model Elements



The Third Space

Zeichner (2010) introduces the concept of the Third Space in ITE as a school–university partnership arrangement connecting the different knowledge communities of schools and the university, thus bridging the theory–practice divide, especially during the professional experience component of ITE programs. The concept of Third Space originates in Homi Bhabha's work on post-colonial culture, knowledge, and identity. According to Bhabha (1994), the First Space refers to indigenous cultural knowledge and identity, whilst the Second Space refers to the coloniser's imposed knowledge, culture and structure. In this context, the colonised either (1) relinquish their identity and assimilate to that of the coloniser or (2) distance themselves from the coloniser and position themselves as cultural others.

The concept of the Third Space refers to the point at which the First Space and the Second Space overlap, representing a hybrid space where new knowledge, culture and identity emerge, belonging to neither the First Space nor the Second Space. This conceptualisation of the hybrid in-between space provides a useful lens to understand the tension of identity, roles, and knowledge communities between teacher educators, ITE students, and mentor teachers in ITE. According to Zeichner (2010), positioning the different stakeholders involved in ITE professional experience in the Third Space provides conceptual tools to reject the binaries of academic and practitioner knowledge – the theory and practice components –

while supporting the integration of competing discourses in a both/and perspective rather than maintaining an either/or perspective. In the Third Space, teacher educators, mentor teachers, and academic and practitioner knowledge are brought together in a transformative environment, creating unique learning opportunities for ITE students and enabling the generation of new knowledge. The Third Space, therefore, encourages the development of a more egalitarian status for all those involved than the traditional school–university partnership model.

Drawing from cultural historical activity theory (Engeström, 2001), Zeichner et al. (2015) suggest two key elements of the Third Space arrangement: horizontal expertise and boundary zones. Originally developed by Engestrom and colleagues in their works on healthcare networks and manufacturing partnerships, horizontal expertise emerges in contexts where professionals working in multi-organisational terrains share the same goals and values but are afforded or constrained by different tools, rules, and patterns of interaction in their own settings. To achieve common goals, professionals must move between systems and contexts to exchange domain-specific expertise and combine resources, norms, and expertise in their respective settings to create new hybrid solutions (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2007). Similarly, in ITE, universities and schools share the purpose of preparing teachers, but each has its own values, identities, and tools.

Upon entering the practicum, teacher educators, ITE students, and school mentor teachers bring different sets of knowledge, skills, and expertise, which are often in tension and thus potentially create hierarchical forms of knowledge dissemination. Lessening this hierarchical relationship among participants and fostering horizontal forms of knowledge requires individuals to cross organisational boundaries and work with others to create new solutions to their shared problems. Through this boundary-crossing process, individuals 'enrich and expand their practices through working together to reorganise relations and coordinate their works' (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2007, p.39). Horizontal expertise, therefore, respects the unique knowledge brought into the practicum by different stakeholders and treats this knowledge as equal, relevant and important (Zeichner et al., 2015). Central to the emergence of horizontal expertise is the concept of boundary zones.

Boundaries can be understood as sociocultural differences that lead to discontinuity in actions and communication, just as how heterogeneity in cultural values, identities, and knowledge among different activity systems of schools, universities and communities make it difficult for ITE students to connect university coursework and school experience (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011). According to Max (2010), boundary zones refer to the 'space where

elements from two activity systems enter into contact' (p.216). It is not merely a space that individuals from different systems visit, but a fluctuating and flexible space that affords continuing joint work and collaboration among schools and universities (Zeichner et al., 2015). Two concepts are critical to establishing and maintaining continuity in actions and communication in the boundary zones: boundary-crossing and boundary objects (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011).

Boundary crossing refers to a person's transition and navigation across systems, while boundary objects refer to the artifacts that enable the crossing. In this context, teacher educators, ITE students, and school mentors are considered boundary brokers who play critical roles in the 'processes of translation, coordination, and alignment between perspectives' (Wenger, 1998), and who have the necessary skills and knowledge to build productive relationships or to facilitate the translation of knowledge from one group to another (Kimble et al., 2010; Loughland & Nguyen, 2018). Boundary objects allow communication across different systems, and include 'technologies, … drawings, set of rules, research projects or documents' (Kimble et al., 2010, p.441). These objects must be flexible and feasible to accommodate the different needs of different people from various systems (Loughland & Nguyen, 2018).

