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Empowering international trainee teacher identity through authentic practice-based research

How a student-centred teacher training curriculum enhances the retention and career progression of international distance learning students

Dionne Ross Dr Elizabeth Hidson Simon Sheard

University of Sunderland

Source: Freepik

Professional Learning | Personal Academic Tutors | Practitioner Research

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The **international** (overseas) ITE context

25,000 schools in total in the UK → half a million teachers → 9 million pupils

Over 13,180 English-medium international schools → 571,228 teaching staff → 5.8 million pupils

Around 6481 British-oriented international schools → 282,600 staff → 2.9 million pupils

Statistics from GOV.UK and ISC Research (2022)

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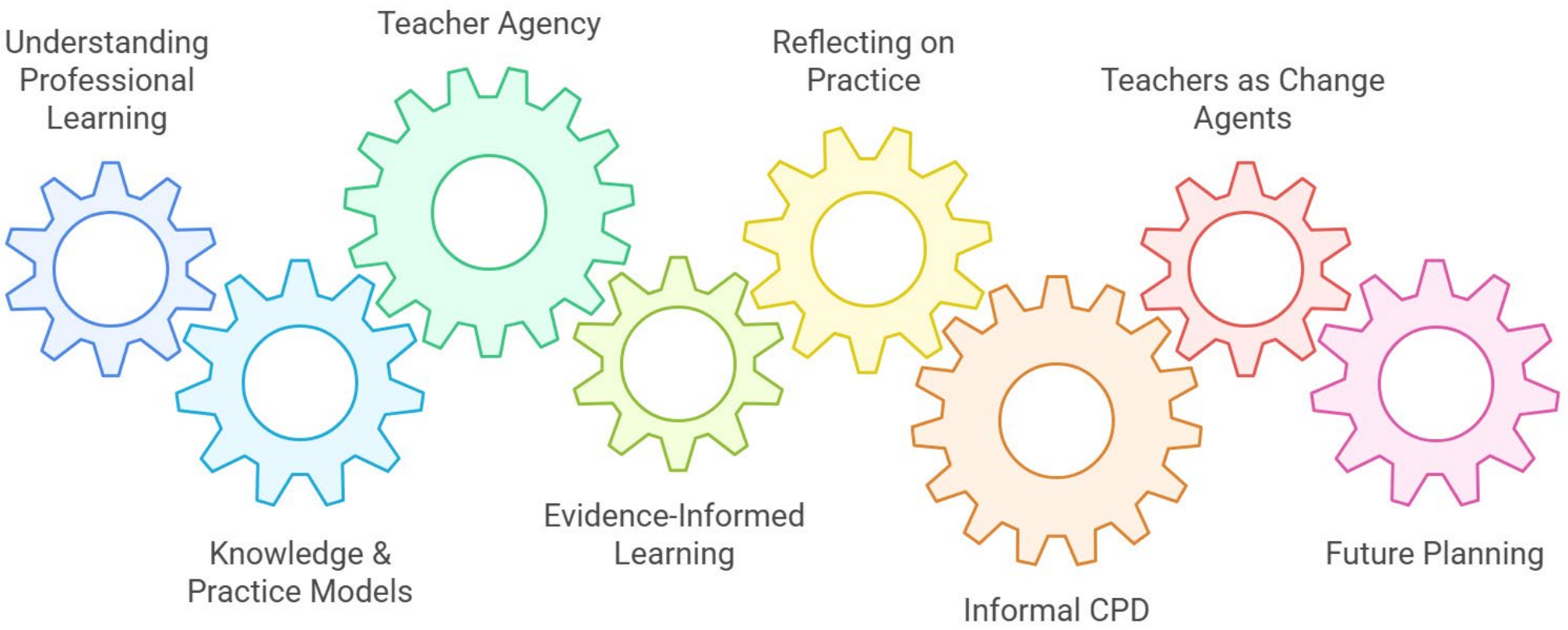
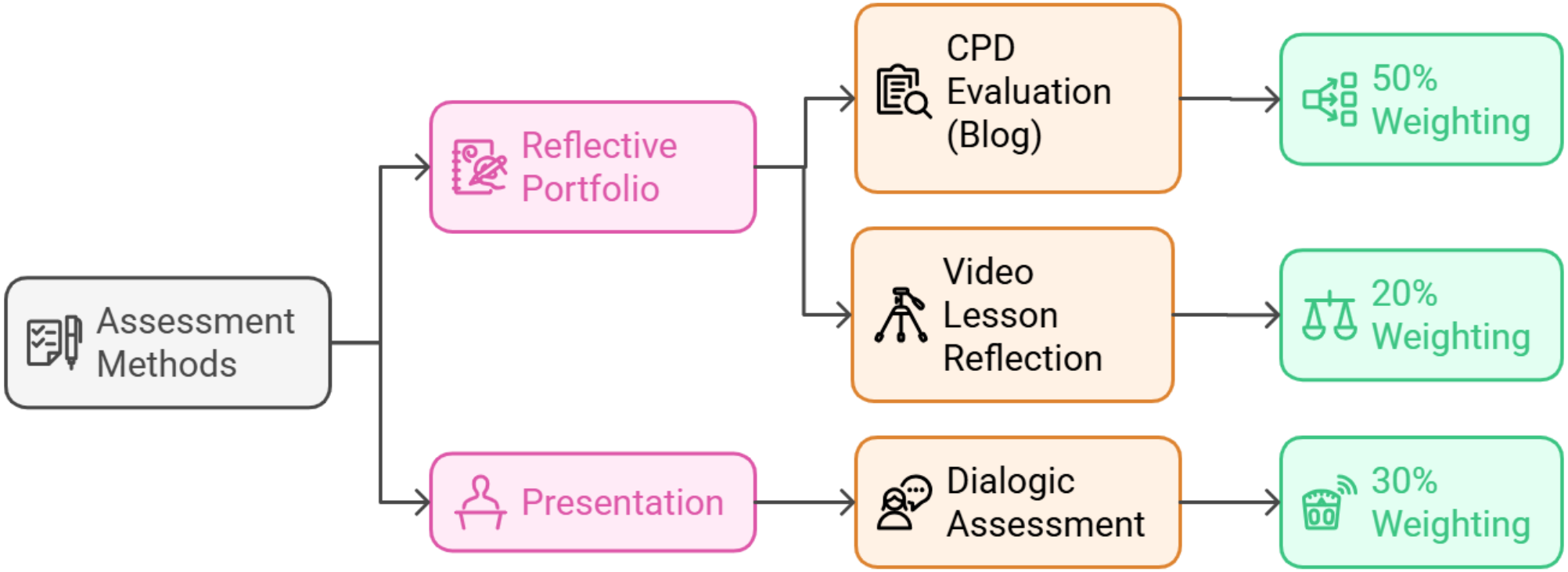
Learning about professional learning



