

NOKUT CONFERENCE  
Oslo, May 2018

**Workshop - The MA  
Thesis: Planning,  
supervision and  
assessment**

## Facilitators

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**Fiona Crowe & Maria Campbell**, St. Angela's College,  
National University of Ireland

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**Rachel Jakhelln**, University of  
Tromsø & Pro-TED

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**Viv Ellis**, King's College London  
& Western Norway University  
of Applied Sciences

# Guiding questions for the workshop

- 1. What makes a good MA thesis in the new Norwegian GLU teacher education programmes?**
- 2. How can the MA thesis fit within the 5 year programme as a whole and how should the student teachers be prepared for doing the MA thesis during their whole teacher education programme?**
- 3. How different is this type of thesis to the kind that have been the norm in your institutions prior to the 2017 reforms?**

# Guiding questions for the workshop

1. What makes a good MA thesis in the new Norwegian GLU teacher education programmes? How did teacher educators from Ireland deal with a similar reform challenge?
2. How can the MA thesis fit within the 5 year programme as a whole and how should the student teachers be prepared for doing the MA thesis during their whole teacher education programme? What was the experience of the Pilot in the North/UiT?
3. How different is this type of thesis to the kind that have been the norm in your institutions prior to the 2017 reforms? How will you begin to overcome these challenges?

# The Main Challenge

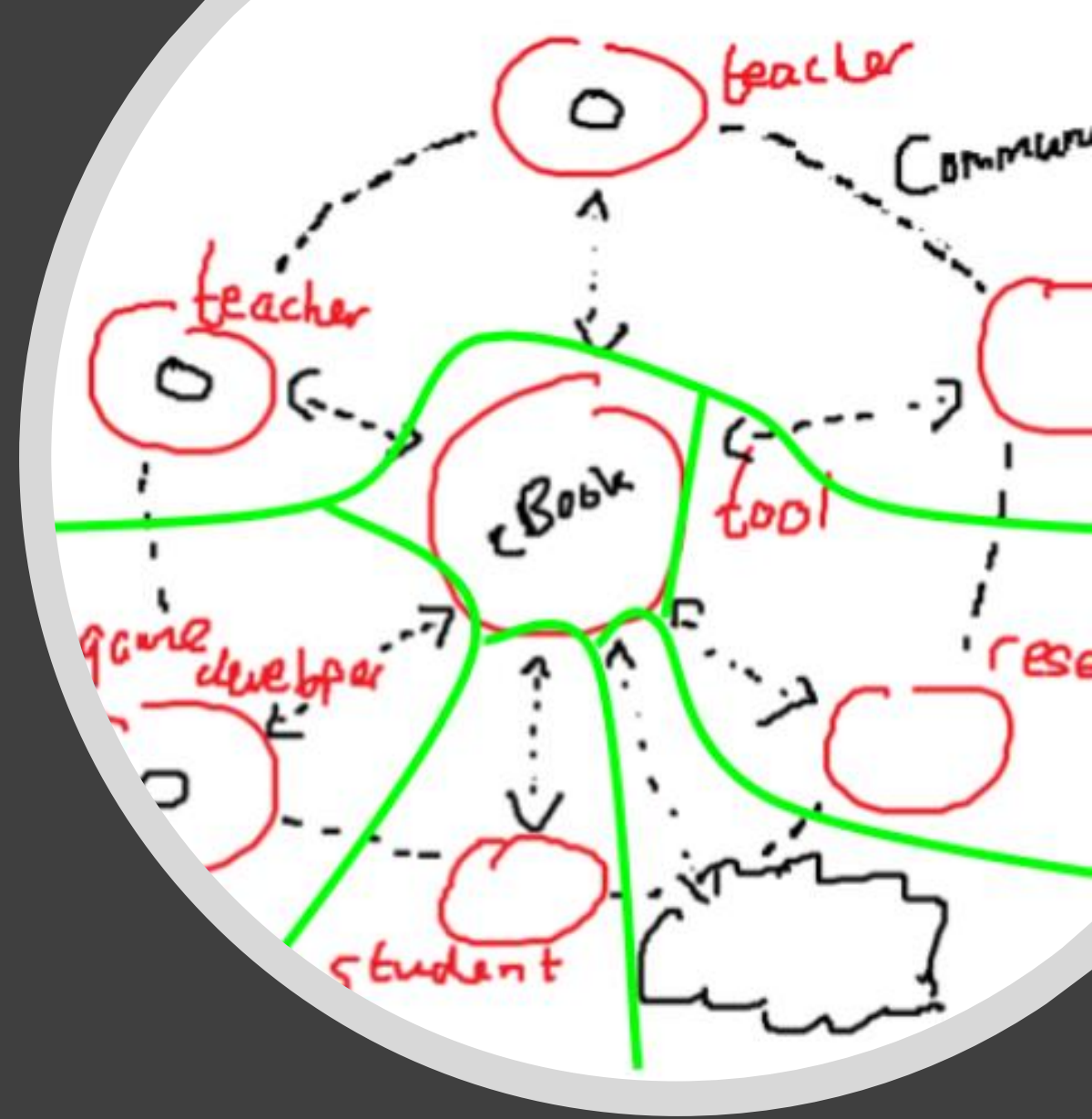
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Meaningful