In general, the Third Space is a useful concept in establishing a school–university partnership arrangement that favours the collaboration and co-construction of knowledge for productive ITE student learning. However, how to operationalise the rather vague and utopian concept of Third Space and how to address the challenges arising from its implementation remain a continuing scholarly endeavour (Daza et al., 2021). In a recent review of 36 studies on the Third Space partnerships since the introduction of the concept in ITE by Zeichner (2010), Daza et al. (2021) highlight numerous tensions that exist in the Third Space arrangements across contexts. These tensions range from the struggles of power, the juxtaposition of discourses, and the negotiation of whose knowledge matters to the shifting of identities and institutional and personal boundary crossing. Reconciling the tensions in the Third Space requires continuous effort from all stakeholders to negotiate and create partnerships that involve organisational structures, the co-construction of knowledge for teaching, and navigating challenges to support future teachers.

Ultimately, the goal of these partnerships is to create a shared sense of 'mission' or 'purpose' and set of goals, fostering a seamless interface where both school and university staff focus on student outcomes, distinct from the cultures of the partnering organisations (Daza et al., 2021). This alignment and collaboration are essential for enhancing ITE students' educational

experiences and effectively bridging the theory–practice divide for which teacher education programs have long been criticised (Green et al., 2020).

Drawing on the concept of Third Space and the cultural historical activity theory outlined above, we introduce the concept of the Teaching School as a collaborative school–university partnership arrangement for the productive placement of ITE students in their professional experience of ITE.

The Teaching School Model

As discussed in previous sections, the premise of a Third Space in teacher education is a close and focused partnership between universities and schools. This strategic partnership merges the operating logic of both institutions into a relationship that seeks alignment and a mutually agreed agenda (Arhar et al., 2013; Farrell, 2023). The concept of the Third Space presupposes that each party will have an equal yet different contribution to make (Lynch, 2012), but it primarily represents a joining of forces and a transformation of how each goes about the business of creating a more effective and empowered education system. This type of arrangement can be understood as one of governance, and a community of practice (CoP), that expands its focus to include collaborative planning and the sharing of resources (Farrell, 2023; Smith, 2016). It also requires the blurring of boundaries between researchers (university) and teachers (school) through engagement in 'teaching centric applied research' (Arhar et al., 2013). At the practical level of teacher preparation, this Third Space manifests as the *Teaching School* in our proposed model (Lynch, 2012; Turner, 2006; Turner & Lynch, 2006).

This notion of a Teaching School is analogous to the 'teaching hospital' in medicine, where the collective capacities and endeavours of a school and a university are harnessed through a formal partnership that creates a sophisticated and enduring CoP focused on teacher preparation and teaching improvement (Lynch, 2012; Turner & Lynch, 2006). In the medical model, professors and clinicians work side-by-side as the constituents of a multi-dimensional organisation sharply focused on practice excellence, improvement, and research. The same logic applies to the Teaching School. It is a new environment in which teachers are prepared for the profession, current teachers deepen their expertise and specialist knowledge through professional learning, and education research is undertaken to advance the profession.

With the teaching hospital construct in mind, the Teaching School also points to the need for a stratified teaching workforce. This implies recognition for individual teachers' increasing expertise and specialist knowledge, including relieving them from lower-level bureaucratic

and administrative tasks to better use their expert knowledge for school improvement. This would see ITE students working with teachers – who are acknowledged for their levels of specialist knowledge and increasing levels of expertise – university academics and others involved in ensuring learning outcomes for students (e.g. paraprofessionals, education advisors, health professionals, etc.) in a context of interrelated teaching, learning and evidence-based research. This type of Third Space arrangement demands an established, mutually agreed and beneficial agenda.

The Portal Task

The concept of the Portal Task is a second key component of the Teaching School model. The Portal Task can be understood as a set of Third Space located 'performance' or 'project-based tasks' (la Velle, 2019; Lynch, 2012; Setlhomo, 2016; Smith & Lynch, 2010). These multi-dimensional tasks involve teacher educators, teacher mentors, and ITE students working together in a school setting to meet specific outcomes related to teacher education. These activities embody the principles of real-life teaching, collaboration, mentoring, problem solving and applied action research; all prefigured towards transforming teaching, schooling and university work for the changing world in which 'education' is now located.

