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As a School of Education in a modern university, our core business is developing professional educators and professional learning cultures fit for purpose in the 21st century, and it is to this that the papers in this special edition of New Redland Papers speak. Such an agenda is about the transformation of learning environments, informed by a culture of reflective practice and embodied in the actions of reflective practitioners.

As far back as 1973, Donald Schön argued that in a social context characterised by continuous change, not just individuals but also organisations need to develop the capacity for lifelong learning in pursuit of social transformation.

We must, in other words, become adept at learning. We must become able not only to transform our institutions, in response to changing situations and requirements; we must invent and develop institutions which are ‘learning systems’, that is to say, systems capable of bringing about their own continuing transformation. (Schön, 1973: 28)

The concept of lifelong learning carries a variety of meanings and is used in specific ways in particular contexts. Frequently in contemporary public discourse, the call for lifelong learning is associated with the demand to increase global competitiveness, economic skills and qualification levels up to and including higher education. The recent Leitch Review of Skills endorsed by the Treasury (H M Treasury, 2006), is one example of this policy agenda. However, the lifelong learning debate is also associated with more complex and contested issues e.g. improving the wider wellbeing of all children, young people and families (as part of the Every Child Matters and Youth Matters policies) – and with promoting community cohesion. Each of these policy drivers finds expression in the most recent reform of the secondary curriculum (both at Key Stage 3 and 14-19), in developments in higher education e.g. related to knowledge exchange and widening participation, and in the recent reorganisation of the DFES into the Department for Children, Schools and Families, and the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills.

All of these agendas place considerable demands and challenges on the shoulders of professional educators and learning organisations. New professional standards for those working in compulsory and post-compulsory education foreground the necessity for educators to be able to engage effectively with such issues and imply new forms of professionalism. Parallel agendas in higher education are creating new forms of learning organisation and changes to the professional learning cultures for higher education staff.

However, we continue to face enduring challenges related to promoting effective lifelong learning at both individual and organisational levels. The creation of learning organisations that can engage young people and adults in the processes of learning remain profoundly affected by the conditions of inequality that shape people’s lives and their differential access to economic, social and cultural resources. Educational disengagement continues to be a feature for some sectors of society and in some parts of the country – including in our local region. A recent high profile study of the contextual and cultural factors underlying low rates of young participation in higher education in Bristol South, for example, illustrates the entrenched nature of challenges associated with educational transformation in such settings (Raphael Reed et al, 2007).
One element of contemporary educational debate increasingly informing strategies to address such challenges may be characterised as the ‘personalisation agenda’. Personalisation references the extent to which public services, including education, put the needs of participants at the heart of provision and enable them to have a voice in the design and improvement of the organisations that serve them. Such a perspective sits within global concerns about the rights of children and young people to have their voices listened to and respected.

Personalisation puts centre stage the need for educators and learning organisations to place students at the heart of the learning process and to prioritise their empowerment through the co-construction and co-design of the learning experience. It also raises important questions about how to access student voices in a meaningful way. We would argue that an equally important and relatively neglected area of enquiry relates to the conditions under which one might promote effective learning dialogues – and to the importance of investigating the multiplicities of learner and teacher identities through listening in to multiple voices in the learning process. Indeed, if one accepts that effective teachers are always also learners, the distinction between the two categories to some extent dissolves.

This edition of New Redland Papers brings together a variety of articles that articulate multiple voices and diverse perspectives on secondary education and lifelong learning. Throughout, we can identify the heart-felt willingness of the authors to listen with open minds to the insider insights of staff inducted into the identity of university community of practice - further explored in Ewing, Simmons and Taylor’s piece, where they examine the changing identities of new members of staff inducted into the identity of university academic through an academic professional development programme. A further feature of this paper is the significance of points of transition, in both challenging people’s prior sense of self-hood, and making explicit the codification of new forms of professional knowledge as individuals move from the status of novice to expert. This applies equally in Owen’s study of PGCE trainees beginning the process of becoming Business Education teachers, and Bromfield’s account of PGCE trainee concerns about managing behaviour and how these change over the course of their initial training year.

The concept of identity being drawn upon in a number of these articles is profoundly influenced by social constructivist perspectives – where social interactions and practices provide the context within which human beings become particular kinds of people. The articles are also deeply influenced by the concept of reflexive practice – within which processes of individual and organisational change are also informed by values, ethics and a sense of moral purpose.

The impact of ongoing professional development within a framework of reflexive practice is further evidenced in Maughan’s article on the accreditation of mentoring. This article, together with the addendum by Foley, poses new challenges for us in developing responsive forms of partnership between learning organisations, including higher education institutions and schools. Owens and Fitzgerald et al also explore the importance of developing new forms of partnership in their papers. In the article by James et al, we are reminded of the impact of aspects of inequality in the capacity of individuals to access lifelong learning. Their paper on decisions made by urban middle class families who choose state comprehensive schools, point to the importance of certain classed parental and learner identities in these processes. Both communitarian values and calculated self-interest appear to be motivating such decisions – with parents seeking a school experience enriched by ethnic diversity (rather than just social class diversity) in order to shape their children’s identities. This is an interesting example of the surprising insights that can be gained by researching the perspectives of individuals or groups who appear to operate against the grain.

Finally, the selection of papers offered here foregrounds the importance of practitioners and researchers finding multiple ways to access diverse perspectives and voices in the learning/ enquiry process. We see in this selection of papers examples of researchers analysing quantitative data garnered from students’ completed questionnaires through to adults operating further along the continuum of practice as they work with students as co-researchers (Fielding, 2001). Even in instances where initial use of a whole cohort questionnaire has provided quantitative data, contributors have subsequently moved on to small, focus group semi-formal interviews in order to promote dialogue and to test out ways of understanding the issues.

This special edition of New Redland Papers therefore provides an important educational perspective on knowledge exchange, where teaching, learning and research - informed by reflexive practice, partnership and collaboration - generate the co-construction of new forms of knowledge.

References


Reflections on practice: unexpected insights into the concerns of trainee teachers in the early weeks of a PGCE course within the context of the development of an innovative training school model

Julia Owens

Abstract

This article describes a small scale study that was prompted by routine feedback from PGCE trainees involved in an Initial Teacher Training Initiative. The study highlights the nature of trainees’ concerns and anxieties in the early weeks of their PGCE course and describes the value of and opportunities created by an early school visit. The article concludes with a discussion of a series of issues that force us to question our practice in the very early stages of initial teacher education and to consider how increased collaboration between Higher Education Institutions and Partnership Schools can enrich this induction phase.

Introduction

As the group tutor for the PGCE in Business Education in a Higher Education Institution (HEI), part of my practice or ‘what I do’ is to fine tune and continuously develop the PGCE Business Education subject studies programme in response to the changing environment in Business Education and the individual and group needs of the PGCE Business Education cohort. Thus, as with all teacher training across age, phase and subject specialism, there is an on-going process of reflection taking place that seeks ways to understand what is happening so that we can extend our trainees, enrich their experience and move our thinking and practice forward. As part of the process of reflection, we can often gain surprising insights into how to nurture the acquisition of professional knowledge in others whilst simultaneously developing our own knowledge. This article is informed by a process of reflection that did just that.

The background

In June 2002 a secondary school in the West of England appointed an Advanced Skills Teacher (AST) specialising in Initial Teacher Education (ITE). As a result, the school felt able to extend its role by increasing the number of trainees it could accommodate for in-school training and by seeking to develop a closer collaboration with its main provider institution of higher education. During the 2003/4 academic year, a group of thirty six PGCE Business Education trainees was involved in the pilot phase of an ‘Initial Teacher Training Initiative’. Prior to the development of the initiative, the Senior Professional Tutor at the school had observed that several of their Newly Qualified Teachers seemed to be somewhat at a disadvantage because they lacked awareness of the rhythm and pattern of the whole school year. Many had not had a chance to really get to know individual pupils whilst training and some had not felt fully involved in the life of a school during their PGCE year (Church 2005:3).

Consequently, a pilot programme was devised that would provide trainees with continuity throughout their PGCE year by allowing them all to work with the same pupils and department throughout. The programme consisted of key strands: (mentoring, newsletters and diaries, school based events and university based work with pupils). It was fronted by an initial visit to the school by the PGCE trainees in September 2003; this was intended to provide a context for the project and to introduce them to the key personnel involved.

This initial ‘context setting’ visit to the school took place in the second week of the trainees’ PGCE course, prior to their first Block School Experience. At the end of this 2003/4 academic year, a routine feedback questionnaire indicated that the trainees all felt that they had benefited to varying degrees from all strands of the initiative. However, and surprisingly, the majority indicated that they had valued this visit over and above any of the other four key strands of the initiative.

Trainees described how they had found the visit ‘interesting and enjoyable’ and how it had provided a ‘much needed introduction to a school environment’. Trainees also made reference to ‘worries’ and ‘anxieties’ about their imminent Block School Experience and reported that the visit had made them feel more at ease and had helped them to ‘relax about the whole situation’.

Given that the purpose of the visit had initially been seen as a way of introducing trainees to the ‘key players’ involved in the pilot and not in any way as a key strand of the pilot programme itself, there was a feeling that we had ‘stumbled upon something important’ that required further investigation. As HEI tutors we implicitly acknowledged ‘anxiety’ and ‘nervousness’ in our trainees, but had never explicitly examined the nature of their concerns. It was decided to include the visit again in the second phase of the Training School Initiative (i.e. in September 2004), but this time to gather data that would enable us to analyse the underlying reasons for the high valuation placed on the visit by the trainees.

The 2004/5 visit, as in the previous year, took place in the second week of the trainees’ PGCE course. Trainees were briefed at the HEI about professional issues such as dress codes and appropriate interaction with pupils and staff. The visit itself was planned as outlined below:

• Handout of school publicity documentation and first issue of the Initial Teacher Training Initiative newsletter written by members of the Business Studies Department.

• Introduction to a Business and Enterprise College by the Head Teacher.

• Introduction to the Initial Teacher Training Initiative by the Senior Professional Tutor (SPT).

• Overview of the Business and Vocational Education Department by the Subject Mentor (SM) and teaching staff, including a Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT) from the previous year’s PGCE Business Education cohort.

• Meeting with pupils – (PGCE trainees and post-16 pupils). Opportunity for discussion with pupils on a range of pre-prepared questions.

• Tour of the school, led by pupils.

• Questions and plenary.

In the feedback questionnaire following the visit, trainees were asked to indicate the value placed on each strand of the visit along with their views and reflections. In addition, it was decided to seek some measure of trainees’ perceived confidence levels and an indication of their specific concerns prior to embarking on their first Block School Experience.

Main findings

Initial analysis of the trainees’ concerns indicated five main sources of anxiety:

• Relationships with pupils

• Relationships with SPT and SM

• Behaviour management

• Subject knowledge

• Socialization/school culture
The Nature of Trainees Concerns Prior to Their First Block School Experience

figure 1

As can be seen from figure 1, 35% of all trainee responses referred to concerns about relationships with pupils. One trainee expressed a very real concern about ‘scary, tall boys’, while another worried about ‘unfriendly pupils’ and ‘feeling not much older than them’. Trainees wanted to be able to find ‘common ground’ with pupils but were unsure how to do this. ‘My main concern is establishing a rapport with the students’ and ‘relating to the students in a relevant and interesting way that students could be motivated by.’ In other words, a significant number of the trainees lacked confidence in their own ability to interact successfully with pupils; they saw the responsibility for successful interaction as theirs but needed some support to do this. In university sessions we had emphasised the importance of presenting concepts in relevant and interesting contexts, so it was important that we provide them initially with the means to make judgements about and be able to select appropriate contexts for their teaching.

Significantly, the other category that dominated the trainees’ concerns was their understanding of the nature of the relationship with ‘key players’ or other teachers in the school. Accounting for almost 30% of all responses, trainees’ anxieties were centred on uncertainty about levels of support and SM and SPT expectations of them: ‘What and how much will be expected of me by support and SM and SPTs expectations of them’; were centred on uncertainty about levels of almost 30% of all responses, trainees’ anxieties or other teachers in the school. Accounting for the trainees’ concerns was their understanding of the means to make judgements about and be able to select appropriate contexts for their teaching.

Underlying this was a ‘fear of the unknown’ and the need to form relationships with new people in a new environment only three weeks after having gone through a similar process in the HEI.

What had been surprising about the data was that the trainees’ concerns were so focussed on the personal dimension of their training. Calderhead and Shorrocks (1997:2) discuss how we conceptualize the work of teacher education and interpret the ‘personal orientation’ as that which ‘emphasises the importance of interpersonal relationships in the classroom’. Interestingly they refer to how teacher education provides a ‘safe environment for experimentation and discovery of personal strengths’ (ibid.). Had this pre-visit gone some way to providing easier access to that environment or indeed to enhancing that environment?

The data in Figure 1 then, along with the views of Calderhead and Shorrocks above, take us some way to an understanding of why trainees had accounted for a significant number of the trainees’ anxieties it was not surprising that the opportunity to meet with ‘key players’ on the visit had also been rated highly in the feedback questionnaire. Trainees felt that they had gained in their understanding of the running of a Business Studies Department and the relationships within that department. Having met the school SPT and the Business Studies Subject Mentor they felt more confident in what would be expected of them on their Block School Experience. It ‘provided excellent insight into the different roles of the teachers, Subject Mentors and SPTs along with raised awareness of the pastoral role that teachers also play’. The trainees found the teachers friendly and approachable, which ‘really settled my nerves about the ‘A’ placement’. Also they were very interested to discover the variety of subjects that the teachers were teaching and how they had found their way into their own particular specialist areas, making trainees ‘feel more relaxed about any areas I might be weak on’.

Of particular value to all the trainees was the opportunity to question the NQT who had been on the PGCE Course the previous year. Many felt reassured as she described the fears she had had at that stage of her training ‘as they were similar to how I was feeling’ and it ‘helped to put my mind at ease and helped confidence as you could see someone in your position a year ago’. In addition the NQT described how she had felt well prepared by her PGCE course which combined with the obvious value placed on Business Studies and vocational subjects in the school, ‘encouraged a right place, right time feeling’. The trainees now had a concept of ‘progression’.

In addition to addressing their anxieties and concerns, the opportunity to meet both the pupils and the teachers had acted as a springboard for the journey ahead. Trainees felt that their experiences on the visit had given them a way to relate their discussions in their university sessions to the reality of the school environment: they now had a ‘peg’ in common on which to ‘hang’ the many new concepts that were being introduced to them in their induction period. The visit then had inadvertently proved to be an enriching experience for the trainees and a thought provoking opportunity for all involved in the ITT initiative.

As can be seen in Figure 2 below, the views expressed by trainees were supported by the numerical values they used to express their confidence levels (on a scale of 1-10) before and after the visit. Prior to the visit only fifty three percent of trainees had confidence levels of six or above, whereas after the visit almost ninety four percent fell into this category.
Confidence levels of trainees and after the school visit

Figure 2
On reflection then, a visit to a school for the sole purpose of an introduction to the Initial Teacher Training Initiative had exceeded expectations and prompted an investigation into a set of outcomes that had been quite unexpected.

Our attention had been drawn to trainee anxieties. What had emerged from an analysis of trainees’ responses to the second visit had led us to a closer understanding of trainees’ concerns and, perhaps, a growing awareness that there was potential to enrich the induction or transition phase for PGCE trainees.

What we had gained in the short term was a more confident cohort of trainees whose anxieties and concerns had been inadvertently addressed through their introduction to the Initial Teacher Training Initiative. As teacher educators we now had a greater understanding of the main causes of trainee concerns within the first few weeks of their PGCE course and awareness that these were significantly dominated by the personal dimension or ‘personal orientation’. The trainees had listened to ‘pupil voice’ and now had more insights into pupils’ levels of understanding, reasons for choosing business subjects, motivating factors and wider interests. They had acknowledged and were subsequently able to engage in a guided dialogue about the diversity in the pupils they had all met. They had a much clearer view of the course structure and the expectation of their role in schools. They now had a ‘map’ in terms of where the course was leading and a sense of progression into their NQT year and beyond.

The visit then had resulted in a more positive mindset amongst trainees and, given that the trainees were themselves a disparate group (based on age, degree, experience in the workplace etc) we had been able to establish a common experience that we could use as a point of reference in our university sessions. All the trainees were now more confident about their forthcoming school experience, the visit having provided a welcome ‘bridge’ between the HEI and the school environments, experienced not in isolation, but from within the security of the trainee/peer group and with the guidance of university tutors working in collaboration with teachers, in a ‘safe environment’ (Calderhead and Shorrock 1997).

Opportunities
An early, accompanied visit had provided the HEI with an opportunity to initiate trainees into the culture of professional responsibility, with respect to their own conduct and that of the school, in this case a Business and Enterprise College. They had gained insights into school responses to a range of government initiatives, involving local people and businesses. As Pring in Bines and Welton (1995) suggests, ‘such initiation must be part of induction’.

The opportunity to engage with pupils informally had been very successful in a number of ways, as discussed, making the trainees far more ‘pupil aware’. However the discussion that took place on return to the HEI enabled HEI tutors to take this strand one step further and introduce the trainees to the concept of ‘pupil voice’, and how the insights gained from this can be a crucial element in the developing teacher’s toolkit. As Fielding (2004:307) observed, ‘Students tend to see the world of school differently to the way adults see it’. These trainees had experienced, first hand, the insights and advantages to be gained from listening to ‘pupil voice’ and valuing their opinions. Hopefully they would have some tools now to avoid misunderstandings and to establish the effective relationships with pupils that were the main cause of their concerns in the induction phase of their PGCE course.

