From UCET inspiration to first conference presentation: Exploring Simulation based learning as an early-career ITE practitioner

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Initial task: Introduce yourself to the person sitting next to you and discuss the following…

"Uncertainty is the parent of professionalism" (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012, p. 107)

What does this statement make you think of …

a) for a beginning teacher, and how might it look?
b) for a beginning ITE-practitioner, and how might it look?

Are you?

- Interested in **low-technology** simulation-based learning and how to apply it within a PGCE programme?
- A new to the sector ITE practitioner?
- Supporting colleagues who are new to the sector?

If at least one of the above applies, then you are in the right place!

Session overview

- Introduction to simulation-based learning
- Short mentoring simulation
- Overview of scholarship project. Using SBL to develop professional decision-making in beginning teachers
- Challenges and opportunities in undertaking scholarship as an ITE Teaching Fellow.

A bit about me...









Challenges of scholarship for a new to the sector practitioner.

- A myriad of choices – where to begin?
- Imposter syndrome:

A conviction that one's self is deficient and one's work is substandard combines with a sense that entrance into and progression within HE were not earned but rather secured by deception, by luck or via a mistake (Breeze et al., 2022, p. 5)

- Understanding of possible funding options
- Time within the new ITE programme

- Tension of practice vs scholarship – professional identity

A starting point





UCET
Universities' Council for the
Education of Teachers



Simulation-based pedagogy

- Simulation-based learning is designed to put you in a scenario where you will need to make a range of professional decisions within a safe-space.

- SBL is widely used in medicine where it has been found to be helpful in the development of key professional competences such as communication, collaboration and risk management (Van Diggele et al. 2020).

- The National Simulation network has been set up to explore its applications within education and ITE (Kirsten Mulholland and Christopher Counihan).

- Although a number of high-technology simulation technologies exist, low-technology simulation involves the use of audio, video, document or live-actors to create a meaningful experience (Nichol et al., 2025).

- You are not required to play a role – you are interacting with the resources as yourself. The more you engage with them, the more you will get out of them!

University of Southampton

Lead Mentoring simulation

Simulation title: Mark, Cathy and Alex: A time of transition

Simulation objectives

- To engage with a short demonstration of SBL-style pedagogy
- To consider how we use a range of evidence to support us in our own professional decision makers as ITE practitioners.
- To work collaboratively to share insights and different possible approaches across different contexts

SIMULATION: Meet Alex

- Alex is one of your tutees.
- You are supporting Alex's mentors at the point of transition between placements.
- His first school moderation visit was in mid November. It was OK at this stage. Behaviour management largely in place, standard lesson for that early point in the course.
- No concerns flagged by Base placement mentor, Cathy, yet.
- Organisation has been a bit problematic.



MEET THE MENTORS

- **Mark Entor (current mentor)**

Has mentored for your subject/phase for years.

Has leadership responsibilities in school



- **Cathy Oach (previous/Base mentor)**

First year mentoring

RQT (year 3)



First thoughts?

Please watch this transition video (sent by Cathy, mentor on first placement)

What might be your initial thoughts about this trainee? Gut instincts?
What more information are you going to need?
What might the impact be for Mark, Alex's current mentor?

Any actions at this stage?

Video

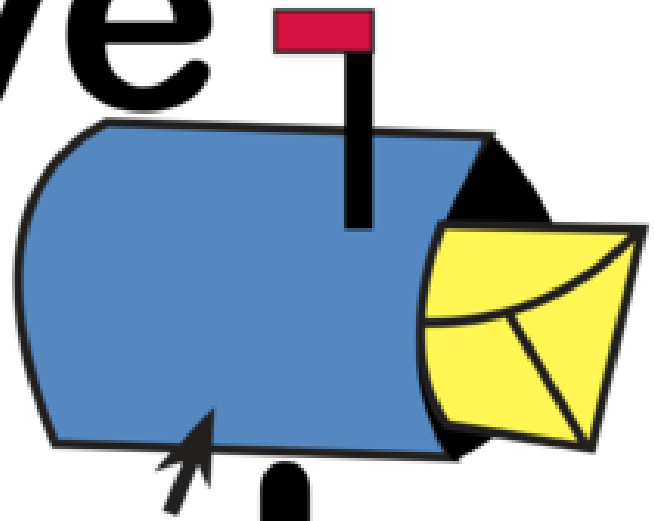
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You've Got Mail



Mark has emailed.