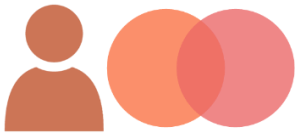
For the ITE student, a Portal Task represents a specific set of collaboratively developed teaching related activities with a learning sequence logic and increasing sophistication (Lynch, 2012). Portal Tasks are designed to provide genuine learning experiences and give ITE students opportunities to practice the 'real work' of teaching by demonstrating the application and production of knowledge, rather than the sole recognition and reproduction of correct answers (Lynch, 2012). Portal Tasking is a learner-mediated partnership based on the pursuit of real-time projects, formulated collaboratively by the ITE student, the university and the Teaching School. Accordingly, Portal Tasks require all participants to focus their endeavours (i.e. the development of courseware, assessment tasks and the associated coaching, mentoring and feedback regimes) into a task that aligns with the objectives and interests of each party, as well as the required learning outcomes of the teacher education program. The latter includes the Teaching School as it is the organisational arrangement that creates the conditions for Portal Tasks to occur and be effective.

On a parallel plane, the Portal Task represents an opportunity for mutually beneficial outcomes for all involved in teacher education. Put simply, when mentor teachers, ITE students, Resident Teaching Consultants and university academics engage in a set of strategically created Portal Tasks, the capacities of all are enhanced and new knowledge is

created. In effect, the Portal Task is not merely part of an improved professional experience for the ITE student, but rather is a multi-dimensional arena where all participants learn and share their skills, acting as a catalyst for further research and learning.

We propose a third component of the Teaching School model based on our thorough review of the pertinent literature: shared roles. We provide an elaboration in subsequent sections.

The Resident Teaching Consultant



The importance of shared roles highlighted in the literature resulted in the creation of the Resident Teaching Consultant as the third element of the Teaching School model. There is also a subsequent re-conceptualisation of the role of mentor teacher, also known as supervising teacher, in the ITE literature. This will be explained in a future paper that explores the notion of a stratified teacher workforce more deeply.

First, some context for this new role. The traditional teaching practicum represents a highly contested space where teacher educators, ITE students, and mentor teachers constantly negotiate their roles, responsibilities, and identities. Teacher educators' roles include introducing ITE students to foundational teaching and learning theories through coursework as well as pursuing new knowledge through research. This new knowledge, however, is governed by university reward systems that prioritise publication in journals, rendering this research largely inaccessible to teachers.

Mentor teachers, on the other hand, are experts in their school CoPs and champion the value of practical teaching experience (Trepper et al., 2023). During the practicum, they help socialise ITE students into the 'messy world of teaching where multiple demands and ways of thinking are part of the landscape' (Valencia et al., 2009, p. 320). However, mentor teachers are not practiced consumers of research, mainly due to the demanding nature of their work environments, the high expectations upon them and the significant rates of change that make being informed about emerging research exceedingly challenging. Furthermore, contemporary research is not regularly used in practice and is less preferred than other evidence, including student data, education system policy and curriculum documents (Walsh et al., 2022). Colleagues, school leaders and professional learning networks are considered more accessible sources of research, which teachers typically engage with in their own time (Walsh et al., 2022). These heterogeneities in the knowledge, routine practices, and ways of thinking between universities and schools create the so-called 'competing centres of gravity' in teacher education (Smagorinsky et al., 2013). ITE students navigate these competing centres,

often serving as the sole mediators between distinct competing knowledge sources, and are often tasked with reconciling the conflicting goals of both systems (Trepper et al., 2023).

Several attempts have been made to bring all stakeholders together in a shared space to co-construct learning opportunities for ITE students (Simons et al., 2020; Trepper et al., 2023). When success is reported, it is underpinned by stakeholders' willingness and desire to co-construct new roles, cross organisational and epistemological boundaries, and contribute to new ways of practice (Grudnoff et al., 2017). These transformative endeavours create hybrid roles within the Third Space, generating new knowledge and creating valuable learning opportunities for ITE students that would otherwise be difficult to acquire.