WORK

# The MA thesis as a boundary artefact

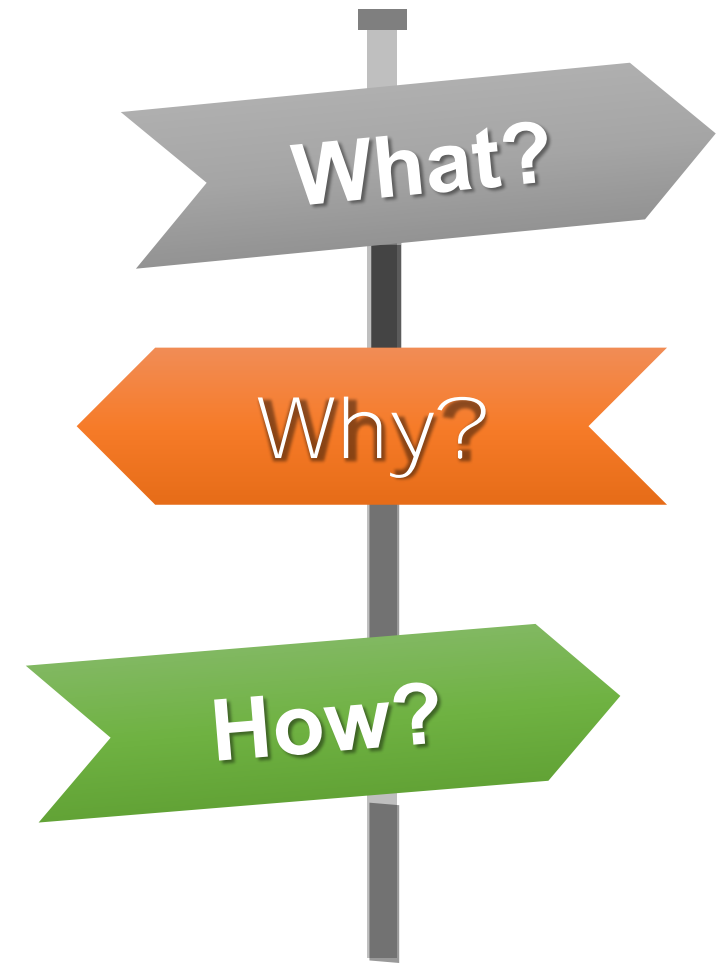
- Great potential: co-construction of new knowledge (student, teachers, teacher educators/schools, universities) and co-configuration of new pedagogical practices (the ultimate intention of the 2017 reforms)
- Great challenges: 1. open communication; 2. coordination; 3. collaboration; 4. transformation





# Theme 1: What makes a good MA thesis in the new Norwegian teacher education?

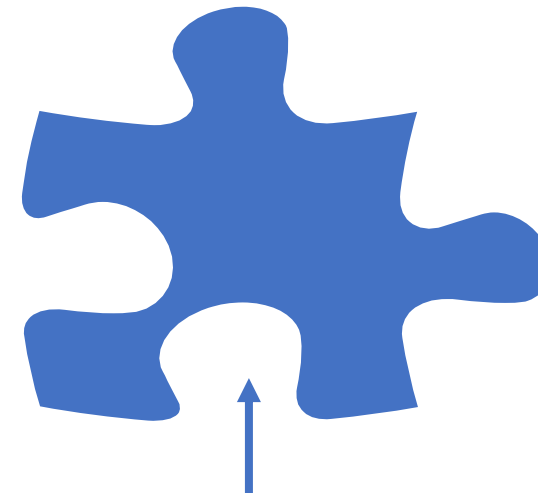
We don't know! Can we tell you about the Irish context and our college experience specifically?