Situated modes of assessment



No matter how great an idea is in principle,

“what really matters is how it manifests itself in the day–to–day work of people in schools”

(Sharples et al., 2019, p. 3)

https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/guidance-reports/implementation

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Engaging with research

- The school sector is geared towards developing a **research-rich** and **self-improving** educational system predicated on the capacity for teachers to engage with research
- Schools are part of the **solution**, not the **problem**
- **Local** insights and context are vital: situational verification

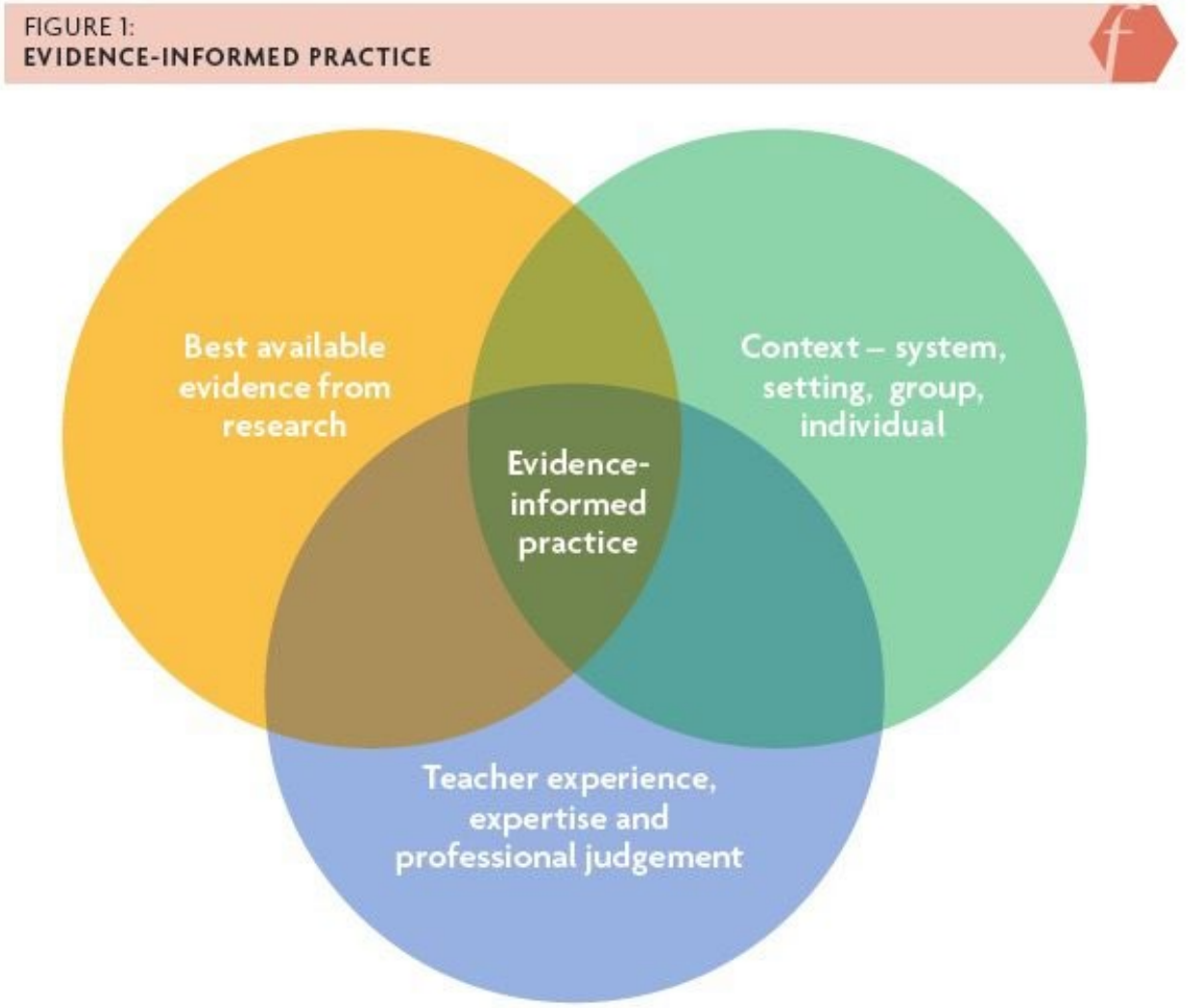


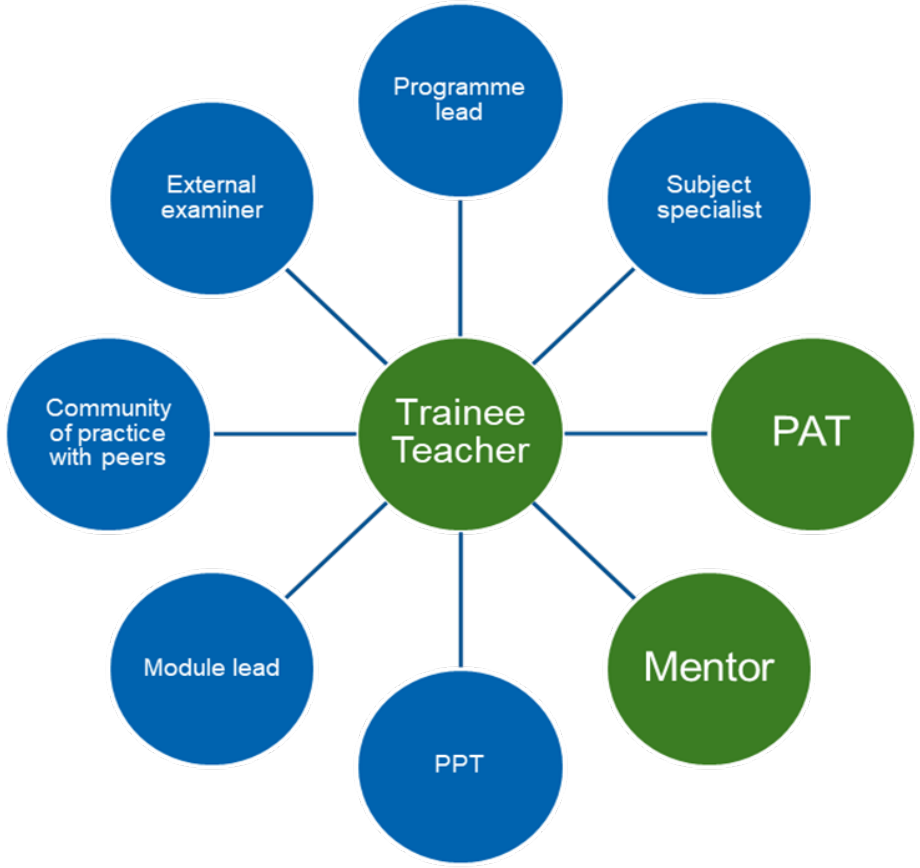
Figure adapted from Scutt (2018)

What is a Personal Academic Tutor?

- …the Personal Tutor becomes a semiotic, a totem (Mathew, D. 2011);

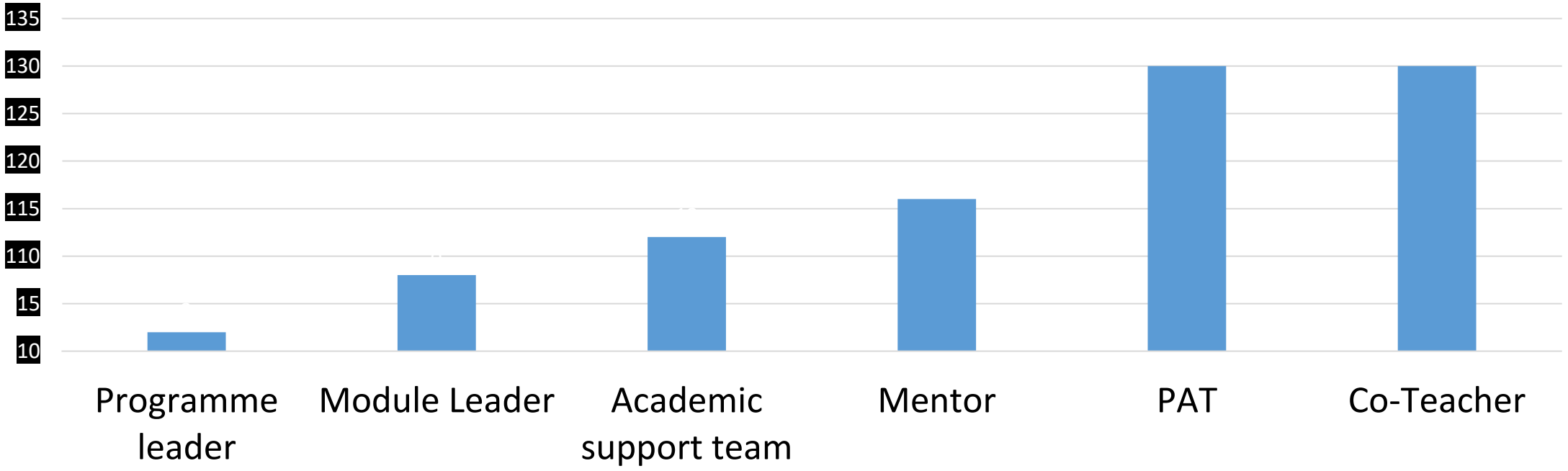
- …presiding over a group of people, disparate not only geographically or in terms of study skills, but in terms of culture, personality, mental health, physical health (Mathew,D. 2012)