Furthermore, participating in school–university partnerships that involve hybrid roles benefit university and school practitioners, as well as ITE students (Trepper et al., 2023). Through co-designing, co-teaching, and co-supervising, teacher educators gain access to mentor teachers' practical classroom knowledge. This exposure allows them to experiment with how tasks might unfold in practice, moving beyond their traditional role as bestowers of knowledge. Mentor teachers also benefit from working across both university and school settings, where they assume the instructional authority normally reserved for university teachers and are able to support ITE students in bridging the theory–practice divide. Sharing roles also allows mentor teachers, ITE students, and teacher educators to appreciate each other's mindsets and gain a richer understanding of the demands of teaching.

As previously explained, the Portal Task links the campus coursework and the professional experience components of ITE programs. To maintain coherence across the ITE program and create meaningful learning opportunities for ITE students, the design, implementation, and assessment of the Portal Task should follow the principle of shared roles. Research indicates when university faculties design assessment tasks and leave mentor teachers and ITE students to navigate the implementation themselves, both program coherence and stakeholder communication is jeopardised due to the different expectations, values, and identities inherent in each setting (Allen, 2011). By engaging all stakeholders in the co-design process, this partnership arrangement fosters the shared understanding and equal status among participants necessary for developing horizontal expertise. It also establishes the shared expectations and open communication necessary for successful boundary-crossing.

Thus, our Teaching School Model applies the principle of shared roles by creating a new in-school educational role, namely Resident Teaching Consultants (RTCs). RTCs can be members of the university faculty embedded in the Teaching School or existing members of the school

staff affiliated with the university. Crucially, they must operate with insight and ease across both environments and 'belong' to each. RTCs work collaboratively and maintain consistent communication throughout the design, implementation, and assessment of the Portal Task to support ITE student learning. In addition, RTCs provide a range of learning opportunities to ITE students, including sessions similar to on-campus tutorials and provide 'just in time learning to contextualise and strengthen on-campus work and individual attention through coaching and mentoring' (Turner, 2011, p. 50). In other words, RTCs can be considered 'a conduit between the university program and the activity of the Teaching School' (Knight et al., 2013), making them the most important relational element of the partnership.

Shared Objects

The principle of shared objects in our Teaching School Model is based on the concept of boundary objects discussed in Engeström's (2001) cultural historical activity theory. Shared objects refer to materials and resources, either embodying physical entities or representations of ideas, which act as a 'bridge between theory and practice' (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011, p. 133). Shared objects serve as 'a focal point around which connections can be made across settings and with which people can organise their work within their respective settings' (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2007, p. 139), thereby facilitating cross-organisation communication between all stakeholders. To effectively facilitate boundary-crossing and foster horizontal expertise, shared objects need to be adaptable enough to address local demands and constraints, but structured enough to maintain shared identities (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2007). Although shared objects might be existing materials or artefacts located in each individual setting, Anagnostopoulos et al. (2007) argue that it is the co-creation of shared objects rather than the utilisation of existing ones that foster the mutual engagement, negotiations, and hybridisation conducive to horizontal expertise. The co-creation of Portal Tasks is an example of shared objects that enable these outcomes.

Previous studies have examined various types of boundary objects that enable the boundary-crossing process and the creation of horizontal expertise in the Third Space. For example, Anagnostopoulos et al. (2007) describe a process through which teacher educators and teacher mentors co-construct a performance-based rubric to help ITE students build their professionalpractice. This co-construction process initiates three key processes central to the production of horizontal expertise. First, the exchange of tools: both parties share resources and materials from their own settings. Secondly, the negotiation of social languages: the university's abstract vocabulary and the school's situated language coexist within the rubric,

enhancing the practices of teachers in both environments. Third, argumentation: this involves debating the purpose of discussions and the critical evaluation of the discussion rubric to refine its conceptions.

Salient among the case studies reviewed above is the use of shared objects to facilitate discussions and collaboration among teacher educators, ITE students, and mentor teachers. This aims to foster shared understanding, consistent communication, clear expectations and purposes, and stronger relationships – all of which are essential to the creation of horizontal expertise. Zeichner et al. (2015) observed that simply gathering all stakeholders within the same physical space does not necessarily alter how knowledge is generated and disseminated horizontally in the Third Space. Similarly, Allen (2011) cautions that even if tasks are carefully designed with clear expectations and requirements, the implementation process can be problematic without constant communication between university and school staff as well as a concerted effort to bring each other's expertise, expectations, and input into the co-design process. The concept of shared objects facilitates the coordination of cross-institutional ideas, knowledge, and practice exchange, effectively reducing the hierarchical dynamics typical of traditional school–university partnerships. Thus, the use of a technological platform to facilitate communication is both a required and beneficial shared object in the Teaching School Model that assists in overcoming geographical boundaries that may exist between Teaching Schools, and between Teaching Schools and the university.