**St. Angela's College, Sligo**  
**Coláiste San Aingeal, Sligeach**  
*A College of NUI Galway*



**Who are we?**

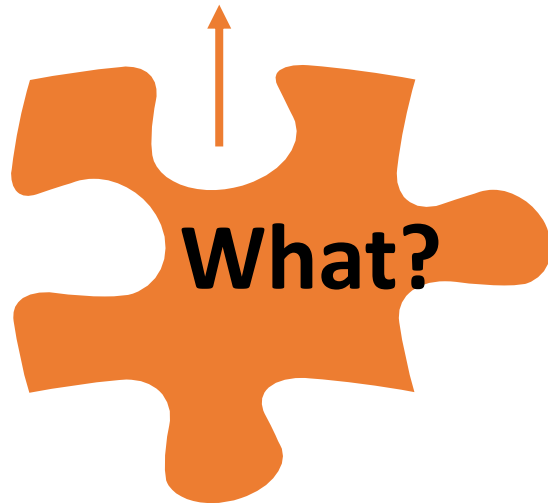
**St. Angela's College  
Education Department**

- 28 academic staff
- 50% with doctoral qualifications

# Context/backstory

## What we offer:

- B.Ed. - 4 years for post primary teachers (2018)
- New 5 years MA – 2015 -
- MA and PGDip – 2 and 1 year part-time -  
practicing teachers – practice based – 25 years+  
– 100+ each year



## Irish context for MA level ITE:

- \*Response to 'Perfect Storm'
  - economic downturn
  - drop in PISA scores
  - New Teaching Council (accreditation process)
- \*International Review of Teacher Education – Pasi Sahlberg (chair)
- \*19 ITE Institutions – Universities and Colleges becoming **6 Centres**

# Collaboration and Partnership (Irish context)

- No official partnership model with schools
- Collaboration – work in progress
- St Angela's College Collaboration with 4 local schools – new initiative
- In-college: Team teaching across module teams and departments in St Angela's College



# Q1: How do we define research questions that are practice-oriented, researchable and that merit research?

- **What:**

- Support teacher students to differentiate between questions in general and possible research questions
- Foster '**interest**' among school personnel in the teacher student's research and in the **potential benefit** for schools/teachers.

- **Why:**

- Teacher students have little practice experience vs practising teachers – 25 years of MA – 2 year part-time – school/classroom based;
- Teacher students may have little understanding of research – ethical issues, practical issues, methodological approaches, and so on;
- Teacher students may have little understanding of school community and the wider needs/interests of schools and wider educational community.

- **How: Next slide**





# Defining and refining research questions

- In college and with schools – **constantly revise and evaluate**
- **In College**....**developmental over 5 years**; teams across departments – design of modules, assignments
- **With schools**: At the end of **each placement student teachers (STs)** meet with coop teacher and principal and discuss their research question/s, come back to college and refine it... and discuss in tutorials.

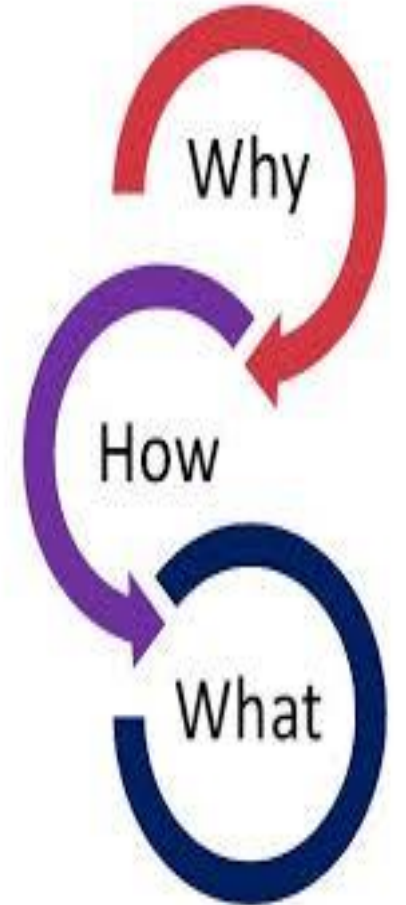
# Q2: Supervision: Roles, relationships and supervision