Mentoring from all sides



- **Tripartite**
- Support Trainees from the beginning to conclusion of the programme
- Structured development journey which is constantly spiralling knowledge development and applying to practice.
- Personalised approach: lived experience
- Dialogic : shared understanding
- Consistent platform and support for mentors in training
- Framework of consistent feedback to trainees
- Reverse mentorship – Advisory Board – Shaun Pender

Please rate in order of importance (with the first being the most important and the last being the least important) to your completion of the programme the staff who have had most impact on your progress on your PGCE



The understanding and support my PAT, mentor and module leaders have offered are what kept me going!

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Student perceptions of the role of the Personal Academic Tutor PAT

Our aim was to understand how the role of the PAT was *experienced* by students across different modes of study.

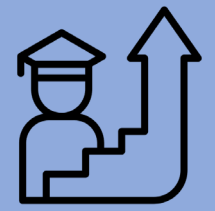
Our objectives were to

- identify areas which best support student retention and success
- reflect upon the sustainability of the role

Survey of 135 students (83 IDL; 52 On campus)

Significant similarities between student groups were,

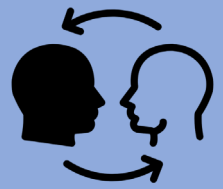
- expectations of PAT prioritised **academic** support over '**personal'** support with 'navigating academic requirements'
- **progression** rated as high priority



Progression defined as,

- Home UG - valued monitoring of personal progress and building confidence
- IDL PG - Networking and Professional connections with career advice.

Key characteristics of a PAT according to students in a range of modes of study,



- Empathy
- Responsiveness
- Understanding
- Knowledge of programme, assessment and curriculum

- The academic **IS** the personal

What are we doing next?

- How can we alleviate 'navigating academic requirement' on the PAT and focus on '**progress**'?
- Explore the difference between **group** and **one to one** dynamic and the value of **personal growth** in an **interactive environment**
- Investigate the limitation of a '*dismissal'* of a 'sense of belonging' from the role of the PAT
- Time allocation ***per student*** is not fully recognised

My PAT was extremely reassuring during all of our interactions. He was able to redirect my struggles in a way that helped me re-evaluate the situation and use it as a way to grow and develop my teaching practice and my written assignments. Communication was very prompt, professional, and involved a holistic approach in that my mental and emotional wellbeing was always considered.

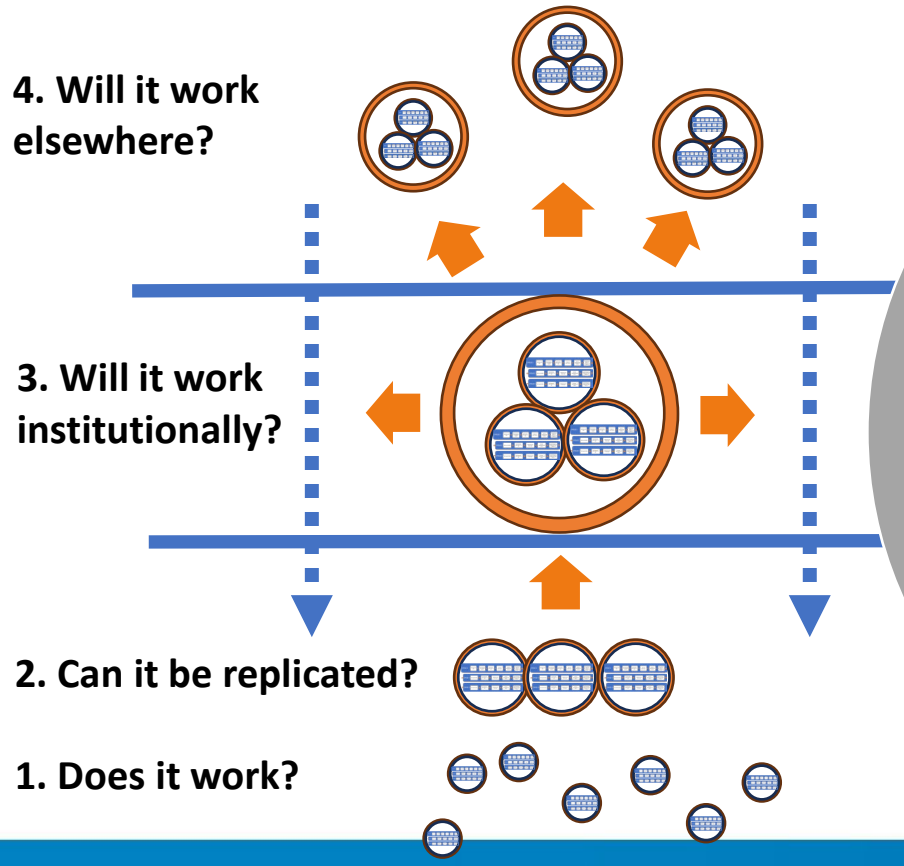
- I would say the PAT played an important role in the completion of this programme. My PAT was all the times available and answering me guiding me all the time. The best thing was the weekly online sessions with the PAT for 1 hour that provided a chance for all to ask questions and take guidance.