In addition to these opportunities to enrich the induction programme for the PGCE Business Education group, reflecting on this one aspect of our practice raised many important questions. In teacher education we are constantly emphasising the importance of giving the learner a context or an experience, a ‘peg’ to ‘hang’ their learning on. However, in the first university-based part of their training had we, until now, modelled this for our ‘learners’? Secondly, in their Professional Studies we take time with the trainees to consider transfer from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 and transfer through to other key stages. Much attention has been given to transfer and transition, but how far do we, in HEIs, model these practices for our own trainees? How carefully do we plan the transfer from graduate student or graduate employee to PGCE trainee? This whole experience then raises issues for us as teacher educators.

Reflection and the improvement of professional practice
Calderhead and Shorrock (1997:8) acknowledge that ‘the task of preparing teachers for the profession is a challenging one’. Difficult decisions have to be made by those of us who structure the courses and engage in a continuing process of review and on-going course development. The outcomes of this reflection on one aspect of our recent practice raise a series of issues that force us to question our practice in the very early stages of initial teacher education. The induction of PGCE trainees is an under-theorised area and the insights gained in this reflection on recent practice suggest that there is indeed a need for further research in this area, particularly into the needs of trainees at the point of transfer onto the PGCE course. Do we really know what the key issues are for trainees in their first three-week induction period? Are some trainees destined to be marginalised or have their progress hampered if we do not have a coherent induction programme informed by research?

The insights gained by reflecting on our experiences here would indicate that the induction phase should initially aim to reduce trainees’ anxieties and concerns i.e. to offer social and emotional support. This is reinforced by Hayes (2003) who observed that trainees’ ‘emotional state affected their confidence and enthusiasm for teaching’ and that for many trainees anxiety had a major impact on their attitudes in the run up to a school placement.
In addition, we must acknowledge the changing profile of trainees wishing to enter the profession. In Business Education there has certainly been an increase in the number of mature applicants and the PGCE cohorts have become increasingly disparate. Typically trainees now embark on the PGCE Business Education course with a wealth of knowledge across a range of subject disciplines. They have varying degrees of experience in the workplace, some having worked for several years at senior management level. Of different ages, some have travelled widely, whilst others have experience of schools as either parents or governors. Indeed, as Glenney and Hickling in Bines and Watson (1992) observe:

_They will bring a range of theories about learning, the nature of schooling and the dynamics between the teacher and the learner. At the same time they will have anticipations of a number of challenges and anxieties accompanying the training process itself._ (p.41)

It is essential then that an effective induction should seek to reduce anxiety and build confidence. With such a disparate group of trainees it is also important to establish common ground so that trainees can engage in shared dialogue, reflect on and maybe then reconstruct their views of the experiences that they bring into teaching with them. An induction programme should enable us as teacher educators to ‘model’ what we teach to our trainees. We should give the trainees a ‘map’ (a clear view of the course, their role in the school and a view of the pathways ahead) - a sense of progression. We must attempt to create a positive learning environment free from the negative effects of anxieties and concerns and provide for them the support in their transfer into a new environment that we expect them to provide for pupils. Surely, as we advise trainees that these positive features are all essential for their learners, then we should provide them for our learners?

The value of a well-organised school visit in the early weeks of the course goes a long way to meeting the criteria for effective induction already identified. Further research is needed, but there is already some scope for enriching the induction experience of the next cohort of Business Education trainees. All of the benefits of the initial school visit identified here were implicit and have only been made explicit on reflection. In subsequent visits perhaps more time can be spent with pupils? Trainees could use this time, not just to find out more about pupils, ‘what drives them’, but to listen to pupils’ opinions about what makes a good teacher and thus to value the pupils’ perspective. Sharing our reflections here with the ‘key players’ in the school could help us to develop the trainees’ first experiences of school based learning and reflection. We must extend our view of what it means to ‘model’ good practice from a limited focus on the classroom to include wider professional practices. On a course centred on evidencing the standards for Qualified Teacher Status (QTS), the visit additionally creates a conceptual foundation on which trainees can begin to understand the nature of the competence statements.

In view of the undoubted value placed on the school visit then it seems important that this should be a pivotal part of any trainee induction programme. (Subsequently, the tutors of other PGCE secondary subjects at the HEI have now adopted similar ventures and adapted this model to match the needs of their student groups, replicating this focus on trainee needs at induction.)

**Implications for the development of the training school initiative**

Finally, what is really key now is to acknowledge that increased collaboration between the HEI and the partnership school has afforded benefits to both partners. The partnership school, now a designated Training School, has not only generated improvements in ITT within the Training School (in keeping with other Training School models) but has created opportunities for enrichment of the trainee experience on the HEI based elements of the PGCE programme. Both partners have found a new way to work together to enrich the training of teachers and in so doing have begun a process of re-defining the relationship between HEIs and their partnership schools.

Through this increased collaboration our PGCE Business Education trainees have been able to experience ‘school based learning’ which is clearly different from ‘Block School Experience’ and is a distinct and valuable strand in their learning. Such experience has a place in all future subject studies programme development, in particular in the induction or ‘transfer’ phase of new trainees. As we continue to collaborate on subsequent phases of the Initial Teacher Training Initiative what is clear is that keeping an open mind and reflecting on practice may well promise other, surprising and unexpected insights that can only serve to enrich the quality of initial teacher education.

**References**


Hidden narratives and tales of the unexpected arising from an exploration of student voices in an urban secondary school

Bernadette Fitzgerald and Mark Jones

Abstract

This article draws on research based in a large, mixed, urban secondary school. The focus of this research was Year 7 students’ perceptions of their new environment on transfer from partner primaries; however, here we present unexpected aspects and questions which emerged. These relate to three key areas: the status afforded to the spaces where students are listened to; students’ use of a range of media and genres through which to make their views known and the gains derived by individual students from being actively involved in student voice activity. In conclusion, this article raises questions for consideration by all who seek to listen to the voices of the young people with whom they work.

Mapping the territory

Listening to the voices of young people in educational settings is not new. However, a recurring question is: why are we listening? Is it because of a genuine belief in the value of young people’s insights or a need to respond to political agendas? In David Milliband’s 2004 conference address on personalised learning, he highlighted the importance of an approach to student voice in which ‘students (are) listened to and their voice used to drive whole school improvement’ (2004a:5). This is consistent with the OFSTED (2005) self-evaluation form (SEF) for schools which requires them to demonstrate how they ‘gather the views of learners’ and what these views tell them ‘about the learners’ standards, personal development and well-being’. There is therefore an external imperative for schools to participate in activities which access student voice either independently or with the support of a critical friend (Swaffield and MacBeath, 2005) such as a Higher Education Institution (HEI). From a research perspective, this re-emerging field of student voice has been championed by a number of authors (Arnot et al, 2003; Fielding & Bragg, 2003; MacBeath et al, 2003; Flutter & Rudduck, 2004).

Fielding & McGregor (2005) have highlighted student voice and its ‘important contribution to educational renewal’. Whilst acknowledging that student voice activities can contribute to whole school improvement, how individuals are situated within an enquiry needs to be explored from the outset. Consideration of Fielding’s (2001) four-fold typology of student participation can inform how schools construct student voice activities. Thus, are students to be used merely as a statistical source; encouraged to become more actively engaged as discusants; invited to work in partnership as co-researchers; or empowered to act as researchers in their own right, initiating and taking responsibility for their own enquiries? Schools, aware of this hierarchical depiction of student participation, will decide which approach is most appropriate in a given context, consistent with the institution’s values.

The journey taken

Our research involved collaborating with eleven Year 7 students within an urban secondary school for six half-day sessions over a ten month period. Consistent with the recommendations of ‘Every Child Matters’ (DfES 2004b), data gathering began with a whole cohort questionnaire which focused on establishing Year 7 students’ feelings of belonging, safety and well-being at point of transfer to the secondary school. Analysis of this quantitative and qualitative data, in addition to discussions with the Head of Year 7 and a Deputy Head teacher, resulted in an invitation to eleven students (approximately 5% of the Year 7 cohort) to collaborate as student co-researchers (SCRs). It had been this sample group’s atypical feelings of dislocation in this new environment, as revealed in the questionnaire responses, which resulted in them being selected. The SCRs were to explore in greater depth what they liked and disliked about their new school environment.

In relation to this research we acknowledge that ‘the boundaries and expectation (were) fixed’ (Fielding & McGregor, 2005:6) as we set the research question. However the approach subsequently taken with the SCRs was situated in the third stage of Fielding’s four-fold typology of student engagement. This third stage portrays student co-researchers as partners in learning with teachers. Thus the research process was characterised by attentive listening and interdependent exploration aspiring to ‘enter spaces that are potentially more open and more creative’ (Fielding & McGregor 2005:6). The research embedded egalitarian values whereby students working as active co-researchers, as opposed to passive providers of data, explored their feelings towards their new school environment.

Meetings with student co-researchers

At the first meeting with the eleven students, ethical protocols to guide our work together were established. During this session students created annotated self-portraits to represent visually their feelings about personal identity, learning preferences and interests, both in and out of school. They then led the researchers on a ‘learning walk’ around their school; the researchers were taken to spaces which the SCRs felt were significant places, areas where they felt more vulnerable or most secure. Subsequently, on a school site plan, the students constructed individual ‘empathy maps’, through which they expressed their positive and negative feelings about different spaces within the school. During the second meeting the SCRs’ combined data was re-presented to them in order to authenticate the initial adult interpretation of their maps. This process resulted in a collective identification of environments within the school which were significant to the SCRs. These were to be photographed and videoed by the SCRs as a medium through which to share their feelings about spaces within the school with a wider audience.

To support this, the SCRs participated in a skills development workshop to familiarise them with using the technology to storyboard, film and edit their final video. During meeting three, the SCRs spent a morning capturing these significant spaces through video and digital photographs.

During the fourth meeting we facilitated the SCRs as they edited their video, produced annotated photographs and prepared for the formal presentation of their positive and negative feelings about the school. At this fifth meeting, they mounted a gallery display of annotated photographs and introduced their uncensored video to an invited audience, which consisted of their parents, siblings, Head teacher, senior teachers, tutors, governor and university staff. Ongoing evaluations were completed after each of the first five sessions and in meeting six, SCRs completed a final evaluation of their collaboration in the student voice research. Their final views were captured through a variety of media which included free writing and video recorded ‘talking heads’. A summary of the research journey is shown in figure 1.

Figure 1: Summary of research journey

Outline of activities undertaken

Meetings with Senior management to clarify research questions and methodology

Whole cohort questionnaire of Year 7 with quantitative and qualitative data

Selection of student voice group

Meeting 1 (School) – student group protocol established, student self-portraits, learning walk around school site and empathy mapping
Meeting 2 (HEI) - Students checked authenticity of composite empathy map.

Meeting 3 (School) - Students filmed and took photographs around their school site.

Meeting 4 (HEI) – Students edited video and voice-overs, produced annotated photographs for gallery display.

Meeting 5 (School) – Students rehearsed and presented findings to adult audience.

Meeting 6 (School) – Students evaluated their participation - final celebration.

However, what the SCRs revealed about their feelings of well-being and the institution’s response to these is not the focus of this article; it is the tales of the unexpected and questions which emerged which will be addressed here. These relate to three key areas: the status afforded to the spaces where students are listened to; students’ use of a range of media and genres through which to make their views known and the gains derived by individual students from being actively involved in student voice activity.

Where do you listen to students?

During the research process the SCRs worked, in both the school and university environments, in spaces that were resource rich, well-lit, airy, clean and purpose built. The school space made available was usually ‘out of bounds’ to this year group and so being allowed to work there was regarded by the SCRs as a special privilege conferring high status on the research and them. Therefore, from the first meeting, individuals’ self-esteem was nurtured through being allowed to enter into a forbidden, prestigious space which was traditionally reserved for older students and visitors. Creating the right conditions for dialogue between students and adults can contribute to the construction of a mutually respectful environment in which creative development can emerge (Fielding and McGregor 2005).

When moving outside of the high status environment for a SCRs led learning walk around the school, an unexpected and spontaneous request from the SCRs was to be allowed to visit the researchers’ place of learning. This request was granted, with subsequent meetings that had been planned to take place in the school buildings being replaced with a number of university visits. During these working visits to the university, researchers were bombarded with questions from the SCRs about how to apply to university, which qualifications were needed, how much it would cost to study there, which courses were available: in a rich context, Aimhigher and Widening Participation agendas were incidentally being supported as these SCRs would be first generation university applicants. Possibly, working at the university with the researchers had enhanced the self-esteem of the SCRs and raised awareness of university application potentially being within their grasp. Polly said

*I hadn’t been there before and I wanted to see what it was like…. it was very big and very good….I want to go to UWE when I am older.*

In the context of this research what was unexpected was how working in high status environments would promote SCRs’ feelings of self-worth which translated into commitment to the research process. McGregor has asked us to consider ‘where and when are the spaces for dialogue around research and enquiry in your school and network?’ (2005:7). Physically and metaphorically we need to ask the question ‘which spaces are conducive to learning conversations with young people?

How do you access student voice?

The SCRs responded positively to the opportunity to express their feelings about their school environment through a range of genres and media (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Range of media for accessing student voice**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Medium</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaire (Open and closed questions)</td>
<td>Written, Multiple Choice, Option to draw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-portrait annotations</td>
<td>Drawing, Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy map of school</td>
<td>Symbols, Key</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School site plan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storyboard</td>
<td>Illustrations, Written instructions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluations</td>
<td>Oral – semi-formal, Written – stream of consciousness, creative writing, Videoed ‘talking heads’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital photographs</td>
<td>Photographs with captions inserted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Film</td>
<td>Written captions on screen, Voice over Film</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactive gallery display of photographs</td>
<td>Photographs with questions to audience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation to known and unknown adults and children</td>
<td>Student-scripted presentation with Powerpoint</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For some students, especially boys, the formal written word is neither a preferred nor an empowering medium of communication. There was an opportunity throughout for students to have access to expensive ICT equipment. SCRs' evaluations revealed that both girls and boys had enjoyed using the digital and video cameras, computers and video editing equipment: this was not surprising. However, a range of other unexpected benefits and insights incidentally emerged through how SCRs had been trusted to use and manipulate the ICT tools themselves. Hannah explained that being trusted with the expensive equipment ... made me feel grown up and respected because we are growing up.

Here, we are mindful of McGregor's (2005) belief that some of the greatest barriers to developing joint enquiry are adult perceptions of young people as being unable to take responsibility... (p.10).

Polly commented I felt like I was older because normally I'm not allowed to work with expensive equipment'.

Lee had enjoyed the deep level of trust and ownership which he felt he had been given through accessing the video editing equipment as it allowed his group's part of the film to be the way we wanted it to be not how you wanted it to be.

These SCRs' words resonate with Rudduck's (2005) assertion that: Pupils have a lot to tell us about ways of strengthening their commitment to learning in school; they say they want ... to be treated in more adult ways and to have more responsibility... to have choices and make decisions (p.1)

Giving students more responsibility, encouraging them to move out of their comfort zone, can generate a creative tension, involving risk for students and adults. An unexpected degree of anxiety was expressed by a number of the SCRs as the time for their formal presentation to a high stakes adult audience approached.

Holly said I was really nervous at the start of the day all the way up until we did it...

Aaron commented that Everyone was sweating.

Such anxieties were counterbalanced by strong feelings of self-achievement and self respect once the SCRs had effectively delivered their presentation. This respect for self was complemented by respect derived from the praise of significant others in the audience e.g. their parents and teachers. Holly continued When I did it I enjoyed it! I think the presentation was a success. My mum and dad were very proud of me. The researchers trusted us; it was really our own work.

Greg noted My mum said it was good.

Andy added My dad came and enjoyed it.

SCRs also derived feelings of self worth derived from their awareness of skills which they felt they had displayed during the presentation. Adrian said My bit went extremely well...there was hardly no stuttering or mistakes.

Lee commented I did very well because I pronounced all my ts.

Lee and his mother were delighted because he had spoken so well in public.

Aaron said I think you let us show you our voices and you let us make a difference – Stand up! Speak up!

A range of media was used for students' evaluations throughout the project. There was an unexpected difference in views expressed by the SCRs in their written evaluations and those presented in the medium of an impromptu one minute 'talking heads' video shot. Most SCRs gave spontaneous feedback in front of the camera. Jade, however, decided to use her written evaluation as a script to camera but went on, in the moment, to self-censor by omitting written text connected with her views on the different sorts of biscuits which they had been offered throughout the project. The written word is often perceived to require more formality than the spoken. In this context, Jade had produced her written evaluation for the eyes of the two researchers with whom she had established a productive relationship over an academic year. However, she anticipated her filmed oral comments would be heard and viewed by unknown 'other' audiences. This project highlighted the importance of asking the question 'How can we provide opportunities for students to express their views through a range of media?'

What can individual students gain through active engagement with student voice activities?

In addition to the obvious parental pride expressed at the presentation, the researchers formally acknowledged and celebrated the SCRs' participation. This took the form of a professionally designed, personalised letter of commendation, signed by university and school staff with whom the students had worked, being presented to each SCR. This personalised letter outlined skills and qualities which SCRs had developed throughout the year. Unexpected was the SCRs' overwhelmingly positive response to this form of acknowledgement. Animated discussions ensued about how they could prevent their letters from getting crushed during the day and where they would ultimately store or display their letter. Suggestions included: a frame, 'my special box and on a bedroom shelf. The SCRs' Record of Achievement was another location suggested by their Head of Year. The SCRs' sense of pride and enjoyment upon receiving the personalised letter could be a reflection of the mutually respectful relationships which had been developed between the researchers and SCRs.

Other examples of the mutual respect and shared commitment between the SCRs and researchers are evidenced in formal evaluative feedback such as when Greg said I have worked better than I usually do because I want to give a good impression.

Sarah commented I really enjoyed working with the researchers and going to the University where I made new friends.
Semi-formal feedback from the SCRs included observations such as Greg saying to one of the researchers, in front of the other SCRs.