Following on from this email, you take a look at Alex's portfolio

In your pack you will find…

1. Mark's email
2. The lesson feedback attached to his email
3. Alex's last teaching moment reflection from his reflective portfolio

What is going on with Alex?

- What are your key lines of enquiry here?
- What do you think is happening with Alex?
- What support is Alex going to require from his mentor(s)?
- What support are you going to need to put in place for Alex's mentors? Think current and placement 1.

Actions:

1) Compile your to-do list

End of simulation

The full simulation would also include:

- A wider range of portfolio documents to interact with
- An interaction with Alex via emails and voice-mail messages
- An interaction with Cathy via video/email

Reflection: Professional decision making as a Lead Mentor

Consider your decision-making processes around this situation. How did you decide your best course of action?

Was their consensus in your group? Why? Why not?

What did you find challenging?

Have you encountered any similar scenarios? What was the outcome of these?

What would be your own sources of support as a Lead Mentor?

Reflection: Simulation-based learning

How did you find the experience of the simulation?

Did you find you were able to immerse yourself in the scenario? If not, what were the blockers to this?

What changes or developments would you suggest?

What potential application could you see for using this with mentors or student teachers?

Is this a pedagogy that you already use? For what purposes?

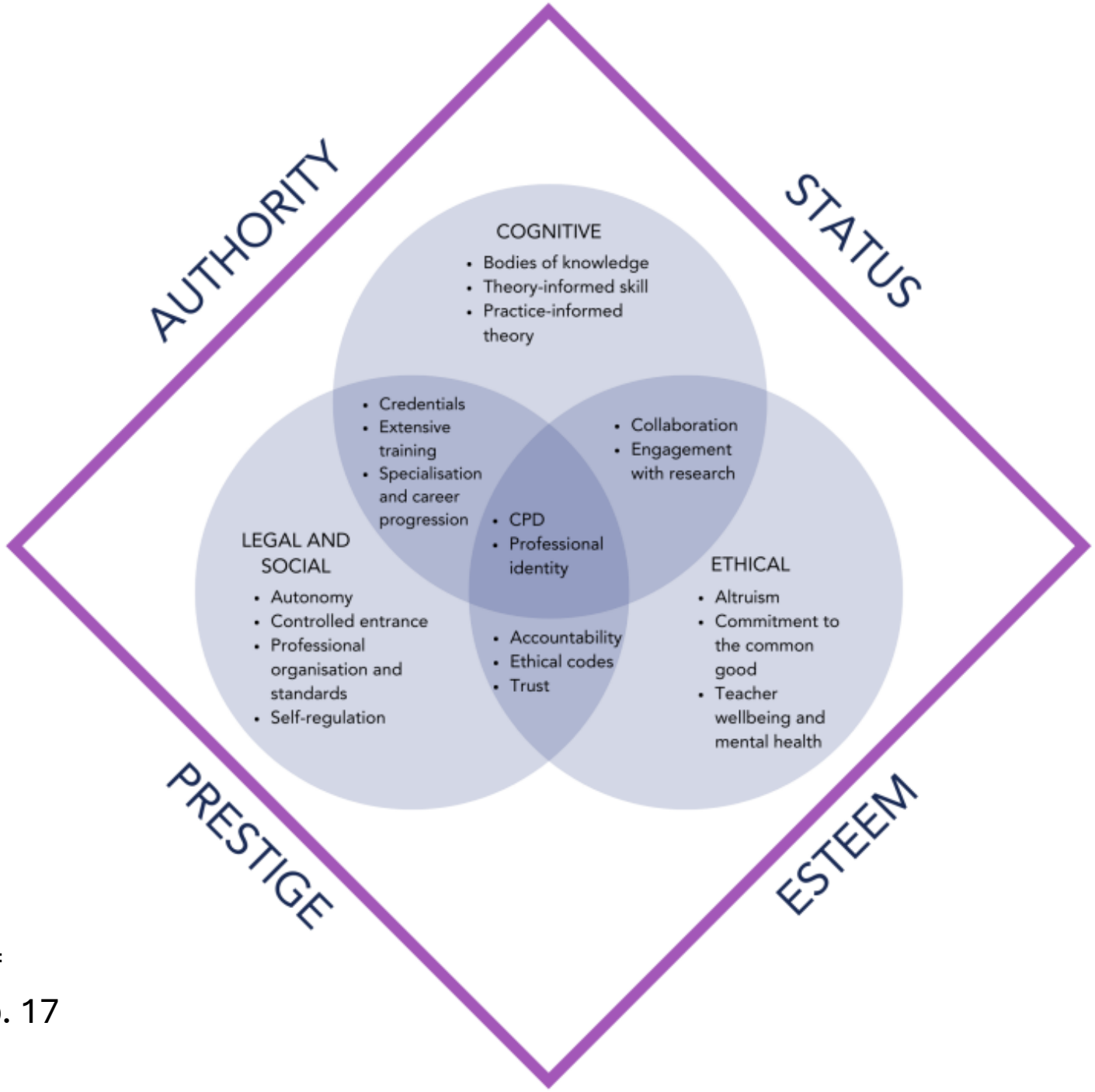
Any other comments?