In our Teaching School model, the Portal Task incorporates resources that exemplify the principle of shared objects. An example of this is the pedagogical framework known as the '8 Learning Management Questions' (8LMQs) (Smith and Lynch, 2006; Lynch and Smith, 2011). These sequential and interrelated questions identify essential elements of successful teaching. Once answered, they provide direction for developing, assessing and evaluating the Portal Task. In effect, this question-based framework guides ITE students in understanding the critical elements and practical application of teaching knowledge necessary for successful teaching. For the RTC, each question embodies both the theoretical and practical aspects of the 'learning to teach curriculum'. Shaped by the Third Space collaboration, these questions define the essential professional teaching knowledge taught to ITE students as well as the type and scope of decision making required for successful teaching.

Figure 3: The 8 Learning Management Questions (Lynch and Smith, 2006)

1. What have my students achieved to date?
2. What do I aim to achieve in my students?

3. How do my students best learn?
4. What Resources do I have at my disposal?
5. What are my teaching strategies?
6. Who will do what to support the teaching strategy?
7. How will I check that students have achieved the defined learning outcomes?
8. How will I report student progress?

To action a Portal Task and thus enact the shared object of the 8LMQs, university staff and RTCs co-construct a task description with three considerations. The first is a set of specific learning outcomes that the ITE student and their associated CoP must focus on for each Portal Task. Second, the staging of the Portal Task must fit the existing teaching environment, meaning mentor teachers do not need to reorganise their classrooms to meet the needs of ITE students. Third, is the creation of an evaluation rubric to outline the evidence that will be collected to demonstrate achievement of the defined learning outcomes.

For ITE students, the Portal Task is not intended to be another type of summative assessment task, but instead is a 'teaching, learning and research centre' designed to create and then scaffold opportunities for ITE students to become 'teaching ready' graduates. Therefore, the evaluation of ITE students' performance on the tasks should not be confined to the demonstration of knowledge acquired on campus and the reproduction of correct answers. Instead, it should provide ITE students with opportunities to actually practice and then demonstrate their teaching competency and engage in reflective practices and critical evaluation of their own teaching, enabling them to connect theories and practices. To serve this assessment for learning purpose, the rubric should be co-constructed by RTCs based on shared understanding of common standards and with a clear structure for a mentoring-coaching-feedback regime. In other words, the rubric can serve as the focal point around which feedback on ITE students is discussed, mentoring conversations take place, and coaching sessions are provided. In all these conversations, RTCs and ITE students play equal roles in sharing knowledge and negotiating meaning. Input from all parties is equally valued.

Conclusion

In summary, the implementation of three elements is necessary for the Teaching School Model to achieve a genuine transformation of teacher education. In this model, the Teaching School becomes the host of learning for both ITE students and the teachers who work within it.

The ‘shared role’ of the Resident Teaching Consultant must also be developed and adopted. This includes the building of the RTC’s competencies (knowledge, skills, attitude and values) (Hannon, 2024) to facilitate the boundary crossing necessary in Third Space partnerships, and to allow the level of innovation necessary to challenge the status quo of schooling and teacher education. In addition, once the RTC is in place, the competencies of mentor teachers should also be developed.

Finally, the Portal Tasks are co-constructed. These are the principal ‘shared’ objects in the Teaching School Model and their descriptors communicate task expectations and requirements, integrating input from all parties and providing the coherence between content learnt at university and implemented at school.

A range of other ‘shared objects’ is necessary. For example, protocols related to how communication and discussion should be structured to allow for regular contact, continuing negotiations, and timely feedback. These help alleviate the pitfalls associated with task implementation, as reported in Allen (2011), where guidelines were produced by university staff but never engaged by school teachers given the tight schedule and heavy workload imposed on them. A technological platform would be adopted for such communication.

To extract the full transformational potential from any of the multitude of versions of the Teaching School in teacher education today, additional mechanisms are necessary. The Teaching School Model theorises these as the Portal Task and Resident Teaching Consultant.

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