## 1. Informal inputs and conversations: about research

- **Teacher/School** and **Teacher Students**
- **Teacher Educator** and **Teacher Students** through feed forward and modified work based on school/teacher input

## 2. Co-researcher and supporter of research (voluntary):

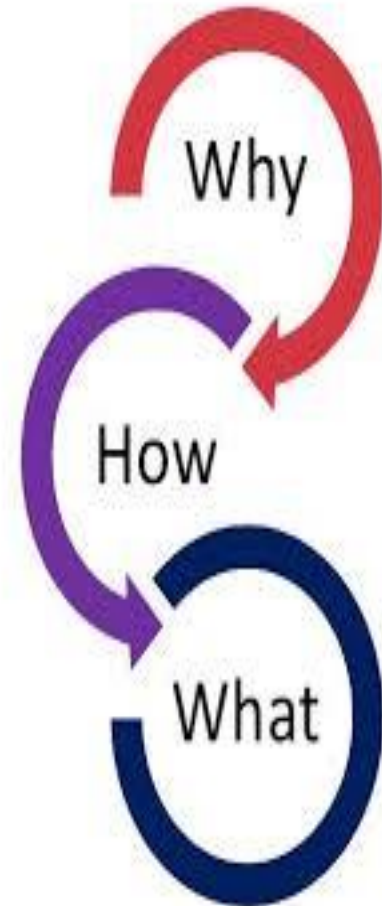
- Teacher – teach/trial interventions and be observed by Teacher Students or observe Teacher Students using formal observation schedule/tool
- Teachers critique research tools for Teacher Students; critical friend/s – to other teachers/head teacher
- Teacher Educators support and advise Teacher Students



## Q2: Supervision: Roles, relationships and supervision ctd...

### 3. Experienced researcher/s:

- Teacher – critical friend/s in relation to theoretical framework and academic rigour;
- **Benefit = funding applications** – whole school research/implementation and evaluation of intervention (**or school reports from Inspectorate**);
- Research upskilling of staff;
- Teacher educator available remotely to cooperating teacher



# Q3: Our experiences and focus re supervision arrangements and quality of MA on new programme

## Currently focussed on:

- Schools' **'buying into'** the process .....to benefit from the research and process
- **Partnership building** with schools
- **Building on our own experiences with MA** – previously practicing teachers...practice based...micro, mezzo or macro level research.



## Working to address concerns with:

- choices of **topic** not being researchable;
- STs choosing perceived 'easy' topics;
- theses not of MA **standard** as compared to our previous MA students;
- lack of ST **experience** of practical issues (schools)
- **ethical issues**





## Activity

15 minutes discussion  
10 minutes feedback

- What planning steps are needed to support teacher students to develop well-defined, researchable, practice-based research questions?
  - Please select a reporter who is happy to share your comments with all the participants in the room after the activity.



..... and Conclusion

.....So what does it mean for all of us?



**UiT**

**THE ARCTIC  
UNIVERSITY  
OF NORWAY**

W3: Collaborative supervision and partnerships: how to prepare student teachers to write good MA theses?

*W3: Veiledning og samarbeid med praksisskoler: hvordan få GLU-studentene til å skrive gode masteroppgaver?*