Why simulation-based learning?

Professional judgement

- “Uncertainty is the parent of professionalism” (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012, p. 107)
- Teachers are continually making professional judgements either long term or in the moment (Knight, 2023)
- It is important that we recognise that the ability to make these judgements and live within a space of uncertainty is what makes us a professional
- BUT this is challenging. It takes time to perfect. It relies on applying layers of professional judgement from the surface level to the deep - professional instinct and intuition (Knight, 2023)
- 33% of Early Career teachers leave the profession within five years (DfE, 2023).
- Although workload is the most-cited reason for leaving teaching, a lack of professional autonomy and a specific trigger point in terms of an incident involving pupils or parents are also significant push-factors (DfE, 2018).

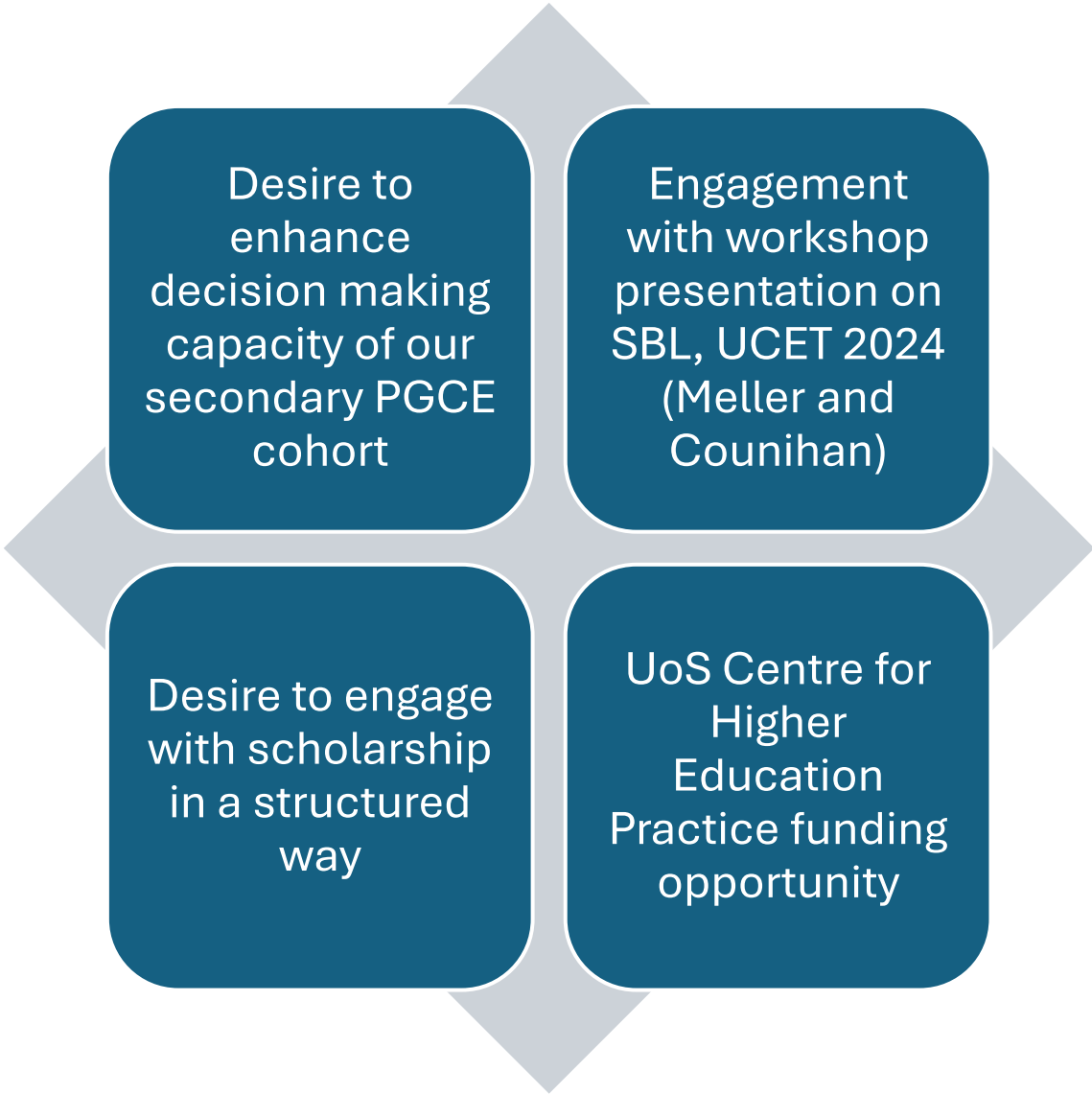
Defining teacher professionalism



Chartered College (2024), Working definition of professionalism (adapted from Mezza, 2022), p. 17

Simulation-based learning to develop professional judgement.

My context



Phased practitioner enquiry project

Phase 1

- **Co-construction and design** of SBL workshops for beginning teachers
- Qualitative data collected via 3 x focus groups (4 current trainee teachers and 3 ECTs)
- Questions framed around *Brown's (2020) domains of impact*.
- Questions designed to interrogate the concept of professional uncertainty for teachers new to the profession
- Thematic coding of focus group data to identify common themes related to RQs and to be fed into workshop design.

Phase 2

- **Evaluation** of the pedagogy
- Qualitative data collected via anonymous online questionnaires completed by 66 of the Secondary PGCE cohort following SBL workshops
- Research instrument = the **Preparing Educators for Practice Questionnaire (PEPS-Q)***
- Additional open-ended questions to allow further sharing of experiences and wider student input into course design.

Phase 3 (upcoming)

- **Evolution and wider application**
- Evaluation of phase 1 and 2 data.
- Evolution of simulation design for beginning teachers