*The best bit was the look of pleasure in your eyes when I showed you my work.*

Equally mutual respect between the students was not a given because the students did not constitute a homogenous group; in effect; it comprised eleven individuals with different viewpoints, personal qualities and needs, who were invited to collaborate on a common research theme. SCRs' interpersonal skills such as working co-operatively, listening to others and reflecting constructively on each other’s comments had to be supported by the researchers. This was a necessary scaffold in order to develop 'the respectful mind' which Gardner (2005) identifies as one of the five minds that will need to be cultivated in the future. Lee felt that by the end of the research there had been movement in the group dynamic as

> When we first met we weren’t very nice to each other because we didn’t know each other.

Sarah said that as the year progressed

> It was fun because we got to work in a team and I wasn’t doing it alone.

In evaluating the gains derived from student voice activities how do you monitor the benefits to the individual as well as the institution?

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, this article has explored issues relating to the unexpected outcomes which emerged when students acted as co-researchers. Whilst students’ views can undoubtedly contribute data for the OISTED SEF and whole school improvement agendas, what emerged was individuals’ embryonic empowerment to become agents of their own transformation. Only where there is democratic and authentic commitment to student voice will the potential for such transformation for both individual and institution be realised. The question then is how such an emerging ‘radical collegiality’ (Fielding, 1999) can be systematically embedded in an institution’s self-improvement culture for every child’s voice to be heard?

We would like to thank the eleven Year 7 students, their Head of Year and acknowledge the contribution of Paul Rycraft (MICE team at UWE).

We are grateful to Professor Philip Woods for his advice and support throughout the period of this research and to Professor David James for his helpful comments. This small scale research project was funded by a University of the West of England Small Grants’ award.

**References**


**Thought Piece: Redefining professional boundaries across the knowledge exchange terrain**

Bernadette Fitzgerald and Mark Jones

This ‘thought piece’ originated within the context of a UWE small grants funded research initiative into an aspect of the ‘student voice’ agenda. Based in a local partnership secondary school, two academics were working with a small group of Year 7 Students Co-Researchers (SCRs) as presented in this journal on pages 16 to 22. One of the unexpected hidden narratives which emerged along this journey is explored here. We invite you to travel with us and engage in the co-construction of alternative ways of working within an approach to knowledge exchange which is reciprocal rather than unidirectional. It is based on mutual respect not to ‘steal’ their voices. Always respectful of their ownership and careful editing of the SCRs’ video (see figure 1 - role 3), always respectful of their ownership and careful not to ‘steal’ their voices.

Throughout the process, he also actively engaged in learning conversations with the academic researchers at each stage of the journey (see figure 1 - role 4). A new symbiotic relationship had emerged between the ‘academic’ researcher and the technician based on openness and mutual respect which recognised the valuable contribution of both partners in the enterprise. Although situational, this shift in institutional custom and practice initially challenged and shifted the more traditional, hierarchical model of working in which ‘front-stage’ academic staff orchestrate the ‘back-stage’ technician’s work. The more generative, inclusive way of working which had emerged was characterised by collaboration and co-creation of experience.

This reminds us of Hargreaves’ (1994) identification of four distinct forms of teacher cultures (Individualism, Collaboration, Contrived Collegiality and Balkanisation) in educational settings. His proposal of a fifth form of culture, the ‘Moving Mosaic’ whereby professional boundaries are blurred with colleagues being flexible, collaborative and reflective is relevant here. This risky practice in which professional roles overlap and identities are re-drawn to the benefit of all, was an unexpected and welcome outcome of the work. What emerged was a transformative sea-change in the form of a more democratic, mutually respectful relationship. In the context of higher education, Ford et al (1996) explored how support staff roles are enacted, with greater encouragement by institutions for support staff to incorporate new roles. In the context of student voice research, there was a timely synergy between all colleagues’ readiness to embrace this more generative, democratic way of working.

Once revealed, this hitherto hidden narrative raises questions for how an institution can systematically and transparently create opportunities for support colleagues to move between roles as part of their professional development, should they wish to do so. Are fixed responsibilities and boundaries best established at the outset of joint enterprises such as research? Alternatively, is a more fluid, emerging collaboration between ‘academics’ and support colleagues to be encouraged in the promotion of an institutional culture in which knowledge transfer is mutual, reciprocal and collegiate?

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**References**

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**Figure 1:** The ‘place’ of the technician in the research process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role 1</th>
<th>ICT Technician as technical support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role 2</td>
<td>ICT Technician as demonstrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role 3</td>
<td>ICT Technician as ‘teacher’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role 4</td>
<td>ICT Technician as co-researcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role 5</td>
<td>ICT Technician as researcher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

‘Traditional reactive role’

‘Emerging proactive role’
Response to: Redefining professional boundaries across the knowledge exchange terrain

Paul Rycraft

This response highlights the opportunities that exist within the School of Education for knowledge exchange through open, collaborative work between lecturers and technical support staff.

In the United Kingdom educational system many people hold a traditional view of the technician’s role i.e. a role where the technician is required to set up equipment which a lecturer needs in order to deliver a session and/or to fix equipment when it malfunctions. However, much more can be gained by all parties if some of the inherent hierarchy of the language which labels roles can be overcome. Indeed Smith et al, (2004) have recognized that ‘…highly skilled technical support is essential to good research.’

My involvement with this particular student voice research project highlights many preconceptions, indeed misconceptions that are held about the role of a ‘technician’. Many of these preconceptions may be derived from the language used. In itself, the term ‘technician’ used here will be read differently by different audiences; for some there is an implicit hierarchical status which sits uncomfortably with their understanding of professional roles, relationships and mutual respect. For others the subtler connotations of the descriptor ‘technician’ may not be problematic or contentious.

The report by Smith et al, still infers some sort of ‘junior professional’ status to that of technician when compared to academic roles (2004:84). However, should not a highly skilled individual with maybe over ten years of experience also be considered a ‘full professional’ in their field? Indeed, searching the literature reinforced the view that technicians constitute an almost ‘invisible’ workforce. (Shapin,1989). When the term technician is used in journal articles it is usually associated with an individual who operates a specific, often very specialised piece of equipment with little further involvement in any research. The technician performs the requested operation and then their involvement in the process ceases.

If this reductive interpretation of the role of a technician had been the way of working in this student voice research project, then the researchers would have been issued with the cameras, the technician fulfilling a basic support role (role 1 in the model proposed by Jones and Fitzgerald). Whilst this traditional provision of technical support is often necessary for the success of the project, it can result in the technician remaining at a distance or becoming ‘invisible’ from the learning and research process (Shapin, 1989). Thus the opportunity for a deeper level of mutual knowledge exchange is lost.

The typology developed by Jones and Fitzgerald demonstrates several roles that are available as a technician and ideally many of the roles could be accessed simultaneously, without recourse to rigid management regimes. The ability of technicians, in various roles, to be allowed to manage their work and become involved in research activities is becoming much more prevalent within the School of Education at UWE. This involvement encourages and enhances technician engagement and promotes a feeling of being treated as a ‘professional colleague’.

This project allowed the role of the technician to develop beyond that of support. However, through remaining in consultation with the researchers and Students as Co-Researchers (SCRs), it was possible to develop the SCRs’ skills to an extent where they could remain in control at all stages of the process. Nothing was passed upon, it also meant that moving between the different roles was not problematic. Thus, I could resolve technical problems with equipment when they arose but also remain involved in the ‘higher level’ development of the student voice research project. In relation to Hargreaves’ (1994) model, the most suitable reference point is that of the moving mosaic whereby the boundaries of each individual’s roles become blurred at some stage, with roles changing dependent on the nature of the task. Being involved in such projects and using the equipment in school certainly enhances the role of the technician, meaning that we are better placed to support all students in the School of Education through drawing on our experiences.

If we are to continue to embrace a culture of knowledge exchange, we need to reconsider what the definition of a job title means to us individually and collectively and have opportunities to address any limiting preconceptions. Through numerous recent collaborative projects the full extent of colleagues’ skills and knowledge are being utilized, developed and appreciated.

References


During a planning meeting, for example, I was able to suggest alternative strategies to enable the SCRs to maintain ownership of their voice in the project. One such strategy was to work alongside them as a co-editor so that they were able to control the final content of the video. I think that because I felt my suggestions were being listened to by the researchers and indeed acted upon, it also meant that moving between the different roles was not problematic. Thus, I could resolve technical problems with equipment when they arose but also remain involved in the ‘higher level’ development of the student voice research project. In relation to Hargreaves’ (1994) model, the most suitable reference point is that of the moving mosaic whereby the boundaries of each individual’s roles become blurred at some stage, with roles changing dependent on the nature of the task. Being involved in such projects and using the equipment in school certainly enhances the role of the technician, meaning that we are better placed to support all students in the School of Education through drawing on our experiences.

If we are to continue to embrace a culture of knowledge exchange, we need to reconsider what the definition of a job title means to us individually and collectively and have opportunities to address any limiting preconceptions. Through numerous recent collaborative projects the full extent of colleagues’ skills and knowledge are being utilized, developed and appreciated.
Changing professional identities from expert to novice: on becoming a lecturer in higher education

Marelin Orr-Ewing, Jonathan Simmons, Alison Taylor

Abstract

This paper sets out to explore some aspects of the transition experienced by academic staff new to higher education on an accredited compulsory programme preparing them for teaching in a post 1992 university. New staff who have not previously worked in higher education go through a process of changing identities from their previous role, be it contract researcher, professional practitioner or teacher in another phase of education, to that of university lecturer. We base our analysis on their written assignments for the first module of this programme in order to understand better the nature of this transition. Our analysis suggests that, while some colleagues express reservations about the requirement to attend, or the time demands of the programme, the majority approach their change of professional identity in a positive manner. Moreover, they appreciate the opportunity that the programme provides to locate their new role within an appropriate theoretical framework.

Context

While substantial work had been undertaken on accredited educational programmes for university teachers in the UK by the Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA), such programmes became even more prominent following the recommendation of the Dearing Committee that all permanent staff with teaching responsibilities should be trained on accredited programmes (NCIHE 1997, para. 70). The SEDA guidelines published in 1992 for course accreditation (see SEDA website) eventually became the basis for the Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (ILTHE) scheme (now Higher Education Academy) (Trowler and Bamber 2006:86). By November 2002 most institutions had a programme in place (Gordon et al 2003:31) and it was increasingly common for these programmes to be compulsory for new staff and for passing them to be a condition of probation (Stefani 2003:17).

The post 1992 university in which this programme is located, requires all new academic staff with less than three years full-time equivalent in teaching in higher education to undertake the Academic Development Programme (ADP) as part of their probation. This generic programme which is located in the School of Education consists of three modules; the first focuses on the twin themes of learning and teaching, its overall goal being to enhance the professional competence, self-awareness and understanding of academic staff as teachers in terms of their responsibilities for others’ learning. A philosophy of reflective practice (Kolb 1984, Schon 1995) underpins the module, implying that the starting point for course members is their own past and contemporary experiences as learners and teachers. These experiences form the basis for individual, group-based and directed study activities and course members, who vary in terms of age, gender, subject specialism, experience and expectations, are encouraged to participate actively in the sessions. The second module focuses directly on observation of course members’ practical teaching and the third offers an opportunity to design and implement a small-scale empirical investigation which is intended to develop academic and/or professional practice. All three modules work together to support new academic staff through the process of taking on new professional identities.

The authors are all experienced teachers on programmes preparing staff newly appointed to this university for teaching in higher education.

Changing professional identities

At its simplest level, identity refers to who or what we think we are. Although new lecturers are not specifically asked to comment on their development of a new identity in higher education, this is nevertheless implicit in the assignment brief and the assessment criteria for the assignment for the first module of the ADP. In the assignment, course members are asked (a) to summarise learning experiences during the module and the general application of these to their own teaching, and (b) to explore a specific issue in teaching and learning that is of particular relevance to their current professional practice. One of the criteria specifically requires the new lecturer to demonstrate that they can explor e the relationship between theory and practice in the workplace, and use reflection to develop personal theory and refine professional practice.?????critically evaluating professional development needs and/or outcomes’ (our emphasis).

In view of the fact that this type of task was set, the most appropriate concept of identity that we will work with is one that is characterised as sociological (Hall 1992: 275) and social constructivist (du Gay et al 2000). The sociological conception of identity assumes that individuals develop their identities through interaction with other individuals and groups within a given social structure of practices and relations. Identity becomes a bridge between the inside (internal self) and outside worlds. Identity can be said to stitch the subject (the person) into the social structure, making both the subject and the social worlds they inhabit reciprocally more unified and predictable.

This contrasts with the enlightenment and post-modern conceptions. The enlightenment conception assumes that individuals are endowed with an internally consistent inner core or self, more or less fixed for life. This individualistic perspective emphasises the uniqueness of each person and is premised on the idea that individuals are in control of their own consciousness and actions. The post-modern conception assumes that individuals have no permanent or essential identity, that there is no unified or coherent self around which a stable identity can form. It assumes that individuals can have different identities at different times, that identities are decentered and fragmented in such a way that the individual is free and able to draw on a range of influences to inform his or her identity at any one moment.

Given that the identities we are analysing are located within the social and cultural space of work, the sociological conception offers the stronger framework for our study as it does the social constructivist conception which focuses on social groups, relations and practices within which human beings become particular sorts of people (du Gay et al 2000).

Methodology

We have adopted a documentary analysis methodology (Cohen et al 2000), utilising assignments written as part of the assessment of the first module on the ADP in the period between January 2003 and January 2005. Where appropriate, we have also drawn upon evidence from the taught sessions of the programme. This equates to four cohorts and amounts to 120 course members drawn from all faculties of the university.

Care must be taken when using such material to analyse the ways in which new staff, who come into higher education with an identity from their previous role(s), discuss changes in identity experienced in their new role. This material has been produced for assessment purposes and therefore has been written to meet particular criteria in order to pass the module and it might be assumed that such writing would lack any critical purchase. However the core assessment criterion for the module requires course members to ‘critically analyse and/or evaluate those ideas, perspectives or theories’ that they have used in their assignment.

The precise focus of this change in identity also needs to be clarified. We are not analysing the ways in which academic work roles have changed over
the last thirty years and how it is now a different type of higher education that new colleagues are entering, although these factors will have a powerful influence on the types of transitions which new entrants have to make (Nixon et al 2001). Equally, we are not aiming to analyse ways in which new staff become academics, a role which includes research, publication, teaching, administration and management, but the ways in which new colleagues reflect on and respond to the shifts in their identity as a teacher. We recognise that the other roles impact on and intersect with the role of teacher but we are mainly concerned with the role of teacher.

We were looking for data, in the form of clear statements within each text, in relation to three aspects of identity:

- the ways they (colleagues) perceived themselves,
- the ways they perceived their role as teacher and
- the ways they perceived their practices (e.g. skills, procedures, strategies, techniques).

On the basis of our experience as tutors on the ADP, we expected to find a greater proportion of statements which could be interpreted as evidence of the writers showing a willingness to take on the professional identity of a teacher in higher education with a small but significant proportion of statements indicating a slower relinquishing of the security of a prior professional identity.

In the next section we will examine and analyse data from the assignments written by the new colleagues and discuss the key themes that emerged.

Data analysis

New lecturers, particularly those who have had a significant period of time in another career prior to joining the university, go through an important shift in identity as they are inducted into the role of lecturer. In each of the cohorts covered in this research, over half were well established in their professional field (for example: cohorts contained lawyers, accountants, town planners, engineers, health visitors, occupational therapists.)

These staff come to us with the status of ‘masters’ in disciplinary or professional terms but they are deemed to be novices in terms of reflective pedagogical practices (Malcolm and Zukas 2000:27).

How individuals react to this process, the extent to which they welcome being ‘novices’ again, taking on a new professional identity, or integrating it into their existing professional identity, can vary considerably. Although there is no such thing as a ‘typical’ ADP cohort, experience has shown that year on year groups tend to include certain categories of new colleagues; people who share a number of common characteristics. In each cohort there will always be some with no teaching experience at all; others with varying amounts and types of teaching experience; others who will know the university quite well having studied or worked there; still others will be new not only to the university, but to the city and possibly the UK. However, what the vast majority of those required to attend the ADP share is the fact that they are subject to a period of ‘probation’ before their contracts are confirmed.

Resisting change or slow to change?

Very occasionally a course member uses the assignment to voice reservations about the requirement to attend a professional development course, deeming it unnecessary for how he or she views the new role. This relates to the ‘power’ dimension of the teaching and learning regimes analysed by Trowler and Cooper (2002). As one course member wrote within an assignment:

> with the increasing bureaucratisation of higher education, it was getting harder to exempt oneself from the myriad hoops that the paper-pushers from on high now force academics to jump through. (Daniel)

Interestingly, the ‘professional identity’ to which this person aligns himself is that of an ‘academic’. On the basis of this short extract, he did not appear to have seen the purpose of a course such as the ADP where the realities of the work of an ‘academic’ in a post 1992 university: teaching; facilitating student learning; supporting students; understanding the rights of students with disabilities; addressing equal opportunities issues and assessing students – are all addressed.

A key finding from the documentary analysis was the number of colleagues whose trajectory towards taking on the role and identity of a lecturer in higher education appears to be relatively slow. This is perhaps because in many faculties, new members of staff are appointed because of their recent and relevant workplace experience which is immediately utilised by the faculty, while the process of inducting them into the norms of the academic environment is affected in parallel through mentoring and the ADP.

It is possible that new colleagues who feel that their existing professional knowledge is valued will be more comfortable with the inevitable changes to ‘professional identity’ which will have to happen. One new colleague, who was recruited because of his subject specialism and immediately given a module leadership role, noted that this was unusual:

‘(As) I am the only staff member with a (………….) background…….. l am involved in many aspects of the programme unusual for most new staff’. (Carl)

On the other hand, this same colleague had been given so many responsibilities before he was truly able to adopt a new, or amended, professional identity, that he still located his discussion (in this case on course content) in his previous identity. He had not had time to go beyond his ‘tacit assumptions’ (Boud and Garrick 1999) – in this case the belief that one needs to cover ‘everything’ on a particular course. There has not been an observable shift in his understanding of his new professional identity:

‘Put frankly, this is not enough time to educate (these) students on everything they will need to know for their professional life’. (Carl)

Embracing change?

