

MAKING THE MOST ITT (INITIAL TEACHER TRAINING)
CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AT THE CENTRE
OF SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

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MAKING THE MOST OF ITT (Initial Teacher Training): CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AT THE CENTRE OF SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

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" It has been suggested that morale in schools is low and some colleagues are experiencing a crisis of confidence. Perhaps CPD has a particular role to play here to the benefit of all stakeholders and to maintain a real and lasting impact across the whole curriculum" Iris Keating, 2001

Abstract

This article is concerned with the benefits for the advancement of continuous professional development (CPD) in schools which capitalise on the potential inherent in working in partnership with Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to provide initial teacher training. It illustrates some of the possibilities and lays particular emphasis on the development of practitioner reflection and the transferable skills acquired by mentors. It also suggests that cooperative research with teacher trainers outside the United Kingdom is a rich source of best practice.

Maybe ten years ago, at a management training seminar led and funded by British Gas, the course leader enquired of the delegates, who were all senior staff in secondary schools, how much money they had for staff development in an academic year. As he received figures ranging from zero to three thousand pounds, his face contorted with a mixture of surprise and incredulity. He reported that he had spent on the re-training and relocation of one of his staff nearly the sum total of the budgets reported to him by these delegates. It may be the case that more funds have found their way into schools over the last decade and that earmarked funding with a range of projects has provided a richer professional development culture in schools, but it remains the case that professional development in schools is given second place to many other issues and commitments.

The DfES in circulars 0071/2001 and 0649/2001 has directed all teachers into the development of a professional portfolio and this is to be an integral part of the performance management culture which saw its uncertain introduction in 1999/2000 as 190,000 teachers completed their threshold applications and a large team of nationally trained assessors visited every school to validate headteachers' judgements and ensure standards were applied consistently and fairly. Government sources have emphasised that good classroom practitioners can expect to see their salaries rise to £ 35 000; and those who wish to move into management can also expect to see remuneration levels which prove attractive in comparison with other professions. These initiatives, however, are not, in themselves, sufficient to secure the CPD culture in schools which sustains improvement and enhances learning opportunities for all within the organisation. Senior managers will have to be as resourceful and as imaginative as possible to create, within

all levels of their schools, the vitality which is the hallmark of any profession prepared to engage in reflection about its practice.

One source of this vitality lies in schools as partners with HEIs in the training of teachers. Indeed, the DfES has recognised some schools as designated training schools. Where partnership between schools and colleges is at its best, the mutual benefits are significant and sustainable. This paper explores these advantages and suggests ways to integrate teacher training into the school so that the professional development of staff is maximised and the learning culture amongst the pupils is reinforced. It will also be argued that HEIs can mentor the schools into reflective practice and encourage meaningful small scale research and the exchange of ideas and information which keep both partners at the leading edge of developments. In essence, the partnership represents a best value route to CPD and is capable of meeting many of the identified needs of both individuals and the school. ITT (Initial Teacher Training) can do much but at present it does not do enough to enrich the school culture of CPD. This is to say we believe there is untapped potential for any school which seeks to fully embrace it.

Student teachers bring distinct advantages to their host schools. Of course, they are naïve and the demands of the unfolding course may seem daunting, but they bring an openness which acts as a catalyst to enhance the culture of meaningful reflection. As schools deliver training in areas like citizenship, literacy and numeracy or discuss the implications of equal opportunities on options at GCSE, the students view these matters with no preconceptions garnered from twenty years at the chalk face; they are able to scrutinise the thinking and the practice in a refreshingly objective way. They do operate in a vacuum in that they cannot compare systems nor evaluate whether a policy re-direction really represents progress, but they can ask searching questions of their trainers. In most schools, the delivery of the training in areas covered by Annex A Section D “Other Professional Standards” (DfEE circular 4/98) is given to key specialist staff who usually work under the direction of a member of the senior management team. These contributors report that in preparing to deliver their inputs they engage in reflection and research which is directly stimulated by the audience they are working with. Most admit that this stimulus is a welcome re-invigoration of the intellectual dimension of their professional duties. So many teachers are deeply embroiled in the day to day management of teaching and learning that they do not afford themselves the time to reflect and few can find the time or the energy to read around their subject. Hence, ITT fulfils an essential role in encouraging research and reflection. This is confirmed by the DfES (2001) who assert: “a number of Higher Education Institutions have established strong and effective partnerships with schools and LEAs....and HEI staff are playing a significant role in mentoring teachers undertaking Best Practice Research Scholarships.” Staff, with a deep knowledge, understanding and expertise, are invited to deliver the professional studies course in a school-based programme but they are also encouraged to provide for the student teachers the local and national contexts. SENCOS, child protection co-ordinators, health and safety representatives, assessment and reporting co-ordinators, for example, are all charged with ensuring a presentation which has relevance

from local and national perspectives. This has encouraged reflection and research among practising teachers who are elevated to the role of tutor with a post-graduate audience.