- Application of simulation design to wider stakeholders including mentors
- Evaluation of this pedagogy for these stakeholders

* Research instrument authored by Nichol et al (2025) adapted from the original (National League for Nursing) design available here: Tools and Instruments

All phases fully approved by UoS Ethics and Research Governance procedures

Phase 1 findings

Research Questions:

- How do student and early career teachers perceive the idea of professional uncertainty?
- Which are the principle professional scenarios that they feel least prepared to face?
- What insights can student and early career teachers provide in the design of professional scenario simulations?

Discuss

- From your experience what are the biggest concerns around the wider professional role of a teacher for beginning teachers at the end of their training?
- To what extent would this be mirrored in responses from ECTs at the end of the first year?
- Make your predictions!

PGCE beginning teacher focus groups (4 participants)

Communication (parents)
(Parental phone-calls, report writing)

Accountability and responsibility
(Data/ reporting/assessment, being the adult in the room, transition to not having mentor with them, dealing with the unexpected)

Justification of actions
(department, school)

Behaviour
Dealing with a serious/unusual behaviour incident, on-call systems, upholding school policy

Systems
(SEN systems, SLT, ECT systems for support)

ECT-1 focus groups (3 participants)

Administration and communication (parents and colleagues)
(email, time pressures, overload, coordination, point of contact, record keeping and reports)

Accountability and responsibility
(transition to full accountability, delegating vs escalating, dealing with the unexpected, in loco parentis – tutor role)

Boundaries and Justification of actions
(parents, colleagues, self)

SEN
(parent communication, information management, broader understanding of need)

Prioritisation and juggling
(tutor group comms, complex situations, overload)

Reflective practice
Automation, understanding, importance

Broader themes (RQ1 and 2)

- **Emails**

Trainees – 2 references both used in contrast to a phone-call home.