The written assignments suggest that other course members have an ability to reflect on previously held views, and a willingness to adapt to a new professional identity. One commented that the experience of moving between a pre-1992 university, with its more traditional entry students, and her current post was ‘very interesting’ and ‘raised many issues concerning teaching practice’. Another commented: ‘…with growing student numbers we are encountering greater disparity in student abilities.’

The majority of course members in all ADP cohorts appeared to have little difficulty in embracing the role and identity of teachers in higher education. In taught sessions they conducted a dialogue in the manner of professional higher education teachers and their assignments indicate a shift in their perception of their identity, even if not explicitly stated. Some are young, in their twenties, recently students or researchers.
They are also clearly willing to ‘problematise’ their practices by ‘trying out’ new ideas and approaches. The assignment reveals that they are reflecting on mile round trip in order to attend – discussion in at the weekly sessions challenging – one had a 70

...adapt to the notion of the ‘reflective practitioner’ are distinctive is the readiness with which they tutors when they disagree, or are not happy with a position that is being proposed. Perhaps the most important way in which these colleagues are distinctive is the readiness with which they work in the area of health and social care clearly illustrates this attitude:

‘I was a novice and hungry for practical information as to how I would be able to plan and structure my lectures’ (Kim)

Course members, like the one quoted above, are engaged and receptive in taught sessions using existing knowledge about teaching and learning, theoretical or from practice in another institution, to contribute to group activities. Such people are often keen to extend discussion and will challenge tutors when they disagree, or are not happy with a position that is being proposed. Perhaps the most important way in which these colleagues are distinctive is the readiness with which they adapt to the notion of the ‘reflective practitioner’ (Schön 1995). While many find regular attendance to lecturing and/or new to a higher education transition for a representative group of those new colleagues are willing, some very enthusiastic and excited, about taking on a new professional identity and that the move, albeit temporarily, from expert to novice has been enabling:

‘The ADP has been a wake up call to me that teaching (my subject) cannot be done in isolation from an understanding of the theory of teaching as a whole. I will retain and build upon the knowledge I have gained in this first module over my teaching career’. (Chris)

Reflection on change?

Interestingly a few colleagues realise that at the start of the course they had made assumptions about the way in which teaching and learning happened, by adopting an approach in which they, as students, are ‘empty vessels’ waiting to be filled. To quote a health and social care colleague:

‘At the beginning I found myself adopting a rather passive approach to learning, wanting to be taught rather than taking responsibility for my own learning needs’ (Cassie)

It is good to note how positions do change and that course members are aware of this, through the process of reflection encouraged by the ADP course and the writing of this first assignment. For example, one colleague commented on how work on ‘learning styles’ had forced her to look at her teaching differently and be prepared to adapt her practices:

‘Personally, I have found the transition from therapist to tutor interesting and at times I feel unclear of the boundaries’. (Susan)

Not all new appointments are of people with a lengthy experience in a particular field, and younger colleagues, approximately a quarter of each cohort, will not yet have developed a strong – or exclusive - professional identity. They may have been appointed because of their academic achievements and their potential to perform in, for example, research and publication. One such colleague was very positive about what attendance on the ADP could offer and had no problems with her ‘novice’ status with regard to her role as lecturer:

‘Though a progressive cycle of learning, reflecting and most significantly sharing of ideas and experiences (on the ADP), I gradually became more and more confident in approaching my new responsibilities with the (……) Faculty’, (Loyla)

These comments reflect the thinking of many colleagues who have attended the ADP course in that they demonstrate a clear acceptance of an emerging identity as a teacher in higher education. One refers to her participation in the ADP course and her own reflective practice having already having ‘had a significant effect on the quality of teaching and learning’ she delivers. She adds the fact that ‘my confidence has increased enormously and with it my ability to be more creative’. (Jane)

Conclusion

We set out to explore aspects of the transition from a previous professional identity to that of a professional teacher in higher education. The analysis of a sample of written, reflective, assignments has provided some evidence and illumination of that transition for a representative group of those new to lecturing and/or new to a higher education teaching environment.

The fact that the move to a new professional identity is difficult for some colleagues was expected. Those who resist or resent the compulsory, and assessed, nature of the ADP are a very small proportion of the overall cohort. However, it is possible that others felt similar resentment but chose not to disclose it in an assessed piece of work.

References


Teacher professional identities in urban schools: learning from teachers on a postgraduate professional Development Programme

Lynn Raphael Reed

Abstract

Committed teachers who work in urban classrooms and in challenging environments often exhibit ‘activist’ teacher identities (Sachs: 2003) in opposition to more instrumentalist modes of being. This article examines the importance of such professional identities through a consideration of dissertations completed as part of the MA Education (Raising Achievement in City Schools) programme at the University of the West of England. The article concludes that such professionals through their writing demonstrate not only ‘deep personal humility and intensive professional will’ (Fullan: 2003b) but also deep personal humanity and intensive professional wisdom. We have much to learn about the qualities of activist teachers in urban schools by listening to their accounts.

Who we are as teachers (our values, commitments, expectations and practices; our sense of our ‘selves’) shape our engagements with the world, including the world within the classroom. As Day argues (2002: 683) ‘Teachers’ sense of professional, personal identity is a key variable in their motivation, job fulfilment, commitment and self-efficacy’. It is therefore central to the project of developing and enhancing educational engagement that we acknowledge, understand and support teachers in their own identity projects. Indeed Maclure (1993) argues that a focus on articulating teacher identity itself may have an emancipatory and empowering effect – recognising ‘voices’ that are sometimes marginalised:

By insisting on the unheroic smallness and interiority of the personal ‘voice’, this particular form of the biographical attitude amounts to an insubordinate refusal, by those on the margins, to play the generalising games of the powerful (Mackure: 1993: 312).

Visibility for teachers through such identity work, potentially has important implications for raising teacher morale and addressing challenging issues related to teacher recruitment and retention. This is of particular significance in schools in challenging circumstances, including many in the urban context where the expectations of staff can be intense (Riddell: 2003). In order to attract and sustain the teaching workforce in urban school it is a priority to recognise and validate teachers who hold the ‘values set needed to support disadvantaged children’ (Ansell: 2004).

Work undertaken on the MA Education (Raising Achievement in City Schools) postgraduate professional development programme evidences two things. Both the centrality of certain aspects of professional identity in such challenging contexts and also the importance of supporting, listening to and validating the work of such teachers through a high quality accredited professional development programme. This paper, by examining the focus of teachers in their dissertations on this programme over a period of six years (1999-2005), provides important insights into teacher professional identities in action in urban schools.

What do we mean by ‘identity’?

There are of course competing perspectives on how we should conceptualise ‘identity’ (du Gay et al, 2000). These include:

- cultural studies perspectives that focus on language, signification and the ‘re-iterative power of discourse’; identity as a ‘fictional construct’;
- psychoanalytic approaches that focus on the affective domain, the defences of the unconscious and the dynamics of intersubjectivity and ‘inner history’;
- social constructivist interpretations that focus on social groups, relations and practices within which human beings become particular sorts of people.


Trowler, P. & Cooper, A. (2002), Teaching and learning regimes: implicit theories and recurrent practices in the enhancement of teaching and learning though educational development, Higher Education Research and Development, 21(3) 221-240

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Trowler, P. & Cooper, A. (2002), Teaching and learning regimes: implicit theories and recurrent practices in the enhancement of teaching and learning though educational development, Higher Education Research and Development, 21(3) 221-240
In general, however, there is agreement that:
identities are never unified and, in late modern
times, increasingly fragmented and fractured;
never singular but multiply constructed, across
different, often intersecting and antagonistic,
discourse, practices and positions. They are
subject to radical historicization, and are
constantly in the process of change and
transformation... (Hall in Du Gay et al 2000: 17)

Given such complex and fluid conceptualisations
of ‘identity’, the question then arises how might
we investigate or research teacher identities? This
can be done in at least three ways:

- by deconstructing representations and ascribed
  identities in educational policy and other public
discourses (Ball 2003);
- by listening to teachers’ life stories and
  professional accounts of themselves and their
  practice (Goodson and Sikes 2001)
- by looking at evidence of teachers’ practices within

There is a strong connection here between
‘articulated identities’ and ‘enacted identities’;
between the personal and the professional;
theory and practice. As MacLure (1993) suggests:

There is a profound connection between identity
and practice. Developing a practice requires the
formation of a community whose members can engage
with one another and thus acknowledge
each other as participants (Wenger 1998: 149).

Indeed evidence of identities expressed as
values, can only really be witnessed in practice i.e.
walking the talk:

I do not believe that values are the type of
qualities whose meanings can be communicated
solely through a propositional form. I think that
values are embodied in our practice and their
meaning can be communicated in the course of
their emergence in practice (Whitehead 1989: 45).

Teacher professional identities: competing
discourses

Recent educational policy has tended to focus on
standards, accountability, prescription, regulation
and performativity with an associated erosion of
teachers’ professional autonomy, and challenges
to teachers’ individual and collective identities.
Indeed, many argue we are witnessing:

- a struggle amongst different stakeholders over
  the definition of teacher professionalism and
  professionalism for the 21st century (Whitty et al

Evidence suggests that almost two decades of
high stakes testing regimes, centralised control
over the curriculum and standardised pedagogical
strategies - combined with the naming and shaming
of teachers and schools through publicised
inspection outcomes - has resulted in severe
damage to teachers’ morale, and loss of personal
and professional ‘agency’ (Ball 2003, Menter et al
1997).

This can be particularly acute in urban schools,
where current measures of ‘performance’ and
‘achievement’ may fail to recognise sufficiently
the significance of context, or celebrate ‘value
added’ and more inclusive measures of success.

Hargreaves argues that in many poorer schooling
communities, the scale of the challenges faced
has led to increasing levels of intervention –
which may have led to gains in achievement but
risk creating teacher dependency on external
strategies and consultants rather than developing
critical capacities needed to sustain improvement
(Hargreaves 2003). Furthermore, since the
 dynamics of urban classrooms, more than any
others, demand that teachers bring their whole
‘self’ into their interactions with pupils and peers
(personal and professional, cognitive and affective),
there is greater ‘surface area’ of these teachers
identities to be ‘bruised’ (Foster and Newman
2005).

One consequence reported of current policies
has been increased teacher vulnerability, heightened
anxiety, retreat into protective and conservative
modes and loss of trust – a vital ingredient for risking
educational change, professional development and
healthy professional conflict (Hargreaves 2002).
The audit culture also leads to what Ball (2003)
calls ‘fabrications’, where inauthentic and totalising
practices and relationships may be called forth to
be judged - causing ‘personal, ontological dilemmas
for teachers’ where their ‘identity is called into
question’ (ibid 222) and where their personal and
professional values are devalued.

Teachers are no longer encouraged to have a
rational for practice, account of themselves in
terms of a relationship to the meaningfulness of
what they do ...beliefs are no longer important
- it is output that counts (ibid: 222-223).

Indeed, the three key components of
professionalism itself, identified by Furlong et al
(2000) – knowledge, autonomy and responsibility
– are being contested. As Day argues (2002: 686)
‘imposed reform may in the long term diminish
teachers’ capacity to raise standards’.

Such analyses highlight the need to seek out,
articulate and celebrate alternative, resistant and
resilient forms of professionalism. Sachs’s work
helps us here. She identifies two contrasting current
forms of professional identity (Sachs: 2003):

1. ‘Entrepreneurial’ teacher professional identity,
arising from performativity and managerialist
agendas, associated with narrow instrumentalism.
Such teachers are:

- individualistic
- competitive
- controlling
- regulatory

2. ‘Activist’ teacher professional identity, arising
from democratic and transformative agendas,
associated with social ideals and explicit
educational values.

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<th>Such teachers are:</th>
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<td>collegial</td>
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<td>collaborative</td>
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<td>flexible</td>
<td>ethical and inclusive</td>
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<td>self-regulating</td>
<td>creative and generative</td>
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As Sachs also writes:

First and foremost democratic schools and an activist identity are concerned to reduce or eliminate exploitation, inequality and oppression. Accordingly, the development of this identity is deeply rooted in principles of equity and social justice (2001: 157).

From such an identity position, teachers are committed to raising student aspiration and attainment, increasing qualification and life chances (a ‘distributive’ perspective on social justice). However, they are equally committed to establishing democratic and dialogic relations in the learning process and learning community (a ‘relational’ perspective on social justice) (Young 1990). Furthermore, they understand the necessary connection between the latter and the former. This captures a radical sense of ‘moral purpose’ (Fullan: 2003a) and represents a powerful example of what Gardner et al (2001) call ‘Good Work’ i.e. work that is both excellent and ethical. As Hargreaves states:

Along with other public institutions, our schools must…foster the compassion, community and cosmopolitan identity that will offset the knowledge economy’s most destructive effects (2003: preface).

Movement towards such a version of teacher professionalism is encouragingly identifiable in a number of recent policy initiatives e.g. new forms of professional association, partnership and networks (Extended School partnerships and 14-19 collaboratives); some opening up of the school curriculum especially at primary level (DfES 2003) and through the most recent secondary curriculum review (QCA 2007); and the duty on schools to promote community cohesion (DCSF 2007). It is also evident in the increased interest in holistic approaches to promoting successful learning environments e.g. through ‘building learning power’ strategies (Claxton 2002) and listening to ‘student voice’ (Flutter and Ruddock 2004).

However, there is also considerable long-term evidence from the outcomes of the MA Education (Raising Achievement in City Schools) of teachers in Bristol schools demonstrating activist teacher professional identities even in environments and through circumstances that work against them. Such identities have been constructed by and are constructive of the real contexts of our local schools, rather than external propositional and idealised descriptions. They also, in some cases, represent teachers working as resilient individuals in unsupportive settings, seeking a community of practice within the MA programme itself. This is important, for whilst the current focus on system-wide reform allows Michael Fullan to claim:

We don’t need the isolated passion of individual teachers. We need a modern version which includes but goes beyond the individual (2003a: 10),

at the same time dedicated and passionate individual teachers, wherever we find them, need to be celebrated and respected for the lifelong commitment they make to the children whose lives they touch by their presence.

Evidence from a teacher professional development programme

Without essentialising teacher professional identities in urban schools, it is remarkable how many similarities there are in the articulated and enacted identities of teachers who have joined the MA Education (Raising Achievement in City Schools) programme over the past decade. This is of course is a subset of teachers in the city, and one might infer that they are likely to be dedicated, engaged and reflective practitioners, by virtue of committing to such a programme. They are also likely to have been affected by and expressive of, the values underpinning the community of practice created by the MA programme itself.

Let me here capture some of the qualities, attributes, values and practices represented in the dissertation accounts that we hold. This is taken by looking at subset of dissertations over a period of six years (1999-2005). In their written accounts of their practice such teachers show inter alia:

- identification and dissemination of good practice and peer support (e.g. Holland 1999);
- strong interest in educational ethics and social justice (e.g. Plumb 2000);
- commitment to listening to and respecting student ‘voice’ (e.g. Dick 2001);
- engagement with the affective domains of learning as much as the cognitive (e.g. Glasson 2002);
- respect for diversities, resistance to deficit models and commitment to inclusivity (e.g. Francis 2002);
- attention to the importance of collaboration in learning (e.g. Goodall 2003);
- connectivity and community building within and beyond the classroom (e.g. Neugebauer 2003);
- commitment to enhancing young people’s sense of ‘agency’ (e.g. Pardoe 2004).

We also have evidence from a larger number of teachers through MA assignments and class discussions and through evaluation interviews. From these wider sources we can add that many of these teachers show:

- willingness to recognise their sense of being a ‘living contradiction’ and to use this as a starting point for action;
- willingness to risk learning, disrupt their own educational certainties and engage in extended dialogue, reflection, evaluation based on evidence and open critique;
- willingness to do things differently – to break out and try new practices;
- high expectations of self and others;
- strong values and well-grounded sense of self;
- commitment to challenging social disadvantage.

These accounts then show us examples of truly transformative and activist teacher professional identities with critical reflective practitioners developing their living educational theories and epistemologies of practice. We also know from a recent evaluation that being on the MA programme itself has strengthened these teachers’ sense of their own professional identities, given them confidence to articulate these identities and to move their practice more in line with their professional values (Raphael Reed et al 2004).

We might conclude by complementing Fullan’s observation that ‘sustaining leaders have deep personal humility and intensive professional will’ (2003b), by adding ‘sustaining teachers also have deep personal humanity and intensive professional wisdom’. This is what an activist professional identity implies, and written work from those teachers who have participated in the MA Education (Raising Achievement in City Schools) provides an illuminating archive of evidence of such identities in action.

Let’s listen to them – and learn.
References


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Learning through Mentoring: where is the credit?

Sylvia Maughan

Abstract

This paper reports on the work of a regional Teacher Training Agency (TTA) working group, which was set up in September 2004 to devise a method of recognising and possibly accrediting the mentoring and coaching skills developed by practising teachers working with initial teacher trainees in the South West 1 region. The work was undertaken in the context of the radically changing climate of Initial Teacher Training (ITT), in which Higher Education institutions (HEIs) no longer receive funding for the provision of mentor training nor for network meetings within ITT partnerships. An addendum to this article updates progress with this development.

A large number of schools in the region responded to initial questionnaires and the data was analysed in the light of the criteria used by the TTA to assess the latest post-graduate professional development bids submitted by providers of CPD. Drawing on the work of Hargreaves (2003), Stoll et al (2003) and Sachs (2003) and others, the changing nature of professional learning communities was used to interpret and develop a meaningful professional framework for mentor development and accreditation. The paper raises questions about the practicalities of increasing the numbers of teachers involved in professional development at M-level whilst they are engaged in full-time jobs in schools.