NOKUT conference

May 28 and 29, 2018

Rachel Jakhelln, UiT The Arctic University of Norway



# Progression in a Master's program in Teacher Education

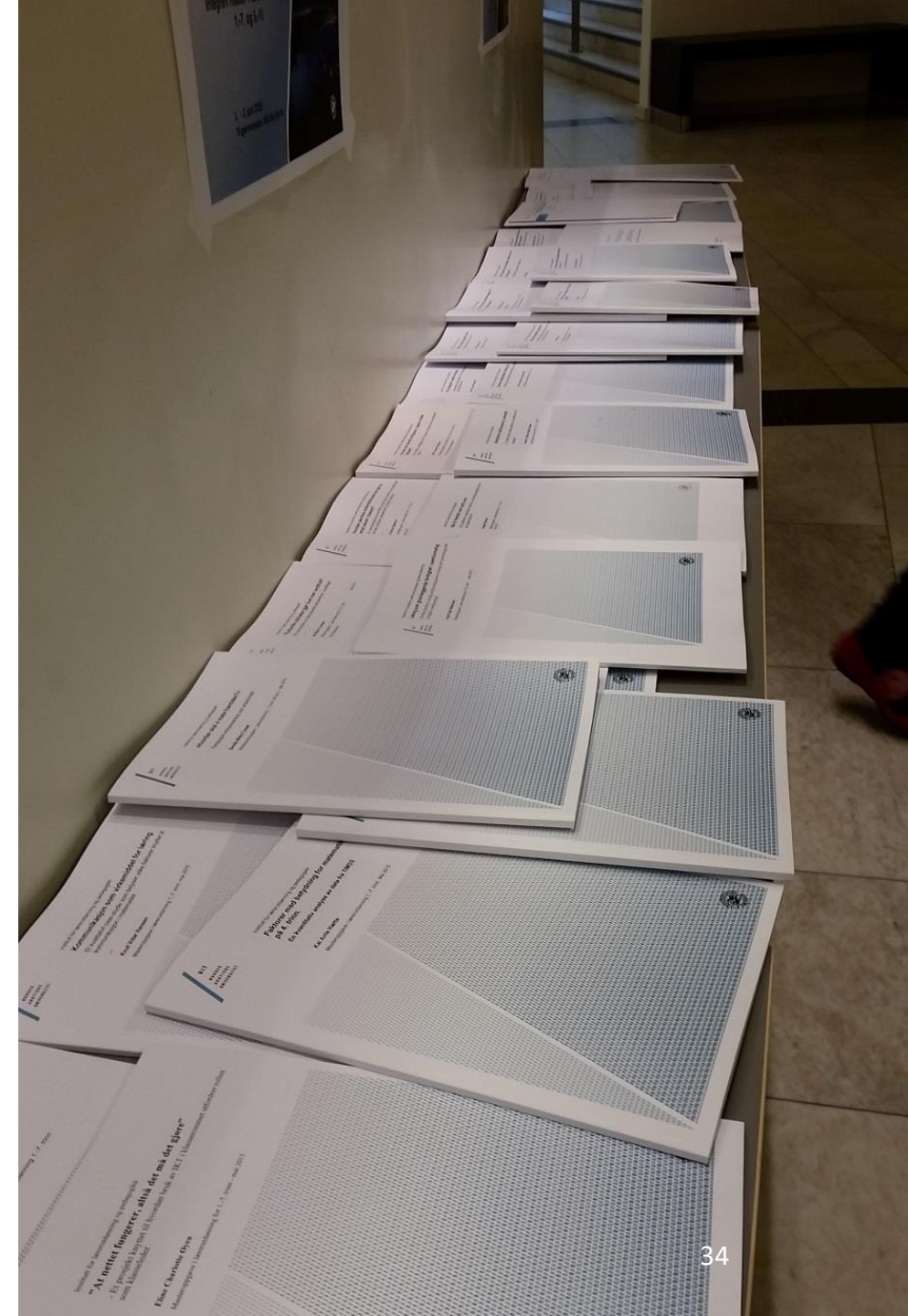
**How does the MA thesis fit within the 5 year programme as a whole and how should the student teachers be prepared for doing the MA thesis and engage in the activities underlying it during their whole teacher education programme?**