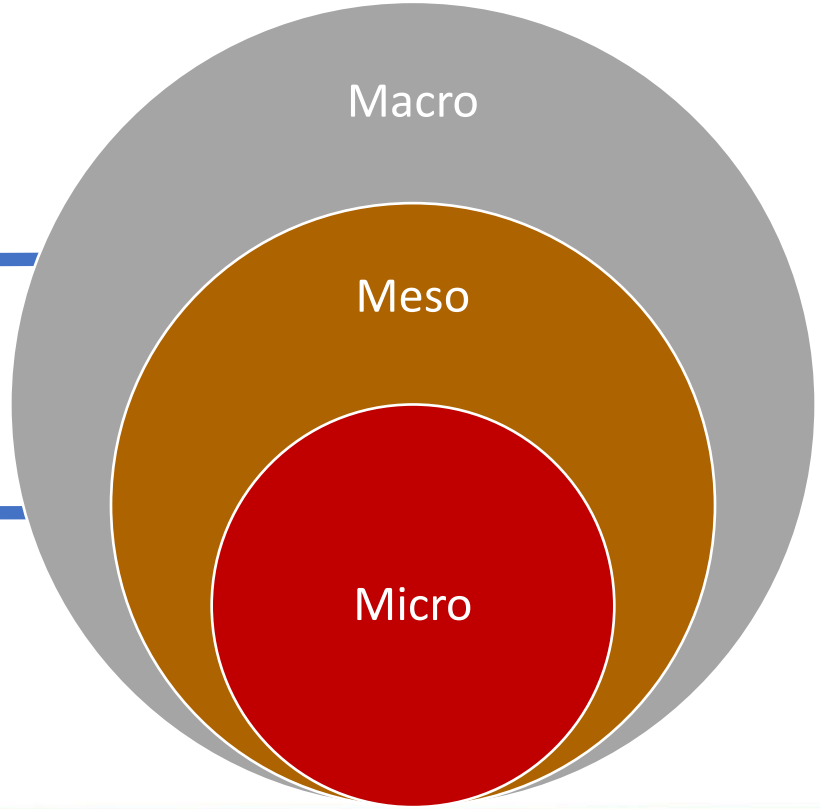
Comments

- "I could not have gotten through the course without the support of my wonderful PAT. Even before I joined the course, they were outstanding in their communication with me, and were always available for weekly catch-ups and one-to-one sessions. They were responsive to emails, and sensitive to the individual issues that each trainee faced. In addition to the practical feedback on assignments, the PAT went above and beyond to lend an ear and to share advice. They really understood each student, and kept moral high in our weekly group meetings, as various trainees faced unique ups and downs throughout the year.

My PAT was absolutely amazing throughout this course. Always supportive and approachable.

Can **situated** practice-led research influence the sector?