The Context

In September 2004 the Teacher Training Agency set up nine regional working groups across the country to develop methods of recognising the professional development of teachers working in schools as mentors to trainees in initial teacher training (ITT). The pace of change in ITT at the time was extraordinarily fast. For example Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) individually were to receive no further funding for mentor training and networking. In the early days of partnership, the TTA had funded ITT providers specifically each year for the training of school-based tutors. By 2004 the TTA had recognised that the availability of suitable school places for ITT trainees would in the future be a constraint on the number of ITT trainees that might be trained (TTA 2002) and had begun to explore different ways of promoting more effective partnership arrangements. The setting up of the network of funded working groups within a National Partnership Project was meant to encourage more collaboration between providers, and indeed did so in the SW1 region. However, even with the existence of regional working groups, most ITT providers in the region continued to struggle with a shortage of placement offers by schools. So the vision of more placements in fewer schools and of schools as active professional learning communities for ITT (Hargreaves 2003, Stoll et al 2003 Sachs 2003), was attractive.

An invitation to design a regional project to recognise/accredit the work of school-based tutors in the region appeared to provide a golden opportunity to change the existing culture; to increase placements; to increase opportunities for trainees and teachers to think together about teaching and learning; to contribute to raising the quality of teaching and learning in schools.

Background of the project

The initial imperative was to find out more about regional school-based tutoring about both existing practice and the needs of mentors. The working group that was established agreed a questionnaire that was sent to all schools, covering in total the age-range 3-19. As project leader I attended Training School network conferences facilitated by the TTA, and undertook case studies of a number of schools identified by the group as having particularly effective practice. The case studies indicated that some schools were now working together, organising training sessions for each other in a way that had not happened previously. In one Leading Edge secondary school, all staff members were engaged on an internal programme of professional development, and were training staff from six other schools. In another secondary Training School all teachers had been trained in peer coaching and were actively involved in regular peer-observation. In a primary school a strong system of buddying with staff from another school had been developed.

These schools appeared to have developed huge confidence in their attempts to engage their staff in raising the quality of teaching and learning. Would there still be a role for HEIs in this new world? Work already underway on the PGCE secondary ITT programme at UWE seemed to suggest the possibility of very positive outcomes for mentors arising from new forms of HEI/UWE partnership in ITT (Whitehead and Fitzgerald 2004). In this work, HEI tutors were working alongside teachers from a local partnership school, and both were jointly benefiting from each other’s expertise and current practice, to the mutual benefit also of the ITT trainees and the school’s pupils.

So was this the new world in practice? Evidence from the project group’s questionnaires painted a slightly different picture. The initial analysis of the data suggested a number of things:

- Many teachers had already been involved in mentoring in a wide range of contexts and were using the skills developed in such contexts to mentor their ITT trainees. These contexts included roles such as Advanced Skills Teachers (AST), NVQ Assessors, Graduate Teacher Project (GTP) trainers, training nursery nurses, and schemes such as Investors in People.
- There was some evidence to suggest that in some schools there was a perception that being a qualified teacher, in itself, implied having sufficient skills for mentoring for ITT.
- There was little to enable mentors to check the quality of their mentoring work. e.g. they felt that they had few opportunities to compare their practice with that of mentors in other schools.
- Recognition, where given by schools, tended to be through existing performance management procedures. There appeared to be a lack of understanding of what was involved in applying for existing opportunities for accreditation of school-based work by higher education institutions.
- The major barrier to the development of mentoring skills was “time”.
- Peer coaching in schools appeared to be relatively common, but there was no evidence of any agreement as to best practice.
- Many schools ran school-based activities to develop mentoring skills for ITT but this often did not appear to meet the TTA criteria for Post-graduate Professional Development (PPD) that were being developed.

So it appeared that the working group needed to design a framework that would define the common ground between the TTA vision, as exemplified in the PPD criteria, and the teachers’ needs, making the best use possible of all existing expertise in the region.

At the time, the TTA’s proposed criteria for assessment of PPD programmes were as follows. Any programme eligible for funding would:
- lead to recognised qualifications at M-level or above;
have as its main objective the improvement of pupils’ performance through the improvement of the knowledge, understanding and practice of individual teachers or teams of teachers;

• develop teachers’ research and problem-solving skills by integrating within it the use of evidence, the critical evaluation of research, from a range of sources, including academic research and other data available to schools;

• be shaped by, and adapted to the needs of schools, teams of teachers and individual teachers in the region where the provision is to be offered;

• directly involve teachers, schools and other local and regional stakeholders in effective partnerships for planning and developing its content and means of participation;

• contribute to an increase in teachers’ participation in postgraduate professional development.’ (TTA 2004)

It was quickly realised by the project group which included representatives of three of the five regional HEIs that it would be impossible to agree identical practice across five HEI providers, each with a well established ITT partnership in the region, in such a short time-scale i.e. the one-year duration of the project. It was also agreed that a certain amount of diversity might encourage continuing thought, and prevent ossification of regional practice.

A review of a range of literature, (Veenman S. et al 1998 and 2001, Foley 2004, Whitehead and Fitzgerald 2004) and personal reflection by the group on their long experience of mentor-training and working alongside mentors in schools led to the following factors being identified as those most likely to influence the quality of mentoring in ITT:

a) the initial training (e.g. by HEI)
b) school support for the role (e.g. regular meetings of mentors, peer-coaching)
c) on-going networking (e.g. with other mentors, other schools, HEI tutors)
d) the degree to which the mentor operates as a reflective practitioner in their own professional practice as a teacher.

The importance of reflective practice is essential to the development of mentoring. ‘Mentoring is just like teaching, you see. You mustn’t impose a model; you’ve got to draw it out’ (quote from a mentor in a case study by Foley (2004).

This echoes the beliefs expressed by Dewey, described by Schon, about the way in which students are initiated into the traditions of practice by practitioners

“The student cannot be taught what he needs to know, but he can be coached. He has to see on his own behalf and in his own way the relations between means and methods employed and results achieved. Nobody else can see for him, and he can’t see just by being ‘told’, although the right kind of telling may guide his seeing and thus help him to see what he needs to see.” (Schon 1987:17)

The ITT partnership between secondary schools and UWE has, from the start in 1991, been based on a reflective style of learning modelled by the Kolb learning cycle (Kolb 1984).

The basic elements of this cycle are summarised in student documentation as Planning; Action; Evaluation; and Re-conceptualisation. This model is used to help both trainees and mentors to understand the nature of reflective practice, this being a fundamental principle underpinning all ITT programmes at UWE. More recent developmental work by Whitehead and Fitzgerald (2004) at UWE with one of the first Training Schools in the region has resulted in the development of methods of learning about teaching and ideas about mentoring in practice based on the ideas of reflective practice.

In this Training School, mentors and trainees had begun to reflect regularly together on video evidence of both the mentors’ and the trainees’ lessons; this enabled both to question and make explicit some of the thinking that was taking place during the lessons, guiding them to make informed adjustments to their practice. Whitehead and Fitzgerald noted that:

“Trainees, despite their relatively limited experience, became included within and valued as members of a professional community which also included us as university educators engaged in and committed to our own learning and development…

The process helped trainees appreciate that “teaching itself is not amenable to finite mastery. Rather they were enabled to recognise that practitioner knowledge is situated knowledge and in flux as new and alternative understandings emerge from within practice.”(Whitehead and Fitzgerald 2004:10)

In view of the argument that teaching is not amenable to finite mastery the project group agreed that a model for accreditation could relate more to a co-operative process of learning about teaching and learning, rather than to specific mentoring outcomes or skills.

This view appeared too to be supported by the new criteria for PPD, in particular the criteria that professional development should ‘have as its main objective the improvement of pupils’ performance through the improvement of the knowledge, understanding and practice of individual teachers or teams of teachers,’ and that it should ‘develop teachers’ research and problem-solving skills by integrating within it the use of evidence, and the critical evaluation of research, from a range of sources, including academic research and other data available to schools.’

The experience of those involved in the project group suggested that the role of mentoring for ITT can develop precisely these skills, and the work of Whitehead and Fitzgerald (2004) would suggest that professional development could be particularly rich when it involves trainees, mentors and university tutors working together as a professional learning community.

Hence the project group was looking for a structure of opportunities for mentors to gain credit that:

a) recognised the possibly contextual and fluctuating nature of mentoring for ITT;

b) recognised the role of reflective practice in mentoring;

c) encouraged trainees, mentors and university tutors to work together to learn more about learning and teaching.

We therefore agreed that instead of looking at a competence model for mentoring, we should explore ways in which credit could be made available which recognised teachers’ ability to learn about teaching and learning through engaging with the practice of mentoring.

In the questionnaires sent out to schools we kept the definition of mentoring open in order to learn about teachers’ views of what they do and in the subsequent responses we noted the widespread practice of peer coaching. There has certainly been much discussion in recent years about mentoring and coaching and the differences between them.
According to Veenman et al (2001) the guiding principle behind cognitive coaching developed by Costa and Garmston (1994) is that ‘the instructional behaviour of teachers cannot be influenced until their internal thought processes have been altered.’ The work of Whitehead and Fitzgerald (2004) demonstrated that when mentors and trainees work together to plan and analyse classroom practice they do indeed learn a great deal about teaching and learning, with particular benefits for the pupils in the schools in which the training is taking place. The SW1 project group needed to agree principles for the region that would encourage and facilitate this behaviour.

Veenman et al cite the work of MacLennan (1995) who defined a mentor as ‘an experienced teacher available for the beginning teacher to learn FROM and a coach is defined as an experienced teacher available for the beginning teacher to learn WITH.’ They also believed that ‘the mentoring stage overlaps with the coaching stage, and the mentor and the coach roles can be fulfilled by one and the same person.’ (Veenman et al 2001:323).

This blurring of mentoring and coaching roles is what had often been the practice for school-based tutors working in initial teacher training in the SW1 region. A conclusion might be drawn that a school-based tutor working with a relatively inexperienced trainee could have different opportunities for professional development than one working with a more experienced trainee. Mentors working with an ITT provider over a period of time would be likely to meet a range of students and would thus have opportunities to develop different aspects of their role. This could include opportunities to further develop their own understandings about teaching and learning.

During the year of the project, the Centre for the Use of Research and Evidence in Education, (CUREE) sponsored by the DfES, produced a framework for mentoring and coaching based on an analysis of all the available research (CUREE 2005). This framework lists a number of different mentoring and coaching roles appropriate to educational settings and in particular identifies three overlapping groups of activity: mentoring, co-coaching and specialist coaching. Scrutiny of the skills identified by CUREE suggests that mentors in ITT need to engage in aspects of all three groups and the project wished to enable teachers in the region to be able to do this.

We should note however that many trainees come into ITT with teaching experience and skills already gained from working with people in other contexts e.g. as classroom helpers with younger pupils in their own schools; as contributors/organisers of community activities for others; as teaching assistants; or as trainers of others in other workplaces. Thus not all genuinely fall into the category of a beginner. Similarly, evidence from our questionnaires indicated that many teachers in schools might have existing skills in mentoring and coaching before becoming involved in ITT. Thus age and teaching experience would not necessarily be appropriate factors by which to judge a teacher’s ability to function as a mentor for ITT. We agreed therefore that a structure for accreditation, which was based on hierarchies of mentoring, would not be appropriate. i.e. developing different lists of skills for mentors at different stages of ITT experience.

Frameworks for accreditation

The group looked at a number of areas and drew up proposals for a regional umbrella under which all ITT providers and other stakeholders might work to develop their own diverse provision.

Style of work

Data from the survey undertaken across the region suggested that the major barrier in the region for teachers regarding professional development was lack of time. However existing school-based tutoring arrangements provided time for school-based tutors to work with ITT trainees. So, using what mentors, were already doing as a starting point for professional development, suggested that the maintenance of a portfolio of evidence might be the most appropriate style of working. The portfolio might initially include evidence of existing work, together with associated analysis and action planning. This would be particularly appropriate when the mentor was working with relatively inexperienced ITT trainees. When the mentor was working with a more experienced trainee then the portfolio of evidence might relate more specifically to the outcomes of small action enquiry activities from which both trainee and mentor might learn more about teaching and the learning of their students.

Level of work

Teachers working as school-based tutors for ITT trainees would normally already have a degree and a teaching qualification. Further professional development would thus normally be at postgraduate level. This means that for teachers to gain credit through HEIs, they would normally be expected to work to level M criteria. The “levelness” of such criteria falls within the remit of the National Qualifications Framework of the QAA. One advantage for teachers of gaining accreditation for work based on their school-based tutoring through an HEI is that credit gained may be accumulated over a period of time, with any HEI, in any part of the country, and is therefore very portable and flexible. Credit gained for their mentoring work might be added to credit already received for prior professional development, which in many cases would include credit for their initial qualifications, enabling a Masters degree to come within the reach of many more teachers.

This resonates with the new directive that from 2007 postgraduates embarking on teacher training courses should be working towards a Masters level qualification.

Assessment criteria

The group agreed that it would be impossible in the time available to develop common assessment criteria for the region - and unnecessary, given the equivalence of existing criteria across the institutions, to unscramble the assessment criteria of each institution, as these had often been developed to relate generically to large, existing CPD programmes. This was another argument for the establishment of common principles for the SW1 framework, but for diversity in the details of practice from which we all might learn.

Support

An important principle right from the start of the project was that each individual school-based tutor in the region should have equal opportunity for professional development and accreditation, if desired, regardless of, for example, the size of their school, geographical location, school ethos, or access to others. Hence we agreed that there would need to be a variety of ways for teachers to access support. The case studies undertaken for the project demonstrated that there are a number of schools that are likely to be self sufficient in providing support. Some, may also wish to provide support for other schools, for example where links already exist. Other schools may welcome the opportunity to develop small professional learning communities. The group agreed to encourage this. We also agreed that no teacher would be required to travel, bearing in mind their lack of time, in order to access these opportunities for professional development, and
so all opportunities needed to be school-based with the availability of on-line support, where appropriate. It seemed possible also that the structures already in place within some of the ITT partnerships might be developed to include additional support.

Quality assurance

All the ITT partnerships in the region have long-standing quality assurance arrangements, with much already in common, and already evaluate and contribute to the development of the quality of mentoring in partnership schools. So in schools in which the professional development opportunities are taken up, we expect to be able to extend these existing tools in each institution to include QA for this new aspect of our partnerships. This could for example enable school data on student outcomes to be used to inform action planning tailored to the individual needs of the school, its students and its staff.

Next Steps

Once the regional principles had been agreed and accepted positively by other stakeholders, each institution represented on the group either developed new provision for mentors or continued or adapted existing provision in order that mentors across the region had access to provision that met the agreed principles.

At UWE two new modules were developed. These were developed particularly with the existing secondary partnership programme in mind. One was entitled Mentoring for ITT: Developing Reflective Practice and was designed for use by mentors working with relatively inexperienced trainees during the first part of the PGCE year. Tasks were provided that encouraged mentors to question the provision that they made for their trainees and the ways in which they worked with them. Beginning in this way from a very familiar starting point based on current practice was an attempt to provide a way of encouraging mentors to begin to see mentoring as a possible vehicle for their own professional development (Ghaye and Ghaye 1998:67). The module required five tasks to be completed, each involving a 500-word analysis at M level supported by evidence that the mentor would ordinarily be producing whilst working with the PGCE trainee. Typical topics suggested for development in the tasks related, for example, to the range of opportunities provided for the trainee; to the way in which account was taken of the context in which the trainee was having to learn; to the quality of lesson observation and feedback; and to the accuracy of assessment of the trainee.

By focussing on such organisational and routine aspects of mentoring, this module provided the grounding for the second module Mentoring for ITT: Developing Teaching and Learning, which was designed for use by mentors working with a more experienced trainee and which set out to encourage mentors to begin to question their own practice in the classroom, working perhaps in a role more akin to co-coaching (CUREE 2004) with their trainee. Tasks asked mentors to focus for example on an aspect of pupils’ learning in which they and their trainee had a mutual interest; or on a particular aspect of their trainee’s work that they wished to help them to improve; or on exploring different ways of working with their trainee in the classroom. This was an attempt to provide something that teachers would see as useful, bearing in mind the finding by Barker that ‘improving the quality of teaching and learning is the main reason for practitioners’ participation in research.’ (NERF 2005)

If mentors did not wish to follow the tasks provided then they could identify their own tasks and engage in small action research activities in order to improve their practice. In this way an attempt was made in the modules to enable the mentors to function as reflective practitioners and to explore and improve their own practice in teaching and learning via their work on mentoring. Whether the tasks alone were sufficient to persuade mentors to set out and explain their values (Ghaye and Ghaye 1998:45) and thus encourage sufficient depth in the change effected is debatable. In recognition of this, each mentor that enrolled on the module was allocated a tutor, who would provide electronic feedback on their written reflections. This was another attempt to minimise mentors’ need to travel to the university and hence address their problem of lack of time identified in the initial questionnaire.

In order to increase the likelihood of mentors engaging in further professional development in the future it was seen as important to encourage mentors to develop as independent and lifelong reflective practitioners. So a further strategy was to introduce the use of a literature database. Simple flowcharts to help mentors access the database were developed with library support and were included in the information provided for mentors. Indicative readings were provided for each module but the expectation was that depending on which tasks were chosen, the mentor would be able to search for relevant literature and that this in any case was an important skill to develop if they were to remain active as reflective practitioners in the future. This strategy was also in tune with the development of national databases/websites of research findings for teachers such as EPPI: Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and TRIPS. The Research Informed Practice Site, funded by the DfES and developed in response to the findings of bodies such as NERF that “Practitioners want improved communication about research and access to research findings” (NERF 2005).

The final strategy was to encourage participating schools to form a small professional learning community in the school to encourage mentors and to provide a forum in which they could be challenged, supported, and helped to validate their claims for improved practice.