ECTs – 14 individual references

ECT #2: I'm the first point of contact for them like so the constant parent communication and like if something happens, you're CCD into an e-mail about it because it's an issue that the teachers have and e-mailed home, you're CCD in.

ECT #1: Yeah. So and so forgot their PE kit, they forgot their container. They forgot their art homework, can you let the teacher know?

- **Range of additional need and their impact in the classroom (SEN/behavioural/pastoral)**

Trainees – No reference

ECTs – reference to gaps in knowledge, administration of adjustments, role of the tutor

ECT #2: Ye that's another thing I find challenging, keeping a track of all the student who have all the different passes, like medical pass, time out pass, toilet pass

ECT #1: like Managed Moves. You didn't know anything about like, managed move, oh, yeah or like a looked after child or like a child who has been a school refuser and they're just coming in on a partial timetable or...

ECT # 1: Because at the start, the parent would be like. Oh, I think they might be autistic. And I would immediately e-mail the Seno cos I just assumed that. That's what we do

Broader themes (RQ 1 and 2)

- **Language around school team – them vs us – who is them?**

Trainees: Justifying school policy, justifying to HOD, SLT

ECTS: Justifying to parents.

T#1: and then you go to the head of the department and then they have to justify and why this this child did so badly when we had predicted this before.

ECT#3: Cos actually, yeah. It's not on me that your kids not behaving if I've done everything I can but you have to be like well prepared to like justify yourself. Like you have to be really prepared to be like. I've done all of this.