# UiT – Pilot in North, 2010 -

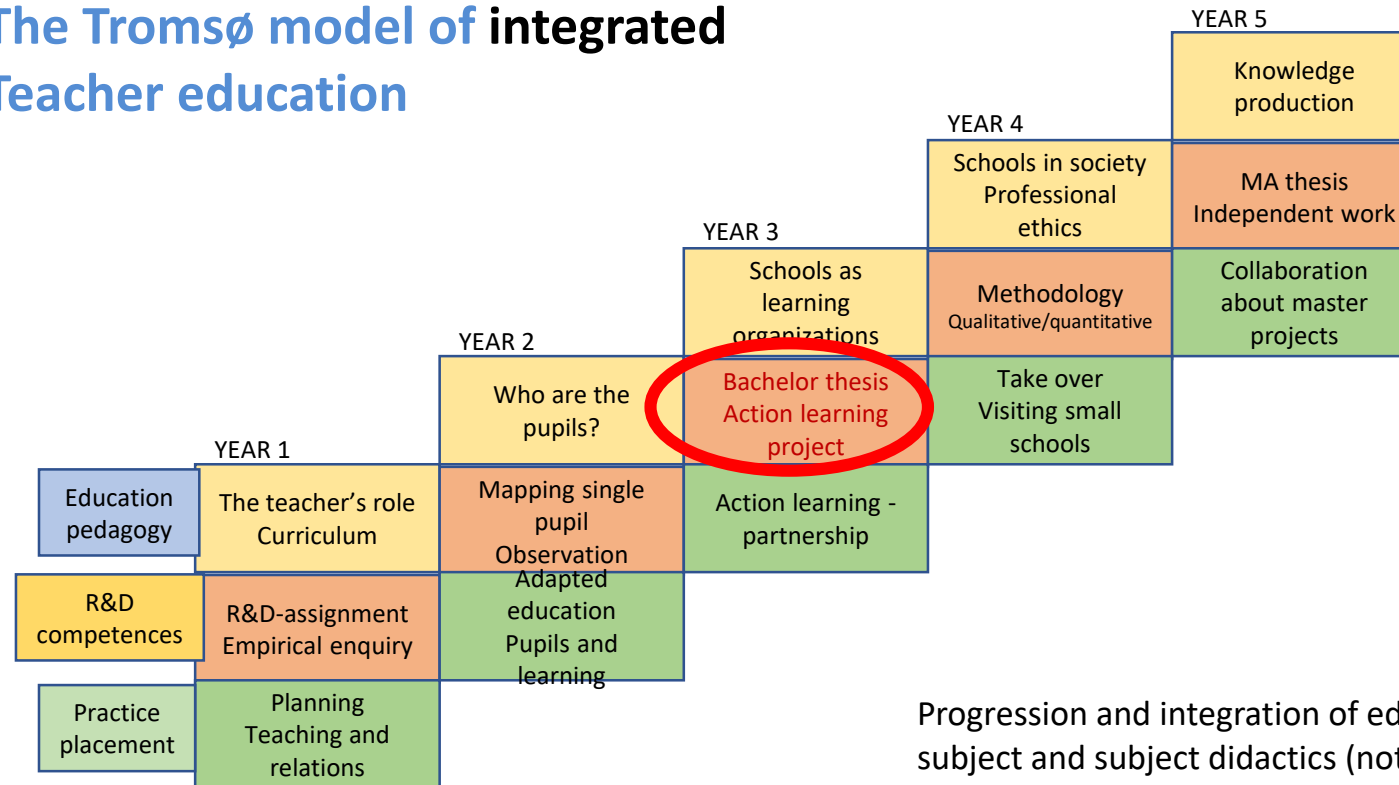
- Integrated five-years MA program
- 1-7 MA in Education. 5-10 MA in subject didactics
- The 2017 Norwegian MA reform – a further development of the pilot program

## Vision

- A **research based teacher education** that offers coherence between subjects, subject didactics, professional education and practicum
  - ” ... means that **all the courses are integrated with research...**”  
(Toom et. al. 2010, p. 333)
- Professional learning for student teachers in partnership with **University schools**



## The Tromsø model of integrated Teacher education



Progression and integration of education, subject and subject didactics (not integrated in the figure), R&D competence and experiential knowledge.

Finally, what  
do you now  
understand by  
integrated  
research-  
based teacher  
education?

T8: Theory and practicum placement and subject didactics. It do all hang together and is put into the Master's thesis in the end. It is a sort of development which we have been ongoing from the very first year of teacher education and until now.

T21: Integrated – isn't it just that the master's thesis is a part of everything? Subjects, subject didactics or... the future work with the master's thesis is there? All we have learnt shall be mirrored in the thesis... In many ways, I have used everything I have learned through the years. Even it is not easy to remember what we learned the first year, so... it is the steps you take in the staircase of learning