“The strong professional learning community brings together the knowledge, skills and dispositions of teachers in a school or across schools to promote shared learning and improvement. A strong professional learning community is a social process for turning information into knowledge. It is a piece of social ingenuity based on the principle that, in Fullan’s words “new ideas, knowledge creation, inquiry and sharing are essential to solving learning problems in a rapidly changing society.” (Hargreaves 2003)

Where such a community developed, a mentor who was subsequently interviewed found it very useful. She reported that the CPD co-ordinator in the school started it up, encouraged the mentors and then left them to run it themselves “…and because you want to do this you are self-motivated aren’t you? So we just generate the next meeting…” She described how they photocopied their writing to share, how they discussed their findings, and how they shared what they had read. Another mentor interviewed, who had had no such support felt that the university had a role in helping schools to set up such a community. There are certainly arguments to say that school-based professional learning communities could benefit from learning themselves about effective ways of working. For example

Peer group validation depends for its richness on a group who are willing to share and critique claims that practice has indeed moved forward. Peer groups can usefully be regarded as a community of ‘critical friends’. (Ghaye and Ghaye 95:1998)

Universities in the future could help schools to develop high quality reflective practice amongst
their mentors, thus possibly raising the quality of school-based aspects of ITT, and at the same time ensuring an ongoing pool of active professional learners for the future.

The aspect of the work that mentors appeared to find most difficult was the writing up of tasks at M level. Support strategies found most useful for this by the mentors interviewed to date include the exemplars of tasks written at M level, which are provided; a support session provided by the university, although this was only easily accessed by those mentors willing to travel; and particularly the subject specific support of the university tutor. It will be interesting to see how many mentors in the end meet the M level criteria for accreditation.

Regarding the impact of the development as a whole on the mentors, the two mentors interviewed to date believed that the work had helped them to develop their own teaching. One gave an example of developing her understanding of questioning, whilst the other stated that for me.

Despite this thinking by these mentors, they still at times talked in just an instrumental way about writing up the tasks and then needing to find the quotes. There is also evidence that some mentors who began the modules will not complete them. So there is still a way to go in developing appropriate support if the process of writing at M level is to genuinely add to mentors’ desire and ability to engage in professional development throughout their career. If we are to encourage more teachers to be involved in post-graduate professional development in the future, more than those who have in the past chosen to study for a Masters degree, then we have to find ways to permanently influence their attitude to professional development, in addition to offering short term academic recognition. One implication is that we need to reflect on the nature of the academic criteria that are available to assess this type of work-based learning. Alternatively, teachers may opt for other methods of assessment that might help with career progression and yet not necessarily facilitate the successful partnerships between teachers, trainees and university tutors that have been described.

They also believed that the quality of their mentoring had improved, in particular their role in encouraging an ITT trainee to become a reflective practitioner.

I don’t think I’d have really thought about it, really at all otherwise. I’d have just been like ‘let’s get through the course’, whereas I’m actually working with two trainees becoming reflective. I suppose I have found it a very interesting way of developing my skills as a mentor, because I don’t think, when I took over the role, I thought of it as anything other than me just helping a few students along, ticking boxes and now it has made me think, right, it does question you and it questions what your role is and how important or not, your role is, in developing new teachers. So in that way it has definitely increased that for me.

Despite this thinking by these mentors, they still at times talked in just an instrumental way about writing up the tasks and then needing to find the quotes. There is also evidence that some mentors who began the modules will not complete them. So there is still a way to go in developing appropriate support if the process of writing at M level is to genuinely add to mentors’ desire and ability to engage in professional development throughout their career. If we are to encourage more teachers to be involved in post-graduate professional development in the future, more than those who have in the past chosen to study for a Masters degree, then we have to find ways to permanently influence their attitude to professional development, in addition to offering short term academic recognition. One implication is that we need to reflect on the nature of the academic criteria that are available to assess this type of work-based learning. Alternatively, teachers may opt for other methods of assessment that might help with career progression and yet not necessarily facilitate the successful partnerships between teachers, trainees and university tutors that have been described.

The TTA SWI project enabled stakeholders in the region to review together the needs of the region and to agree principles which could strengthen existing partnership work in ITT. The main outcome was a focus on the use of mentoring activity to help raise the quality of teaching and learning in schools. Although it may take a while for the agreed principles to become totally embedded in the culture of the region, the emerging evidence at UWE seems to suggest that new forms of partnership with mentors working in professional learning communities in school, supported both individually and as a group, by university partners, may meet the needs of mentors and help to develop attitudes appropriate to life-long learning of benefit to all. The project has provided a rich environment in the region for some challenging new thinking.

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Addendum
Recent developments of the mentoring project: reflective pedagogy in practice
Joan Foley

Up-date
By November 2006 it was clear that about a third of the original cohort would submit their final M Level pieces. Participants who did not go on to submit cited the pressures of busy school lives rather than the lack of UWE support as the key factor in choosing to withdraw. ‘Light touch’ Ofsted visits, staff absence in the Autumn term and rapid curriculum developments became priority considerations rather than the writing of reflections on mentoring but this does not mean that reflection did not take place:

I’d just like to apologise for not handing in my final draft – just no time now or in the immediate future so I might choose to submit next year. I have found the reflective tasks really helpful though: the readings have made me think again about something which had become habit – so thanks for that

(Mentor in City school)

It became clear that participants needed more support in honing their writing to meet M level requirements than was originally envisaged. A visiting PGCE Secondary tutor with years of teaching experience in city schools, of being in partnership with ITT providers and with recent research interest in mentoring, was asked to provide written exemplar material for participants. Her 500 word reflection together with appendix material and bibliography provided a useful model. Feedback from participants suggested the value of this. Consequently, a bank of successful reflections by participants has been built since. In addition, the MA Programme Leader offered a workshop in writing at Masters level using the exemplar material. This workshop has been built into the programme since and uses the bank as a key resource. To further support participants, digitised readings were made available on-line together with a range of hard copy readings in the portfolio guidance.

All those who submitted were able to obtain 30 credits at Masters level.

In the light of the submissions of the first cohort and the changing context for mentoring and coaching within the new Revised Standards for the Teaching Profession (TDA 2007), the module has needed to be somewhat fluid and has developed to incorporate possible accreditation under the requirements for GTCE Teacher Learning Academy Stage 3. Necessarily the reflective pieces here are more detailed. Indeed, it has become clear that to fully engage with the literature and body of knowledge necessary at Masters level, participants need the opportunity to write at length and participants have been encouraged to write about two tasks rather than four. The resulting drafts have been most impressive: participants have engaged with the literature with insight and have discussed the aspects of change in their practice with confidence. These impact statements will be refined further in the final submissions.

Finally, there are discussions in the present redesigning of the module to incorporate coaching and how the HEI can invest additional support to participants in its visits to schools as part of the partnership programme to supplement the on-line support provided by the module leader.

The new module was promoted at the Summer meeting for Senior Professional Tutors and mentors and the introductory workshop has been scheduled for earlier in the academic year in response to potential participants’ requests.

The processes of learning from experience, reflecting on the successes and challenges of the orginal project, and reconceptualising future development, are just some examples of reflective pedagogy in the School of Education’s postgraduate development programme.

Reference

Community and Calculation: counter-intuitive school choice and the urban white middle class
David James and Phoebe Beedell with Diane Reay, Gill Crozier, Fiona Jamieson, Sumi Hollingworth and Katya Williams

Abstract
Along with ‘the market’, ‘choice’ remains a core driver in educational policy and other public service reforms in European countries (Justesen, 2002; Miliband, 2006; Tooley et al 2003), including the UK, despite many well-debated problematic dimensions and ramifications (Ball, 2003; Power et al, 2003; Shwartz, 2004). The notion of choice is also the context for a continuing exodus of the urban white middle classes from state secondary education in England. Indeed, the availability of different types of secondary school provision, and the circulation of information about it, is of central importance in the housing market and is closely related to a series of strategic lifestyle choices. It also continues to have a high political profile. Against this backdrop, the Economic and Social Research Council-funded project Identity, Educational Choice and the White Urban Middle Classes (Award reference RES-148-25-0023) is investigating a cross-section of ‘counter intuitive’ examples, where white urban middle class families in England eschew more apparently dependable state and private alternatives that are open to them and instead choose ‘ordinary’ state comprehensive secondary schools for their children.

With specific reference to this group of families, the study seeks to understand school choice practices and processes in terms of orientations and motivations, ethnicity and class. It aims to investigate how such practices are related to identity and identification in the light of contemporary conceptions of the middle class self. In addition, we seek to understand tensions between familial and wider social interests, and the impact on children of particular school choices.

We have interviewed parents and children in over 130 white middle-class households in London and two provincial cities in England, which we have called Riverton and Norton. In each case, a positive choice has been made in favour of a state secondary school that is performing at or below the England average according to conventional examination league-tables. The study began in mid 2005 and concludes in 2007, and is part of the ESRC Identities and Social Action Programme.

In this short paper we set out a brief indication of two themes in the parent data about orientations to school choice, which we term ‘community’ and ‘calculation’ respectively. The material presented is an indicative part of a much broader analysis, currently underway, and the conclusion mentions some of the directions in which that is taking the team.

Hard and soft community orientations
A small proportion of the adults we have interviewed describe their choices and experiences in terms that speak of a political and theorised position on education and social stratification. Their orientation to secondary school choice is centred on community, locality and a sense of solidarity, and might be summed up by the phrase ‘this is where we live, the local school is good enough, if it needs to be better we can help it to improve – and if everyone did the same, all schools would be good’. This could perhaps be termed a ‘hard-line’ communitarian position. Lesley, one of the mothers we interviewed in Riverton, described the choice and experience of both the Primary and Secondary schools attended by her children in these terms. We had been talking about how much she knew about particular schools when they had moved into the area:

Lesley: For us the school was just a school, we didn’t actually know if it was technically good or not, it was just there. And I do remember about a year before my oldest was due to start there, walking past the playground and hearing one kid call the black kid in the playground ‘coon’ and I thought ‘Oh shit’. And had a slight wobble and wondered if the school at St Margeret’s would have a better racial mix, but then thought ‘If this is what we’ve got, that’s the school they’re going to’. 
The idea of a ‘better social mix’ as something to be sought after is becoming central to the main analysis of the data and is in the next section. Further into the interview, Lesley described the ‘principle’ that underpinned decisions on school choice in the family:

Lesley: We explained the principle to the girls and they completely understood it, to the extent that towards the end of Year 5, my younger daughter was under the impression that Hammerton School (an out-of-city, high league-table position State school that many children of professionals go to) was a private school.

Interviewer: Explain that principle to me.

Lesley: That comprehensive education only works if everybody sends their child to their local catchment school…of course comprehensive education truly only works if you close down your private education and everybody sends their child to the local catchment school. And that is totally fundamental to what we think.

Interviewer: So for you, there was no question of dithering?

Lesley: No. Some people thought it was very hard. When the kids were about 5 and everyone thought that Redwood School (the local comprehensive) was all bullying and low achieving, a lot of people said ‘You’ll change your minds, you’ll suddenly move to Mountstevens School in Year 5.’ I thought ‘Redwood does look a bit hard.’ But I thought, they’ll be older by then. So we never went to another open day…the kids wanted to go to Redwood.

Interviewer: Is that where most of the kids from (the primary school) went?

Lesley: I think possibly in (Daughter’s) year, the majority of her year possibly did. Certainly half of her year went, I’d say, but amongst her friendship group, a lot of them went somewhere else…But she was quite happy, she felt that was the school for her, it was her local school. We had discussed the whole principle with her and she agreed with it and was quite happy with Redwood School, a bit scared obviously, but she would have been just as scared if she was going to Hammerton or ‘Independent’. (laughs)

Interviewer: And how was that process for you? How did you feel about it? What were you aware of in that process? Did you notice any fracturing of people into working class, middle class?

Lesley: Well you won’t stand by and sneer as people…one middle class person after another informed you that their child was just too clever to go to Redwood, or that they were too arty to go there…‘I admire what you’re doing’ – admire – what is admirable about your child going to the local school? I talk as if we were saying ‘This is our principle.’ It was far more organic than that. We weren’t going round saying (it). …It’s just the way it was, that’s what was happening. But I did despise people who gave me all the reasons why their particular child couldn’t do it…I’m sure Redwood’s very nice, but my child’s too clever.’

The orientation here was one where a ‘principle’ is clearly articulated and fastidiously applied. However, there were also ‘softer’ communicative notions in interview data, in which ‘walkability’ or more general notions of locality were important:

Martin: I think there was more a strong feeling, which I am imagining is where some of your questioning is moving, which was about the significance of ‘local’. You know, so in the same way that I would choose to go to small local businesses rather than out to North Park (a large out-of-town shopping mall), I would rather support local schools.

 Calculation, investment and inequality as opportunity

In addition to orientations calling upon notions of community, a second strong initial theme was about school choice as a type of investment. Amongst our interviewees there was widespread scepticism about GCSE league tables and many doubted that they had any validity at all. Many parents saw other factors as much important in school choice, such as ideas of ‘value added’, the dynamism of the head teacher, the quality of communications with parents and the school’s capacity to give a good experience to learners. Many saw ethnic diversity itself as an important and highly positive educative feature. An example from the London data would be the parent who spoke in quite emotional language of the ‘marvellous advantage’ of ethnic diversity for her (white) son:

Amanda: Michael has an incredibly ethnic range of friends and it is a marvellous advantage. I mean it is not something that most people of my generation would have I think. At his 15th birthday party last year 19 friends came and they were from 9 different ethnic origins from all round the world and I found it rather moving actually. They were just lovely, they were just lovely, they were all over the house they were doing whatever they were doing. They have got this bond of popular culture that unites them you know for getting on with people in all ways in the future. I don’t think I could have given him a better education.

In Riverton, a similar idea emerged when we asked Angela Smith to clarify what she had meant when she had suggested that the best school would be the local school:

Angela: I think a mix is what you need…and that’s what was at Meadowood School at the time my kids were there, there was a complete mix from the children of professionals through to the City (names a predominantly black working class area) kids who came with nothing really. And it’s that mix, I think, that is valuable. Having a local school in an inner city might not work, in a smaller town it might do, because you’ve still got that mix.

Interviewer: So there’s something in there for you about if a child is going to a secondary school, that it’s good they should mix with as wide a range of kids as possible and that that’s good for them in terms if experience growing up?

Angela: Yes, yes I really do. I think that aspect of Meadowood School was just an amazing education for my kids and it was just there, it was just how school life was. There were dealers outside the gates at lunchtime – well they had to learn to cope with that, they’ve got streetwise and they’ve not been protected from the seamier side of life. And the (presence of) political refugee children – they (my children) had so much education.

In general, the data suggests that for these white middle class parents at least, ethnic diversity is often seen as an asset, whilst social class diversity tends not to be. The avoidance of social class diversity is likely to underpin many judgements about good schools and bad schools. Janine, another parent whose child was going to Meadowood school, told us at length about how at the point of primary to secondary school transition, the parents of all of her child’s close friends were either ‘going private’, or moving house, a year or more in advance of the transition, so as to be in a particular catchment area. Those moving house usually wished that that their children would be able to go to Mountstevens School and thus could avoid Meadowood. Although
they had considered these options in Janine’s family, her own view was that moving house or buying or renting a flat just ahead of the qualifying period was a kind of antisocial behaviour. She had both personal and professional insight here, and said that sadly, the strategy was rife amongst the better-off families in Riverton. Janine expressed very similar views to Angela regarding the benefits of exposure to ethnic diversity. However, later on she acknowledged that there were particular risks associated with the choice of school. Importantly for her, and indeed for our analysis, the family was in a position to reverse the school choice decision they had made if that became necessary:

Janine: You know, I think we've got more options than a lot of people around us have...and that if we really had to, we could do something about it (emphasis added).

Here, ‘doing something about it’ means getting their child into a different school, and the ‘options’ include paying fees for private education. The existence and awareness of this ‘safety net’ underlines the extent to which the transition is being managed, and monitored – the fundamental choice can be undone.

For many of the parents interviewed, there is a strong expectation here that the ethnic (and more rarely, social class) diversity of a school will produce a ‘better’, ‘nicer’ person – one capable of recognizing, knowing and respecting qualities in a wide range of other people and, by the same token, who is able to develop an enhanced capacity to negotiate their own way through life. Interestingly, this celebration of diversity is sometimes tinged with a wish that the child does not have too easy a ride – the proverbial ‘school of hard knocks’. In several cases parents seemed to be engaged in a reflexive project to have the child undergo, in microcosm, the sort of social class transition that they had themselves experienced in longer, generational terms. Some parents also said that they hoped their children would develop a sense of appreciation of their own good fortune, and that this knowledge would make them more considerate and community-spirited. Here, the choice of the local comprehensive is influenced by a disdain for the perceived negative effects of a more privileged education. In several cases, the parents’ own experiences of particular kinds of school – especially private ones - played a part in framing the decision.

Conclusion

In this short paper we have only mentioned two of the important themes in our analysis of the parent data. The work on which this brief account is based has developed – and is still developing - in a number of directions. Firstly, the team has become particularly interested in the role of whiteness as a largely unacknowledged ethnic category (see Reay et al, forthcoming), and in the apparent normality of middle-class notions of the self in the current political climate (see e.g. Savage 2003). Secondly we are increasingly struck by the moral questions raised by social class and educational inequality, and by attempts on the part of our interviewees to act ethically in an unethical context. The work of Sayer (2004) and Bourdieu (1999) is proving particularly helpful in this endeavour. Thirdly, the final phase of the analysis involves regional comparisons as well as further comparisons between parent and child accounts of choices and decision-making. In terms of the outcomes of the whole study, our dissemination/communication plans include a conference, a book and further journal articles.

References


Why continue with mathematics?