- **Macro**
  - Region
  - School group
- **Meso**
  - School
  - Department
- **Micro**
  - Classroom
  - Teacher

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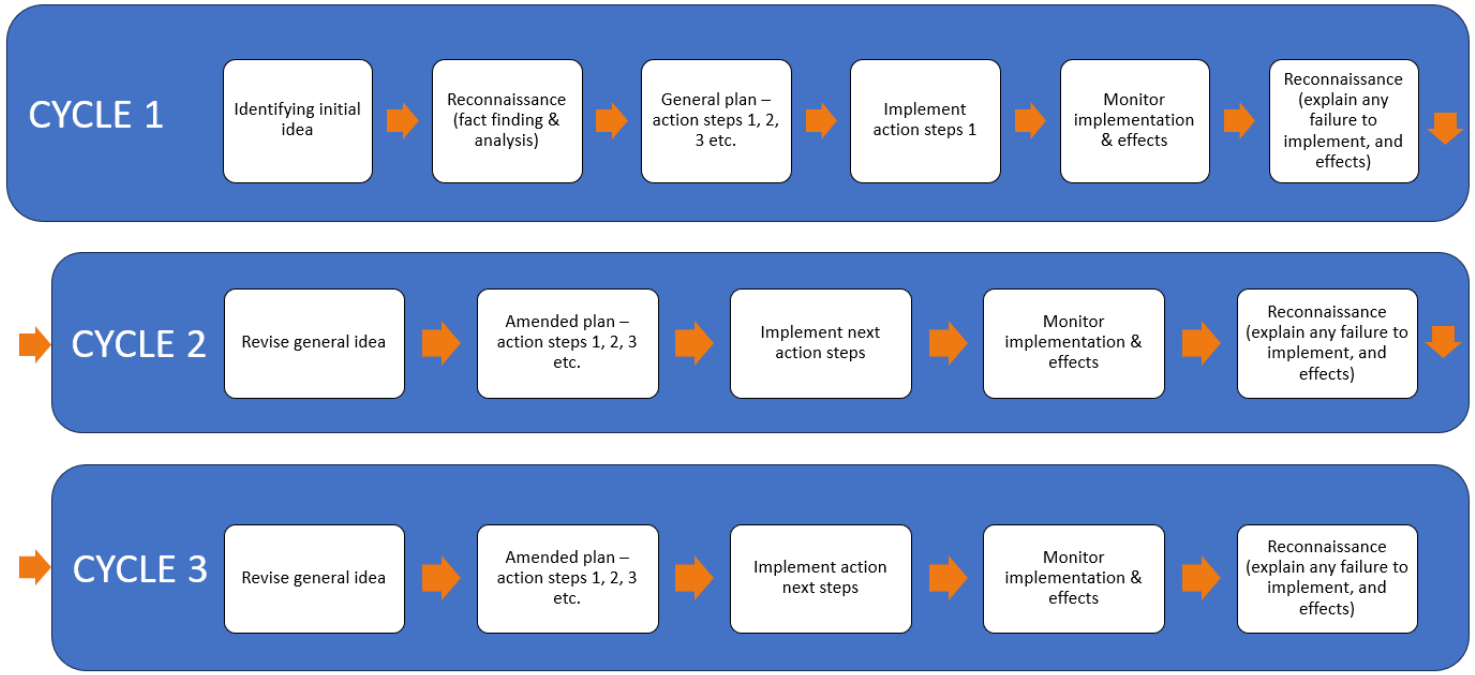
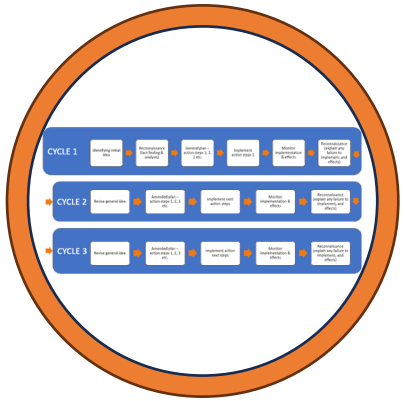
Contextualisation within international teaching placement: **action research**





e.g. English for Chemistry

CHALLENGES - #DistanceNotDistant

1. Our team is proudly and unapologetically **international-facing**
2. We have **multi-cohort** suites of programmes
3. Our students graduate, taking their learning with them – how do we **invest this knowledge** back into our programmes?
4. How do we develop a **community of practice**?
5. How to enhance **student engagement** and build in all the **#DistanceNotDistant** features that we LOVE?