# Proud graduating teachers together with a (proud) former Minister of Education

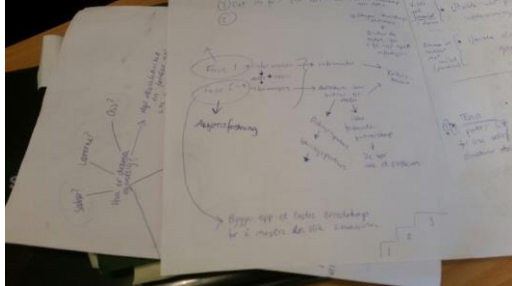
May 2017



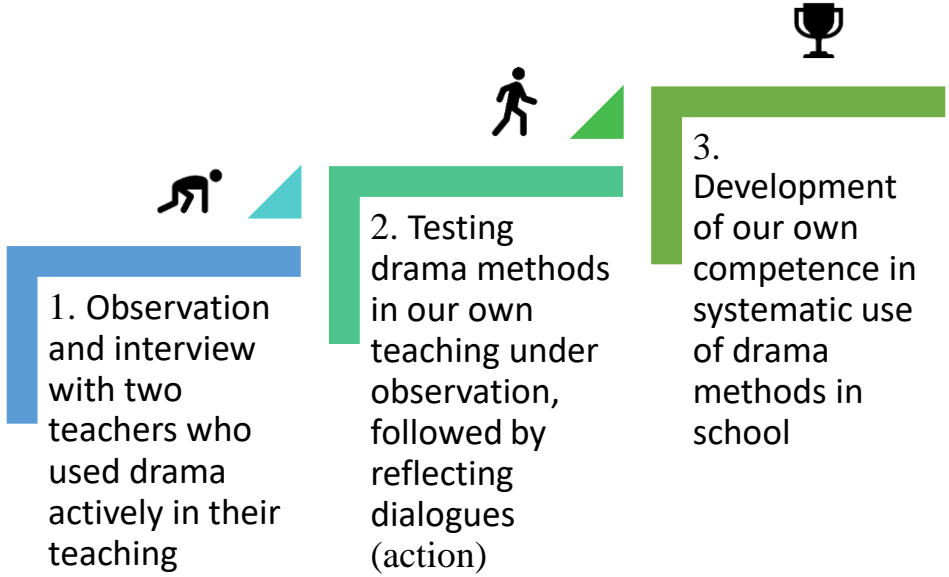
Masterlærer – monsterlærer – mønsterlærer?  
Master teacher – monster teacher – excellent  
teacher?

Inquiring teacher!





# An example of two students' work with the Master's thesis



# Students' voices

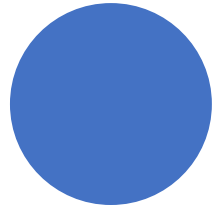
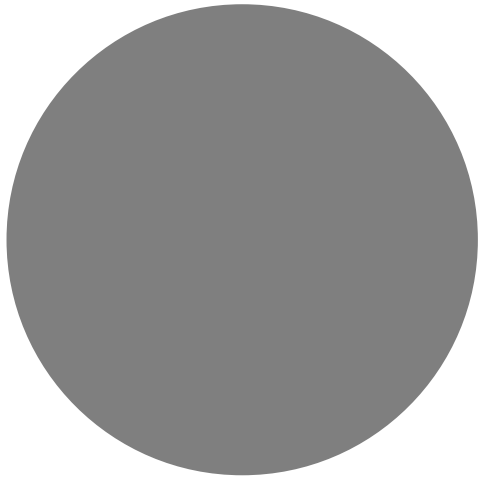
From interviews with graduated MA students about the Bachelor's thesis:

**Student 1:** It would have been great if the Master's thesis had been like the Bachelor's project in action learning. We were in many ways as teachers doing research... I think it enhanced our development as professionals

**Student 2:** What made the work with the Bachelor's thesis so exciting was that we were in a school doing something we felt important

**Student 3:** In the work with the Bachelor's project we were in a practice doing an inquiry





The elephant in the room  
How to involve the schools in an  
authentic way?