Alison Fletcher

Abstract

This paper presents the first steps in an exploration of why so few learners choose to continue studying mathematics post-16. It reports findings from a small-scale pilot project with students who did opt to continue with mathematics beyond compulsory study, as a means to understand why so many others have less successful experiences in mathematics, and fail or decline to study it beyond GCSE. The study sought Year 12 A level mathematics students’ stated reasons for having chosen to study mathematics and their perceptions of the subject, via questionnaires and semi-structured focus group interviews. The lines of enquiry in the questionnaire were framed from others’ investigations of students’ perceptions of the nature of mathematics, and the findings reinforced some hypotheses made from these studies and from anecdotal evidence, about the significance of beliefs about the subject, on enjoyment, success and participation. Key findings from the pilot study indicate that prior success and enjoyment were the most significant factors in the choice of A level mathematics for this respondent group, and that their perceptions of the subject were to some extent affected by these factors. It appeared that there was little variety of teaching and learning styles experienced by this group in their mathematics courses, the predominant model being uniformly traditional and didactic. The paper raises questions about the links between teaching and learning approaches in mathematics and students’ subsequent perceptions of success and enjoyment of the subject.

Introduction

The present mathematics education context is one of a continuing, serious national concern around sufficiency and quality of mathematics teacher supply (Smith, 2004; Noyes, 2004). In recent years there have been repeated suggestions of a ‘state of crisis’ in recruitment and retention of participants in mathematics education and standards in mathematics at all levels (Smith 2004; Tomlinson 2004; Howson 2002; Roberts 2002; the London Mathematical Society 1995; TIMSS, 1999, 1995). In addition, there are now many changes to curriculum and assessment in progress, with the QCA currently re-constructing the Key Stage 3 and 4 mathematics curriculum and recent major changes and additions to 14-19 qualifications, including the move from 3-tier to 2-tier GCSE, the discontinuation of coursework at GCSE, consultation over double-award GCSE mathematics, and a number of new alternative certificates to GCSE and for post-16 mathematics. The Every Child Matters agenda places responsibilities on mathematics teachers to enable their students to ‘enjoy and achieve’ and prepare them for achieving ‘economic wellbeing’.

Some reasons for disaffection, failure with and drop-out from mathematics are easy to surmise, as they abound in the media and in culturally ingrained perceptions of the subject and all those who study it (Berry and Picker 2000; Burton 2004). The study discussed here aimed to gather insight from some students who, in contrast, had opted to continue to study mathematics beyond GCSE, with the intention of identifying some of the motivating factors for these students’ choice. The study attempted to gain some understanding of the rationales and beliefs about the nature and acquisition of mathematical knowledge held by the participants, who had chosen to engage in further mathematics study, to inform some hypotheses about mathematics and learning mathematics, as dictated by the school mathematics curriculum. The study also looked at factors affecting the construction of students’ confidence and identities with the subject.

The study aimed to explore with students who had chosen to study mathematics, what had motivated their choice, how they defined their ability and success, and what kind of learners they perceived themselves to be. Three hypotheses that appeared in advance to be worth exploring, as motivational factors, were:

ability – students having experienced what they and others deem to be success in mathematics, probably measured against external, summative examination results, might perceive interest, enjoyment, satisfaction and self-confidence in mathematics, giving them the desire to continue;

experience – students who have experienced effective teaching and interesting learning opportunities, with subject content presented appropriately and made interesting and relevant, might have developed a positive impression of mathematics, enhancing their desire to continue;

career aspirations – some students might perceive that they need mathematics for their future work, or access to higher study or a particular career.

The study assumed it would be informative to explore whether particular views or beliefs about the nature of mathematics were consistently held amongst this group, and to what extent to which they identified themselves as, or with, mathematicians; in addition, whether the group’s responses indicated particular traits or strengths in their perceived thinking and learning approaches that are also widely interpreted as mathematical was explored.

Context for the study

In the Smith (2004) report ‘Making Mathematics Count’ it was suggested that factors influencing student choice of subjects for post-16 study were complex and not well understood. Themes identified emerged most frequently and significantly as negative issues for opting for mathematics, (gathered anecdotally from focus groups consulted to inform Smith’s report) were:

1 influence of teacher/teaching;
2 perceived difficulty of mathematics relative to other subjects;
3 course content perceived to be boring and/or irrelevant; and
4 lack of awareness of links between career options and subject choices.

In the highly influential ‘Mathematics Counts’ report, Cockcroft (1982) reported a ‘commonly held opinion’, that ‘Maths lessons are very often not about anything’ (para 462), and Gates (2001) suggested that this sums up what still appears to be many children’s experience of school mathematics. Smithers (2004) suggested that, in the light of a review of all principal comparative international surveys of student performance conducted over the last 40 years, England’s main concern should be with our mathematics education! In fact, statistics (Smith 2004) show that at present approximately 90% of GCSE students drop mathematics at age 16, and of the remainder, 90% of these drop the subject at age 18; thus, despite a climate where the population of post-16 students in full time education is rising, absolute numbers continuing with mathematics are falling.

Considering a more basic level of ‘functional numeracy’, Roberts (2002) reported a notable mismatch identified by employers, between skills acquired in school mathematics and those required in the workplace, echoing earlier findings of the Cockcroft report (1982) and the Bynner and Parsons (1997). Hoyles’ (2002) suggestion of the need for mathematical literacy proposes a solution to this problem; she identified a need for redefining the content and context of mathematics education, for our technological society, encompassing the demands and use of ICT. This raises the question of curriculum appropriateness which is beyond the scope of this study (Hoyles et al, 1999).

Many have commented about the inseparability of issues of supply of sufficient and suitably qualified mathematics teachers and students’ participation
and success in mathematics (Noyes, 2004; Smithers & Hill, 1989; Cockcroft, 1982). Smith (2004) noted a survey finding that over 30% of those currently teaching mathematics had no post A level qualification in mathematics. One national project worth acknowledging, as it attempts to respond to these issues, is the Undergraduate Ambassadors Scheme, which seeks to address under-recruitment to mathematics teacher training by placing students in schools to promote this as an attractive career option, as well as encouraging school pupils to aspire to degree level study of mathematics and sciences. Cooper and D’Inverno (2004) note that some studies suggest that mathematics graduates may lack confidence in key skills which are essential for teaching, such as communication skills, given the mathematics content focus and predominance of traditional teaching methods in their degree courses. Also relevant to this study are the outcomes of another small-scale project which sought Undergraduates’ views about teaching mathematics as a career (Kyriacou & Newson, 1998); respondents saw the opportunity to be using mathematics as a positive factor, but this was balanced against concerns about stress, dealing with difficult pupils, and relative financial reward.

What is certain from the literature is that concerns about achievement and participation in mathematics are not new. An HMI report in 1876 noted (cited in Cockcroft, 1982):

In arithmetic, I regret to say worse results than ever before have been obtained ... The failures in arithmetic are mainly due to the scarcity of good teachers of it!

The findings of two studies of particular interest and relevance to this project have been significant in the choice of lines of enquiry to explore in the pilot questionnaires. Bland (1994) explored “who does A level mathematics?”; his aims were to discover whether students chose mathematics as a priority because they enjoyed it and wished to pursue it beyond A level study, or if their choice was more utilitarian to support other subject studies. His findings, from a respondent group of 159 students in 8 sixth form settings, encouragingly found that many had chosen mathematics because they enjoyed it, though many felt that GCSE success was no indicator of suitability or preparation for A level study. Only 10% of Bland’s respondents were intending to continue to study mathematics at undergraduate level. Similarly, the study discussed in this paper sought students’ stated reasons for choosing to study post-compulsory mathematics, with the hypothesis that these reasons might implicitly suggest factors which dissuade others.

Analysis of a survey of images of mathematics held by members of the general public, Lim and Ernest (1998) found that perceptions of the subject were closely related to attitudes and feelings towards mathematics, but also that these were very significantly influenced by experiences of learning mathematics in school. In completing an answer to an open-ended question, “Maths is …”, 44% of responses related to something affective; 14% referred to the process of learning mathematics and 30% to the nature of mathematics. It is particularly interesting that a subject, variously associated with being cold, un-affective, fixed and rational, should draw such an emotional response from people. Students currently engaged in mathematical study are perhaps even less likely to separate their images of mathematics from the experience of learning mathematics, since the latter could be argued to be developing the former. In the light of Lim and Ernest’s findings, the study discussed in this paper was interested in discerning to what extent present A level mathematics students’ views of the subject were attributed to an emotional or experiential factor, specifically their teaching and learning experience of school mathematics.

Findings from the Study

The research findings in this section result from a pilot study, in which data was obtained using questionnaires, investigating Year 12 A level mathematics students’ motivation to continue to study mathematics post-16 and their perceptions of mathematics. Further evidence was obtained from subsequent semi-structured interviews with small groups of students, seeking elaboration of characteristic responses from the questionnaires.

The pilot sample was small, comprising 55 respondents from 3 institutions. These were mainly students currently studying A level mathematics, and mainly Year 12s at the end of their first year of post-compulsory study; a small number of respondents were mature students, and a small number were on an Access to Higher Education course with a mathematics component. In reporting findings from this pilot phase of the study it should also be acknowledged that informal discussions took place, with other sixth-form students and with Primary and Secondary phase graduate teacher training students specialising in mathematics, providing further anecdotal evidence.

The pilot questionnaire was designed to elicit responses relating to factors identified in others’ surveys. These include reasons for choice of mathematics and relative agreement with statements about the nature of mathematics (Bland 1994; Lim & Ernest 1998); popular/cultural perceptions, again relating to the nature of mathematics, and also how mathematicians are portrayed in the media. Analysis of the responses could then be compared with some of the findings within the literature and other research. The pilot data was intended to be used to give some initial insight into these themes and highlight some specific questions for more detailed exploration through interviews in a further study.

Analysis of these findings is presented in sections relating to some selected questions from the pilot questionnaire.

Reasons for choosing mathematics AS/A level

Respondents were asked to rank a number of statements representing possible reasons for their choice of mathematics; they could rank as many or as few of the statements as they considered applied to their choice. The percentage of respondents citing each reason (irrespective of ranked positions given) was calculated, to give a proportional comparison of the overall stated significance of the different factors. Also, weightings were applied to the rankings given (for example a ranking of ‘1’ was given the highest score in order to calculate relative significance.)

Taking into account the rankings allocated, the top three reasons given by respondents in this study were:

1 1st it was one of my best subjects at GCSE (12.5%);
2 2nd I enjoy it (10%);
3 3rd I find it interesting (9%).

There was no clear majority reason expressed. However the significance of prior success, as measured in public examinations, was noted.

In a DfEE survey of adult learners (1996) NIACE found that 48% of all respondents cited work-related reasons for choice of subject study, and 36% for reasons of personal development or interest in the subject; however mathematics and science students represented only 4% of these respondents. Of the respondents of sixth form age in the 1996 study, across all subjects, again more cited work/career aspirations (39%) than
any other reasons. (compared with only 8% in the study discussed in this paper); 16% stated that their choice was influenced by the achievement of the qualification itself (compared with 7% of the respondents in this study). Significantly, 14% of the whole sixth form age group in the NIACE survey cited interest in the subject as a reason for choice, compared with only 5% of those studying mathematics/science subjects.

**Experience of AS/A level mathematics course**

The questionnaire asked for brief open-ended responses to the prompt ‘how are you finding your maths AS/A level course?’. Across these responses, several recurrent themes emerged.

Firstly, many respondents suggested that their mathematics study ‘made them think’. The development of generic thinking skills is a topical theme within the National Strategy (2005) at present. The role of mathematics learning in developing reasoning and problem solving skills could be made more explicit to students at all levels of study. Interview evidence suggested that these responses were more likely to mean that mathematics study was being experienced as difficult or “challenging”. The use of the term “challenging” was a second recurrent theme in responses (used by around 45%). Challenge was usually expressed as a positive feature – it seems that mathematics is widely perceived as difficult, but that this can be interpreted in its favour and as a motivational factor for some students studying mathematics at this level. As in Lim and Ernest’s (1998) findings, almost all respondents in this study (over 90%) agreed that mathematics is difficult, regardless of their own stated success or enjoyment of the subject; in both surveys respondents used the term “challenging” to express both positive and negative emotions. It is not evident from this study whether this is a characteristic unique to mathematics, or comparable with students’ experiences of study of other disciplines at this level, as comparison with other subjects was not investigated here.

A number of questions follow about whether mathematics is difficult per se, more difficult than other A level subjects (there is some statistical evidence to suggest this, (Fitzgibbon & Vincent 1994)), or difficult due to design (curriculum or teaching and learning approach).

Around 55% of responses described enjoyment, frequently linked either to “finding it easy” or in contrast “challenging”. For these respondents, their descriptions related closely to their expressed reasons for choosing mathematics. The QCA have recently surveyed mathematics teachers about participation and retention in A level mathematics in their settings, in the light of new syllabus and AS/ A2 module arrangements. Their interim findings (2005) note a “clever core” of mathematicians studying at this level, those who find it “easy”; the reverse of this might be that other students who perceive themselves to be without this “cleverness”, or inherent flair for learning mathematics might be disinclined to choose this A level. A further subset of those expressing enjoyment linked this with “new” material. This is significant in terms of the Secondary mathematics curriculum design. It is probably true that there are a lot of perceived repeats of topics already heard of and met, albeit at a simpler level: perceived and real repetition throughout schooling, and not just in mathematics, is a concern for interest and motivation as well as progression and continuity.

In contrast, to those enjoying their mathematics course, a further group of respondents (around 25%) expressed their experienced difficulties and linked this with not enjoying the course and doubts about whether they would pass. This highlights once again the link between experiencing success and positive perceptions of the subject. Recurrent phrases included “more difficult than expected”, “pace too quick”, “too much to learn”, and some made comparisons with prior study, stating that it was harder now and that they preferred their experience of mathematics at GCSE level. These statements, when discussed further in interviews, revealed some underlying features of pedagogical approaches to mathematics at this level of study.

The respondents suggested that, for them at this present time of study, the nature of mathematics learning and success was characterised by a dependence on memory, rote learning, and fast coverage of lots of content.

This raises significant implications about prevalent and predominant teaching and learning styles, which convey a particular view of mathematics and the likelihood of resultant procedural rather than relational understanding. In fact, 100% of questionnaire respondents described the teaching and learning model they were experiencing in their A level mathematics courses as, “teacher input followed by student practice”; not one respondent related any alternative approach or experience to this. Given the small size of the sample here and the limited number of teachers, schools and colleges represented, there is no claim made to generalise to the wider picture of what A level mathematics lessons look like, but for these respondents this was the sole diet on offer, still falling short of Crockcroft’s (1982) recommendations. An interim finding of the QCA’s (2005) evaluation of participation in A level mathematics, was that there was no clear agreement across teachers’ attitudes towards or approaches to the delivery of A level mathematics.

The final category of responses which deserves attention related to the environment for learning post-16. Some cited that learning in a small class was helpful, and one respondent mentioned that it was better not to be learning alongside students who were reluctant and only there because mathematics was compulsory. The potential for participation in and discussion about mathematics is greater in the context of a small group of similarly interested and able students. This might represent a significant change in the nature of the mathematics learning for students as they move from GCSE to A level study, though this was not evidenced in the responses on teaching and learning styles experienced.

**Extent of agreement with common perceptions of mathematics**

Respondents were asked to express their opinion, on a simple agreement scale, about a number of different predominant beliefs about mathematics; these are summarised in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>% agree (SA and A)</th>
<th>% disagree (D and SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a difficult subject</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a boys’ subject</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a useful tool</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Perceptions of mathematics
Perceptions of mathematics continued

It was noted that many of the statements which indicated a very particular and rather closed view of the nature of mathematics were supported by the majority of the A level students in this study. For example, 78% agreed or strongly agreed that mathematics is “mainly rules to learn”; 73% agreed that mathematics is “either right or wrong”; 51% agreed that “you can either do or not”. Comparing respondents’ expressed perceptions of mathematics with when they claimed to have most enjoyed mathematics, there was no difference between the proportions agreeing that mathematics is “hard”! A greater proportion of those who stated that they were enjoying mathematics more at A level than in previous phases of schooling also strongly disagreed that the subject is mainly about “rules to learn”. The group who were enjoying mathematics less at A level was more inclined to say that mathematics is not “applicable to real-life”, not “fun” and not “creative”. Table 2 summarises the responses about when the students claimed they had most enjoyed mathematics and their stated reasons.

Table 2: Experience of school mathematics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When did you most enjoy mathematics?</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>Summary of stated reasons, in students’ own language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Less pressure; I was better than everyone else; Enjoyed problem solving activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KS3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Easier; I kept up; More basic numeracy, which I was best at; I was best in year; Not so critically important; Fun; More time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KS4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Enjoyed being good at it; Got good grades; Did good coursework; In a good class; Liked teacher; Simpler; Struggled less than now; Found easy; Enjoyed the topics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A’ level</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>More challenging; More depth; More interesting areas of maths; More reasoning than in GCSE; New maths to learn; Because I chose to do it; Not held back by others in class; Good teaching; Small class; Not patronising; More competitive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Out of school/in own time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prefer to be at home</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NB All 43 respondents had taken Higher level GCSE and had achieved a grade B, A or A*

Conclusions and questions arising from the study

The purpose of this small-scale study was to explore some hypotheses about prevalent perceptions of mathematics and to obtain some students’ stated reasons as to why they had opted for a mathematics course beyond GCSE. An assumption of the study was that there are strong links between the students’ learning experience and resultant ‘success’, the implicit messages about the subject which are suggested in the way it is presented to students, and students’ beliefs about the nature of the subject. The study was also conceived in the context of a national problem with recruitment to and student ‘success’ in post-compulsory mathematics courses.

The study did not seek generalisations beyond this respondent group and there is no claim made here that, should the study be repeated with other respondents, similar findings would emerge. The responses were valid for these participants at the time they responded. A central aim of the pilot study was to identify themes for exploration in a further study, through more extensive and expansive interviews with various participants in mathematics beyond GCSE.