- **Points of reference and illustrative anecdotes**

Trainees – small point of reference

T#1: Like I have done a parent phone call now…

ECTs – almost alarming numbers of examples

- **Logistics and time-management**

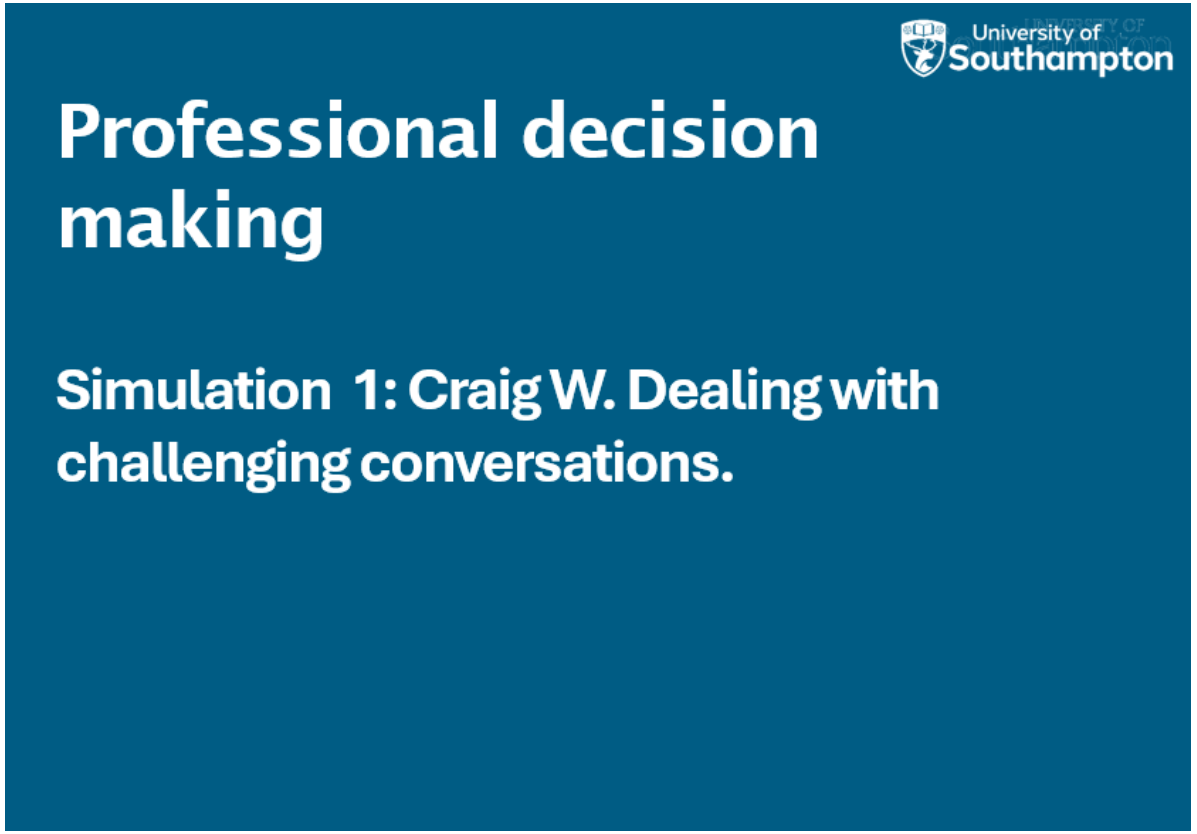
Trainees – almost no reference

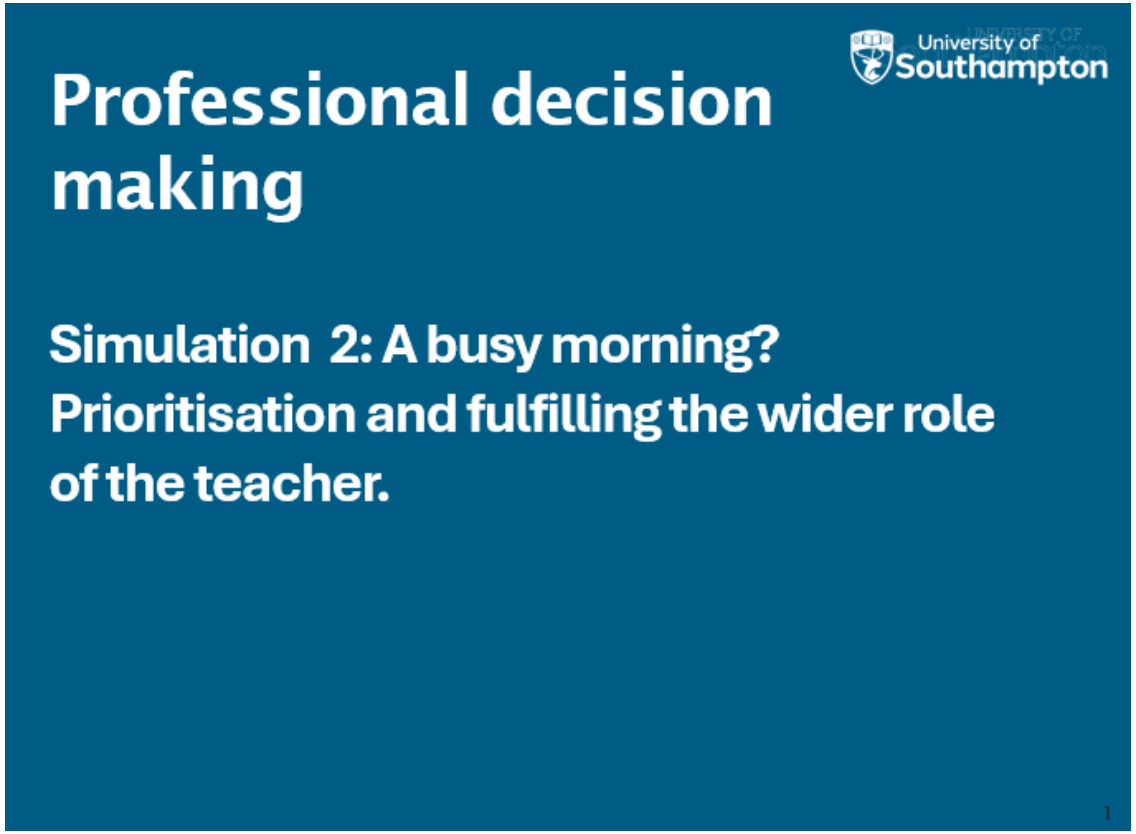
ECTs – underpinning most examples

Simulation design (RQ3)

- Value of peer feedback
- Concern over make-up of group
- Concern over input from potentially employing school (trainees)
- Value of discussion and collaboration

The simulations





Phase 2 findings

Research questions

- What are student-teachers' perceptions of the impact of taking part in simulation-based learning workshops on their professional decision-making?
- What are student-teachers' perceptions of the differing modes of delivery of simulation-based learning workshops?