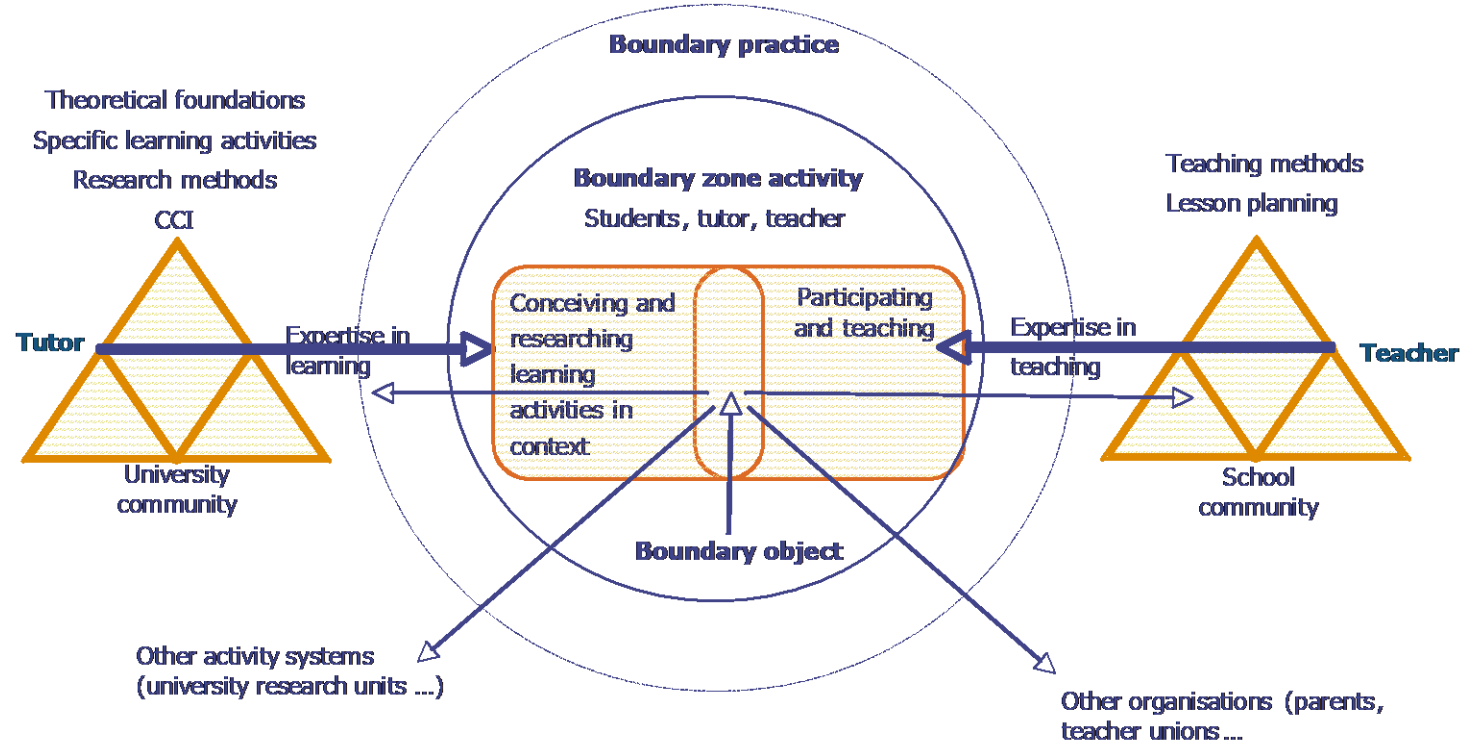
# Discussion activity

- What does progression look like in practice-oriented, classroom/school research? *For example, in the relationships between the universities and the schools as well as the coursework/assignments for students?*
- How to involve the schools in an authentic way? *For example, assessment of the thesis? As co-researchers?*





Working on the thesis as 'boundary practice'





# Final reflection

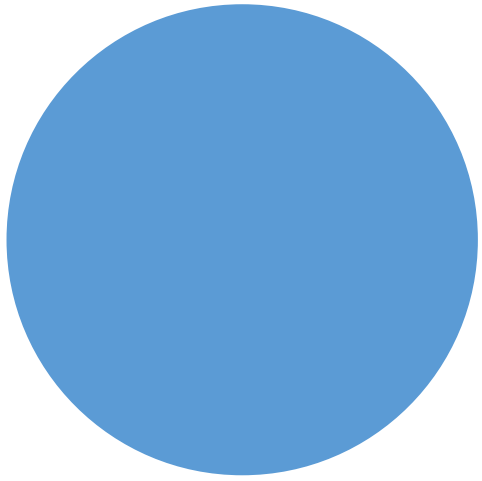
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The 2017 GLU teacher education reform presents some great challenges in order to achieve potential transformation.

The MA thesis can be seen as a focal point for these challenges – drawing together multiple dimensions in one artefact.

- **For you (in your table group), what is the main challenge you face when working on the new MA thesis?**
- **How will you begin/*have you begun* to overcome these challenges?**





Thank you

See you at the next  
regional meetings!