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CALLS, COVID-19, NOTEBOOK

Teaching online research methods online with asynchronous international distance learning students during Covid-19

December 22, 2020

socmediaeditor

By Elizabeth Hidson and Vikki Wynn

Challenges in asynchronous international distance learning pre-Covid

Working on an international distance learning teacher training programme brings multiple challenges, the biggest of which had previously been the asynchronous pattern of teaching and learning for the academic elements. Teaching is based on a systematic instructional design approach adopted by our university and broken down into weekly thematic units to support acquisition, discussion, investigation, collaboration, practice and production to meet learning outcomes. Recorded micro-lectures, learning activities and discussion boards are accessed asynchronously, with face-to-face online group sessions for further consolidation. The assessed teaching practice element of the programme had always been carried out in the host international schools, facilitated by school-based mentors and in-country professional practice tutors.

Developing research-informed practitioners

Our current issue

Our archive

Tweets by @TheIJSRM

TheIJSRM
@TheIJSRM

Want to learn about how @DrHidson and Vikki Wynn kept their international students engaged while teaching research methods online using asynchronous technologies? Then read our latest @TheIJSRM contribution! #distancelearning #teaching #researchmethods ijsrm.org/2020/12/22/tea…

Research-active teacher educators

> The importance of developing research capacity in trainee teachers stems from the expectation that they will become research-informed practitioners who can use evidence to inform decision-making… **Being consumers of research is not enough, however: teachers need to also develop the tools to carry out their own research in school settings.**
>
> ***Hidson & Wynn, 2020***

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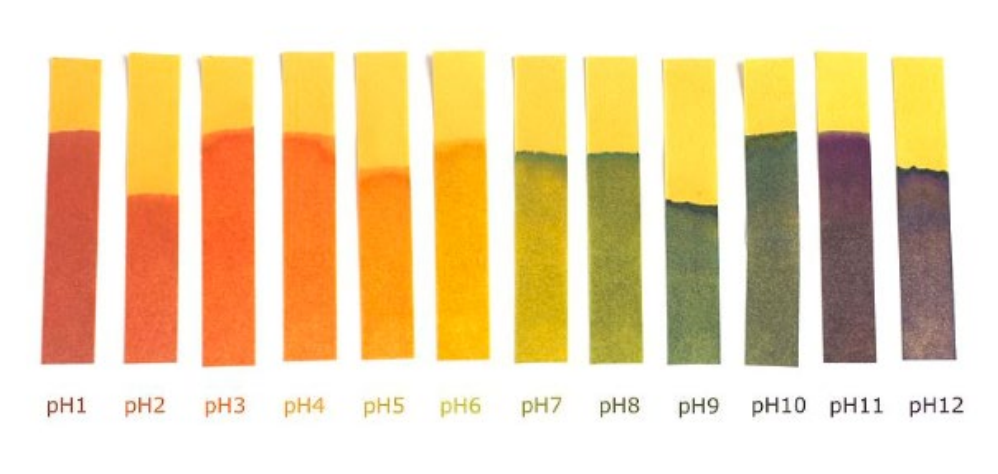
English for Science (translanguaging PAR)



An **indicator** is a chemical that changes colour in acidic, alkaline and neutral solutions.

指示剂 *zhǐshìjì*

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VIDEO-ENHANCED DIALOGIC ASSESSMENT (VEDA)

An assessment process combining video-enhanced lesson observation and feedback, combined with a dialogic interview and assessment of a digital portfolio of evidence.

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Concluding thoughts on the conference theme

- Are we training teachers to read sheet music perfectly, or to create beautiful music that resonates with **their** students?
- Are we preparing teachers for the classrooms they'll actually enter, or idealised classrooms in **our** curriculum?
- We've spent years asking how can we get international teachers to fit our system. How can our system adapt to amplify their **authentic** voices?

Global Perspectives in Teacher Education: Challenging the Standard Education Model

26 Jun 2025

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Questions, comments, insights, suggestions?

(Thanks to Simon for sharing!)

Thank you

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