Phase 2 findings (PEPS-Q)

Q1: The simulation workshops were helpful in developing my skills as a secondary school teacher (N-66)	
Strongly Agree	47% (n-31)
Agree	53% (n-35)

Q2: The simulation workshops helped me to feel better prepared for my future practice as a secondary school teacher (N-66)	
Strongly Agree	45% (n-30)
Agree	55% (n-36)

Q3: Simulation is an effective pedagogic approach which has supported my professional understanding (N-66)	
Strongly Agree	47% (n-31)
Agree	53% (n-35)

Q4: Simulation is a more interesting and engaging form of learning than more traditional pedagogic approaches (N-66)	
Strongly Agree	62% (n-41)
Agree	36% (n-24)
Disagree	2% (n-1)

Phase 2 findings (PEPS-Q)

Q5: The simulations created during this session were authentic enough to develop my understanding and skills (n-66)	
Strongly Agree	52% (n-34)
Agree	47% (n-31)
Disagree	2% (n-1)

Q6: Simulation added to my understanding of theory in secondary education (n-66)	
Strongly Agree	30% (n-20)
Agree	64% (n-42)
Disagree	6% (n-4)

Phase 2 findings (Additional questions)

Q7: The feedback and discussion I had with peers within my group, added to my professional understanding (n-66)	
Strongly Agree	42% (n-28)
Agree	58% (n-38)

Q8: I am confident in my understanding of the concept of professional judgement within secondary teaching (n-66)	
Strongly Agree	44% (n-29)
Agree	56% (n-37)

Q9: I feel ready to make decisions based on my own professional judgement when I begin my ECT year (n-66)	
Strongly Agree	35% (n-23)
Agree	63% (n-41)
Disagree	2% (n-1)

Q10. Which of the workshops did you find most useful today?	
Workshop 1: Craig W. Managing difficult conversations	61% (n-36)
Workshop 2: A busy morning? Prioritisation and fulfilling the wider role of the teacher	29% (n-23)

Q11: In your own words, please comment on any areas of the workshops specifically that you found helpful (representative examples)

Getting to discuss with other trainees and having the visual/ auditory to represent the emails and parents was really beneficial in imagining the scenario

This is an area that I feel I may not have had ample experience in throughout my training year. I found working in a group helpful to bounce ideas off of

Looking at how to word emails and how to deal with parents on the phone

Being given a realistic and challenging example which we will have to face, rather than talking about "general" examples

I enjoyed being able to discuss scenarios that I would find tricky.

Q12: In your own words, please comment on any areas of the workshops specifically that you would change or did not find helpful (representative examples)

Allow for more time to have the simulation

Some of the prioritisation workshop seemed just common sense

Go through examples of what should not be done and why (or common mistakes) , rather than just talking about what should be done

I'd like to look more at the organization stuff

More explicit links to literature

I felt the managing difficult conversations was an ***unrealistic situation***

The only thing I would change would be to have more of these simulations throughout the university year, as I found this to be really interesting. Perhaps in weeks like the ITAP weeks, this could be used in addition to further exploit the material or topic addressed in ITAP as a way of building on what was learnt and to consolidate that knowledge. In this way, there would be space for more simulation scenarios to be included throughout the course , potentially including a further variety of pastoral scenarios or addressing safeguarding concerns.

Impact on practice/future lines of enquiry

- The designed workshops have been embedded into PGCE Secondary programme
- Further simulation designs under way for ITaP input
- Introduction of Virtual Tutor Group

- Design and implementation of mentoring simulations for Mentors, ITE-coordinators and Lead Mentors
- Input from school-based colleagues in the design of simulation-based pedagogies for developing coaching and mentoring capacity across the school.
- Application of similar pedagogies for our undergraduate BSc Education students

Some final thoughts on what I have learnt… (so far)

- I am an ITE practitioner, building my own scholarship within this broader identity is important
- Networking is key – building connections and collaboration. Communities of Practice. LinkedIn!
- The transition from school to university is under-estimated
- Space to reflect is vital
- A year can change a lot!

- The challenges of professional decision-making impact all stakeholders in ITE not just our beginning teachers

Any questions for me?

I have a question for you!

If you were me, where would you go next on the project overall?

Join the SimulatED network!

SimulatED Network

LinkedIn:

Or contact Kirstin Mulholland:
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