**Research Briefing Nº 51**

# How can online discussion support and develop newly qualified teachers?

This research investigated newly qualified teachers (NQTs) experiences of participating in online discussions (ODs) that were part of their Master of Teaching (MTeach) course.

**Key words:** teacher development; NQT; online discussion; pedagogic design; presentism; collegiality; reflexivity

## Preliminary findings

See links to the report and conference presentations at the end of this document for further details on analysis and findings.

- ODs enabled new teachers to participate (in new ways) in professional development by providing a sense of community as well as an opportunity to write for an audience of peers. Both factors, supported by an underlying practitioner focus, helped new teachers to develop as critical practitioners; for example, teachers were more able to critically assess their own practice and working environments.

- These new teachers developed a collegiality, reflexivity, and an engagement with wider and longer term perspectives about their professional practice.

- The overarching finding is that by giving importance to and using the real and unique experiences and interests of teachers in the design of courses and ODs, a 'way in' is provided for them to understand more fully the complexities, dilemmas and strategies encountered in their own and others' professional practice.

> **Pedagogic design**: the methods and approaches used to set up and enable the online discussions.
>
> **Reflexivity:** teachers' ability to critically reflect on their teaching/practice taking into account local and wider perspectives/issues.
>
> **Presentism:** An over focus on the immediate and short term.

The research concluded that the gains from the ODs were the result of careful 'pedagogic design' at several levels.

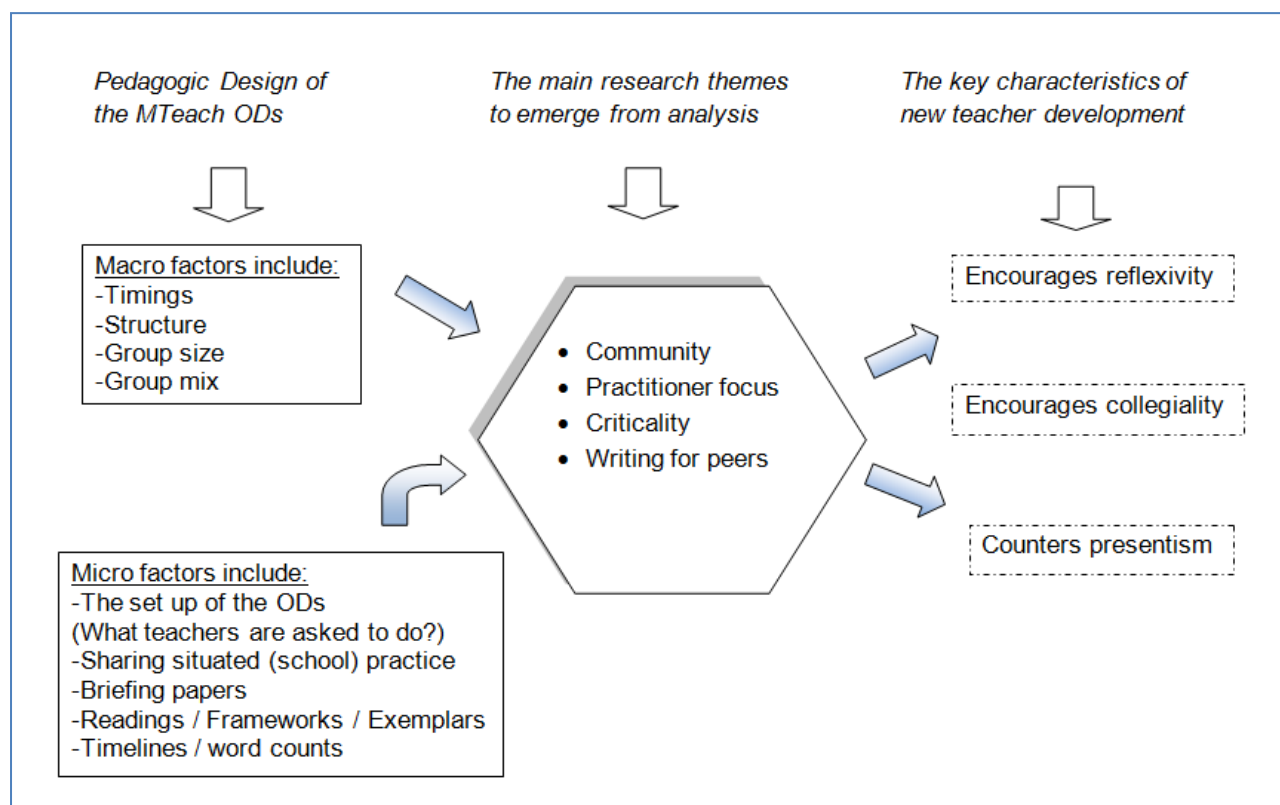The main elements of this research are presented in Figure 1 below.



**Figure 1:** An overview of the relationship between the pedagogic design of the ODs, the themes from the research and the key characteristics of this form of new teacher development.

The flowchart format illustrates how pedagogic design influenced how teachers experienced the ODs. Within the ODs the themes of Community, Practitioner focus, Criticality and Writing were seen to develop and were valued. The research found that the ODs enable a particular form of new teacher development that encourages reflexivity and collegiality while recognising and resisting presentism. However, the danger of a flowchart or diagram is that it over simplifies the relationship between the concepts with implications of narrow or 'one-way' relationships. This is not the intention. Rather, the diagram provides an overview of how the three main components of the research are linked: that is, the pedagogic design of the ODs, the themes to emerge from analysis and the main concepts derived from the literature review.

## What we did

The project was partially funded by the [Excellence in Work-Based Learning for Education Professionals (WLE) Centre](#) in 2009.

This work concerns the professional development of teachers in their first year of teaching. It was interested in how the ODs these teachers undertook as part of the MTeach contributed to this development process. The teachers worked in online tutor groups made up of teachers from different schools, phases (primary and secondary) and subjects.

The research aims of the project were to establish:

- How the ODs facilitated new teacher development.
- The nature of new teacher development within this setting.

## How we did it

The research used a sample of 22 teachers who started teaching between 2002 and 2006. The data used was: their written accounts of participating in the online discussions produced towards the end of their first year of teaching; and interviews with a selection of these teachers at a later stage in their career.

## Further information

See the WLE project Report: ['How can e-learning support work based learning for newly qualified teachers (NQTs)?'](#)

See also [Research and Innovation in Distance education (RIDE) paper presented in October 2012 at the Centre for Distance Education, University of London RIDE 2012 Conference](#)
(Scroll down the page to: Poster Demo Downloads and click on the title 'Communities of practice or practice communities: The role of online discussion in the context of the Master of Teaching (MTeach) [paper 2]')

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