‘Success’ was inextricably linked to enjoyment for most respondents, which raises the question, what is an indicator of success? For the participants in this study, the majority had conceived and measured their ‘success’ in mathematics in terms of being in the top set, understanding easily, and obtaining a high GCSE grade. Some respondents doubted their ability and success, despite being in top sets and obtaining high GCSE grades, because they felt they were not understanding the work, that the pace was too fast and the content too difficult. I suggest that this is a deficient model of ‘success’ which arises from a content-driven curriculum, a restricted range of teaching and learning models...
and an over-emphasis on measurement against ‘high-stakes’ external assessments, at the expense of developing confidence and self-belief, for some learners – achieving but not enjoying. In subsequent research I aim to investigate in more depth notions of identity as a mathematics learner, and maladaptive interpretations of ability and understanding (Boaler 2000; Dweck 1986).

In relation to the principal reasons expressed for choice of mathematics A level, it is evident that those who had experienced success at GCSE appeared to be more likely to enjoy mathematics and therefore opt to continue to study it post-16. This study cannot show if this is the case for all school subjects, as might be highly likely. Therefore the lack of success students experience up to GCSE in mathematics is a significant problem for post-compulsory take-up, even taking into account its high status and alleged usefulness, in terms of school subjects, as might be highly likely. Therefore the lack of success students experience up to GCSE in mathematics is a significant problem for subsequent research I aim to investigate in more depth notions of identity as a mathematics learner, and maladaptive interpretations of ability and understanding (Boaler 2000; Dweck 1986).

Epistemological beliefs about the nature of mathematics were varied amongst the sample. Those who were finding the A level course hard and challenging but viewed this positively and were enjoying their learning, in general, had a less restricted view of mathematics than those for whom the difficulty and lack of a sense of success was de-motivating and whose enjoyment of the course was less. I suggest that further to this, beliefs about the nature of a subject are embedded in and conveyed by the teaching and learning approaches adopted, and profoundly affect students’ construction of their own perceptions of that subject. A question for subsequent research is whether particular views of mathematics are restrictive on learning and motivation to continue study.

References
Behaviour for learning: an analysis of secondary PGCE trainee teachers’ concerns

Carolyn Bromfield

Abstract

This study set out to explore PGCE secondary trainee teachers’ concerns in relation to dealing with students with behaviour difficulties within the classroom and whether this changed over the course of their programme. Key findings from the research focussed on a change in emphasis from a reactive position of managing students’ behaviour to a more proactive approach linking behaviour and learning. This research also highlighted the importance of listening to the stakeholder voice when evaluating educational programmes. Through examination of trainee teachers’ perceptions and concerns, an insight can be gained regarding the problems they face and the knowledge they find most worthwhile.

Introduction

On entering the teaching profession in 1970, I certainly felt ill-prepared to deal with disruptive behaviour in the ‘blackboard jungle’. As evidenced by my own experiences and that of others (NFER 2006), practising teachers have long been concerned about their lack of training and lack of skills in dealing with difficult behaviour in the classroom. In terms of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) in 2006, it could be expected that this view had significantly changed due in part to the introduction of National Standards (TTA 1998) with the emphasis on improving teachers’ efficacy and confidence. These revised standards (TTA 2002) take into account the increase in social and educational inclusion and require newly qualified teachers (NQTs) to ‘promote behaviour’ (QTS Standards S2.7) and ‘manage behaviour’ (QTS Standards S3.3.9).

However, it would appear that the effective management of students’ undesirable behaviour in the classroom still represents a major challenge for trainee teachers (Kokkinos et al. 2004) and there are still teachers entering the profession claiming not to have had sufficient grounding in behaviour management (TTA NQT Survey 2005).

Therefore, the aim of this research was to examine PGCE secondary trainee teachers’ concerns about student behaviour, to determine whether these concerns were acknowledged and met by tutors within an HEI and indeed whether these concerns should be responded to, and to determine whether trainees in 2006 did feel prepared to deal with difficult behaviour in the classroom.

The Study

As with any new venture it is to be expected that concerns would change over time linked with growing confidence on the journey from novice to expert. Some researchers have suggested that these changes can be linked to the transitional stages of learning to teach (Berliner 1988; Fuller 1969; Fuller and Bown 1975; Maynard and Furlong 1993). Fuller (1973) explored these stages and identified different concerns that trainee teachers experienced at different stages of their training. He suggested that initially in any new situation their concerns are very egocentric being focussed on very basic survival needs with anxieties centred on the demands being made on them. As Capel (2001) maintains:

Only when these initial concerns about self have been addressed do [trainees] become concerned about the task of teaching and about meeting the needs of individual pupils (p. 248).

Fuller and Bown (1975) identified three stages of trainee teacher concerns:

1. Self concerns - coping and survival in the teaching environment. This will include issues of behaviour management and class control, being liked by the students, as well as the pressures of being observed and evaluated.

2. Task concerns - mastering the daily routines and the practice of teaching. This includes working with a variety of students, differentiation of work and providing suitable resources.

3. Impact concerns – concerns about enhancing learning and how this can be achieved. This includes the social and emotional development and how individual needs can be met within a classroom setting so as to maximise each student potential to learn. Here they become more focussed on their relationships and individual students.

Stages of development in learning to teach have also been identified by Maynard and Furlong (1993):

1. Early idealism - this occurs before any school placement has started. In this early stage trainee teachers are often idealistic in their feelings towards students, identifying with perspectives of the students rather than those of the class teacher.

2. Survival – this occurs when trainees begin their first placement. Here the realities of life in the classroom take over from earlier idealism. The trainees’ major concerns centre on class control, classroom management and fitting into the school system.

3. Recognising difficulties - having adjusted to the realities of the classroom the trainee now begins to focus on the different demands placed on them. They become concerned with the pressures of being observed and assessed and start to focus on teaching methods and materials.

4. Hitting the plateau - this occurs after trainees become more confident in class control and have started to assess what works well and what does not. The problem here arises that they begin to opt for ‘safety’ and become blinkered in their vision – concentrating on what works well for them.

5. Moving on - this occurs when trainees can shift from focussing on their own needs to the needs of their students and be confident enough to experiment with their teaching.

Both these studies indicate the importance of moving beyond the survival phase in order to progress along the route to becoming a teacher. In terms of behaviour management this is extremely significant, as trainees in the survival phase tend to react to student’s behaviour and make decisions that are based on ‘gut reactions’ rather than thought through responses. When trainees are under excessive stress a bodily reaction can be triggered called the ‘fight or flight’ response (Cannon 1927 cited in Thase and Howland 1995), so that when trainees feel they are unable to cope or are threatened in any way they can enter the reptilian brain phase in which the thinking elements of the brain close down and they are left with limited impulsive reactions.

Participant selection

In order to analyse trainees’ concerns about behaviour issues throughout the whole process from the start of their training to emerging as fully qualified teachers, the time constraints of this research determined the choice of following the experiences of trainees on a one-year secondary PGCE course. The PGCE secondary cohort, as opposed to the primary group, was selected as these trainees not only have to come to terms with subjects in the National Curriculum programmes of study but also have to become competent in classroom management and organisation with different groups of young people, thus making the forming of relationships more problematic. Secondary teachers have fewer opportunities to build relationships with their students, unlike their primary counterparts who have the same class of pupils every day. Barry and King (1993)
have suggested that teaching is comprised of three fundamental areas: instruction, management, and relationships with the issue of relationships being placed as a central tenet of being an effective teacher (Abbott-Chapman et al. 1990; Hughes 1994).

It was my initial intention to include all of the PGCE trainees in the research but after careful consideration it was recognised that collecting data from this large group would not be feasible. I therefore decided to restrict the sample to two of the core subjects, English and Mathematics and to Business Studies who were included in the sample as this is a curriculum area outside mainstream academic activities. My choices were also influenced by supportive subject tutors who expressed an interest in taking part in the research.

Methodology

Interrogating personal ontological and epistemological viewpoints facilitated the choice of the most appropriate methodology in order to find the ‘best fit’ between the research questions posed and research methods employed. This research study used a phenomenographic methodology in order to see the world from the trainees’ perspective (Marton 1981) and was particularly effective as this approach emphasises the experience that has been reflected on and fits with the notion of the reflective practitioner. A key aspect of this methodology is engagement with the lifeworld of the trainee (Husserl 1970; Spurling 1996) which involves

some time, to ascertain whether there were any discernible differences between their responses (Ritchie 2003). Having organised the volunteers into the various categories I then selected at random the final group choosing two male and female from each cohort—twelve participants in total.

An initial concerns questionnaire was given to the trainees in week three of their ITE programme prior to a two-week school visit to prepare for their first teaching experience (placement A). The questionnaire invited the trainees to consider what behaviours they thought were going to the most difficult to deal with. Questionnaires were subsequently issued to the three groups in January following placement A and in June 2006 at the end of the PGCE programme. The selected twelve participants were interviewed on three occasions during the same periods.

The Main Concerns (Stage 1)

Data analysis from the first set of questionnaires emphasised the importance that trainee teachers placed on being ‘in control’ of the class (see chart 1). This is in line with other research (Capel 2001; Wilson and Cameron 1996) that found the item causing trainees the most concern was ‘maintaining the appropriate degree of class control’. Trainees viewed being in control as the main marker of effective management which is not surprising given the message from some teachers and the media that behaviour management is solely concerned with establishing control over disruptive students (Powell et al. 2004).

For me it’s those more aggressive situations that I’m worried about and knowing your rights when you’re there in a classroom so that you can actually retain some kind of control… and well respect so that you don’t actually crumble or give them the power.

The final category was constructed from anxieties trainees expressed about not being regarded as a ‘real teacher’:

I am concerned that as a trainee teacher the class will not have as much respect for my authority as they would for their normal teachers and they might say things like ‘You can’t make me you’re not a real teacher’.

The Main Concerns (Stage 2)

The biggest fear expressed by the trainees in the first round of questionnaires was that of ‘worst-case scenarios’ in which they were out of control in the classroom. Following the first placement the majority had realised that these occurrences were rare and their main concerns had now changed significantly, (see chart 2) with refusal to work...
being referred to as the most difficult behaviour to deal with:

It’s when a pupil does nothing when you ask them to do something and just refuses to work. I had children getting out of seats or leaving the room, and talking to them made no difference and you cannot physically make them sit down. It’s the ‘don’t care’, ‘how are you going to make me’ attitude.

Handling defiance in students was demanding for trainees as they found it difficult to cope with students who openly disobeyed their instructions or challenged their authority:

The most distressing things were the blunt refusals to do as requested - even small things like refusal to remove a coat, as well as the bigger issues like refusal to leave the classroom when asked to.

Teachers can be seen as figures of authority (Visser et al. 2003) and as such there was an expectation by many trainees that if they issued an expectation by many trainees that if they issued an instruction it would be obeyed. They often based this assumption on personal experiences from their own schooling in which they had conformed to school rules and regulations:

When I was at school we all did as we were told. I don’t remember anyone in my class answering back to the teacher and we certainly wouldn’t have sworn or used abusive language for fear that our parents would be informed.

References to low-level disruptive behaviours such as talking when the teacher was talking and other inappropriate noise levels were now featuring more frequently:

It can be difficult to obtain the level of quiet necessary to move on with the lesson. Once noise levels are high with difficult classes it can be impossible to regain quiet.

Other concerns relating to excess noise were mentioned, particularly when students called out answers to questions, ‘even though they had their hands up’, or shouted to their friends across the room which disrupted the whole class. A number of trainees said they found it difficult to manage groups of students all chatting at the same time: ‘when you get one group to shut up then another group, or groups, start talking’. Others felt that their authority was challenged by students who were ‘talking when I was talking’ or ‘students whispering when I am talking and not being quiet when asked’.

The Main Concerns (Stage 3)

At the end of their programme all the trainees in the study highlighted low-level behaviours as causing the most concern (see chart 3), echoing those of practising experienced teachers (NFER 2006).

This also endorses Little’s (2005: 376) findings that ‘teachers are spending a great deal of time and energy on managing inappropriate behaviours that are of a minor (but disruptive) nature.’ Many said they were not prepared for the amount of time they would spend dealing with low-level behaviours which they found extremely stressful. This resonated with another study of secondary PGCE students (Kyriacou and Stephens 1999) in which surface behaviours were described as causing the most stress. This also relates to similar findings of practising experienced teachers:

The most common forms of misbehaviour are incessant chatter, calling out, inattention and other forms of nuisance that irritate staff and interrupt learning (Ofsted 2005).

Analysis of data

Findings from this study support previously identified anxieties (Fuller and Bown 1975; Hart 1987) in that behaviour still remains a major concern for trainee teachers. A recent report published by the Association for Teachers and Lecturers (2006) also identified that student behaviour management was a key concern for trainees and newly qualified teachers. This mirrors trends within the teaching profession, according to a National Foundation for Educational Research survey (2006), with over half of secondary headteachers reporting concern about deteriorating behaviour. Data analysis from the first set of questionnaires and interviews emphasised the importance that trainee teachers placed early on about being ‘in control’ of the class. This is in line with other research (Capel 2001) that found the item causing trainees the most concern was ‘maintaining the appropriate degree of class control’. Research by Wilson and Cameron (1996) also found that trainee teachers early in their course showed a universal concern with being able to control pupils and saw that as the main marker of effective management.

A third of the way through the PGCE course concerns had changed, with the English and Mathematics specialist trainees finding handling defiance in students the most demanding. They found it difficult to cope with students who openly disobeyed their instructions or challenged their authority. The Business Studies specialists differed in that they perceived low-level disruption to be the most problematic partly due to the additional distraction that the IT equipment presented for students. At the end of their programme all the trainees in the study highlighted low-level behaviours as causing the most concern. This is in common with practising teachers in secondary schools who cited incessant chatter, calling out, inattention and other forms of nuisance as being irritating and disruptive of learning (Ofsted 2005). Clearly there was a significant change in all trainees’ concerns over the course of their training.

Emerging from the research was a pattern in which trainees at the beginning of their course were extremely anxious, where these high levels of anxiety led them to being most concerned about extreme high-level behaviour. Following placement A, trainees were mainly concerned with middle-order disruptive behaviour. This was serious behaviour such as refusal to work or dealing with aggressive behaviour, but did not include instances in which they felt totally out of control. By the end of the year trainees’ confidence in behaviour management had increased and it was no longer the high-level or medium-level behaviours that were causing the most concern, but instead those insidious low-level behaviours (see Chart 4).
This research has highlighted the importance of listening to the stakeholder voice when evaluating educational programmes. Through examination of trainee teachers’ perceptions and concerns, an insight can be gained regarding the problems they face and the knowledge they find most worthwhile (Guillaume and Rudney 1993). It is only by attending to trainee teachers’ concerns that we can fully understand the processes trainees undergo to become teachers.

**References**


**Discussion**

This research was attempting to examine trainee teachers’ personal perceptions of their experiences in order to gain an insight into the problems they face. This is particularly important in terms of behaviour management as personal perceptions and interpretations of concepts and frames of reference will affect decision-making. Trainee concerns and anxieties have been found to be closely linked to individual perceptions and interpretations of student behaviour (Kokkinos et al. 2004). Other research has also focussed on trainee teachers’ interpretations of student behaviour problems (Westerman 1991; Prawat 1992), which will affect the types of strategies that are selected to deal with the behaviour. For instance, trainee teachers can sometimes view inappropriate behaviour as an expression of defiance or non-compliance whereas more experienced teachers are more likely to look beyond the immediate outward signs for other contributing factors (Hoover and Kinsvatter 1997). Misunderstandings and misinterpretations can lead to inappropriate choices of intervention (Irwin and Nucci 2004) and these in turn can lead to resentment or confusion for the student.

1 These standards were current at the time of the research. Revised standards have operated since September 2007.

2 For the purpose of clarity it is to be noted that participants in the PGCE Secondary Programme who are training to be teachers will be referred to throughout the paper as ‘trainees’. This is in contrast to pupils in secondary schools and colleges who will be referred to as ‘students’.

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**Chart 4:** Correlation between levels of anxiety experienced and level of behaviour causing the most concern

![Chart 4: Correlation between levels of anxiety experienced and level of behaviour causing the most concern](image-url)


Teacher Training Agency (2005) NQT Survey London: TTA.


Notes for Contributors

The policy of the journal is to promote the practice of education as a professional activity based on critical evaluation, enquiry and analysis by practitioners. Any educator who considers themselves to be a reflective professional is welcome to submit articles of interest to the target audience.

Scope and nature of contributions

Papers are accepted as main features between 4000 and 6000 words in length or short reports of between 1000 and 2000 words. Papers based on analytic research into practice will dominate, though literature reviews or well grounded discussions will be welcomed. Papers should be written in a straightforward, accessible style, avoiding the use of technical jargon. Acronyms must always be explained. The first person voice should always be used. Articles should begin with an introductory paragraph that sets out what is being argued, and a concluding paragraph that clearly summarises the main points. The editor will compile a brief abstract. Short summary case studies or illustrative vignettes can be included as boxes outside the main text. There should be some referencing, though this will be limited to key texts that readers may wish to consult further, or which justify contestable claims. Samples of the work of students or pupils may be included, subject to the appropriate permission. Graphs or tables should be kept to a minimum. Photographs will be particularly welcome, though must always be accompanied by unambiguous evidence that they are compliant with child protection considerations and have the necessary authorisation.

Manuscript requirements

Manuscripts must be submitted to the editor in electronic form using recognised word processing software such as MS Word. Discs, CD ROMS or e-mail attachments are all acceptable. Three hard copies must also be included. Single spacing is acceptable. Figures, charts or diagrams must be included at the end of the text, with a note to indicate approximate place of insertion. They must be submitted in electronic form and as good quality originals. Photographs may be good quality black and white or colour prints, or may be submitted in a recognised electronic form such as .jpg.