Another significant contribution derived from ITT in schools is the development of trained mentors. The college partnership we have worked in offers a three day training programme for all subject mentors and validates this training with a Certificate of Professional /Advanced Studies to those staff who wish to complete some research and a short thesis. The training is offered at no cost to the participating schools. Importantly, more than one member of staff within a subject area can participate in the programme. To the individual there is the obvious benefit of recognised and validated additional training with a qualification. This is evidence for their professional development record/portfolio and demonstrates competences as they aspire to pass the threshold or to achieve an increment on the upper pay spine. Some colleagues have used the experience to secure promotion to posts of greater management responsibility. These individual benefits are valuable, but the cumulative benefits of having trained mentors within the staff of a school are of a different order. Mentors become centres of excellence to complement other good practice in that they acquire skills of monitoring, evaluation, counselling and facilitating learning. These are important skills and ensure that mentors place appropriate emphases on the reflected practice so essential to successful teaching. Dunne and Bennett (1997) concluded that mentors too often focused on the craft of teaching and did not encourage their students into enough reflection to move them into higher levels of professional thinking. Mentoring has many facets but the role of coach is one to be developed as it underlines the importance of taking teachers from where they are to where they want to be (Costa and Garmston, 1994). It is a truism that mentoring skills are highly transferable and enrich the effectiveness of the teacher in other areas of his work. This enrichment process motivates mentors to invest in not only the tutoring of their trainees, but also in the school's improvement. The essential qualities and skills of effective mentors include: people orientation, sensitivity, empathy, warmth, respect, and the readiness to share power and expertise (Veenman et al, 1998). The very best mentors have developed the ability to reflect *in* action and to reflect *on* action. (Schon, 1983)

One school set aside some of the funds it received from its college partner to celebrate and recognise the work of all the staff who had contributed to the success of the ITT programme. It organised a celebratory dinner at a local restaurant and invited all those colleagues who were formally involved in ITT, as well as enabling the student teachers to extend an invitation to any member of staff who had been instrumental in supporting their training. It was no surprise to see several of the non-teaching staff accorded recognition and appreciation. (There was a special thank you to the reprographics assistant-as a student teacher you need to have access to speedy and accurately reproduced resources!)

Many schools have been able to make appointments to their staff as a result of their close contacts with training providers. Student teachers who have demonstrated developing competence as classroom practitioners are attractive recruits to schools which seek to fill vacancies, especially in shortage subjects. The network of partnership schools also provides a source of information for students and schools as to vacancies and likely applicants. The schools also feel that they are instrumental in maintaining, and to a large

extent, determining the standards of those who will join the profession. One school, for example, was able to secure two teachers of R.E and another was delighted to obtain the services of two mathematicians. In both cases it was not just the expediency of filling vacancies in shortage subjects but the security of appointing candidates of proven potential that was so attractive.

It is our view that ITT should be seen as a vital ingredient in the life and work of most schools. We recognise that there may be valid reasons why a school might not wish to become involved. Of course, this decision rests with the headteacher and his governors. Improving schools do many things right; there is no universal panacea. Schools have to find appropriate strategies which are contextualised. However, our experience confirms that ITT can generate continuous professional development throughout a school. Its intrinsic merit is that it is not obviously geared to performance management, but is focused so clearly on ensuring the future quality of the teaching profession. This in itself is an inviting prospect and appeals widely to fellow practitioners. Incidental advantages often accrue. An effective student teacher can be left in charge of a group and this can create time for the regular class teacher to engage in other tasks (and not necessarily catch up tasks but perhaps some more detailed analysis of pupil learning needs and matters of differentiation). However, the real merit of ITT is the engagement of staff from all areas of the school. The examples we have referred to show that governors, headteachers, senior managers, classroom teachers and non-teaching staff have all had the opportunity to contribute to the training programmes. Further evidence points to schools reviewing practice and policies in the light of the increased awareness which training others brings to the work they do. ITT is fundamentally about teaching and learning and schools benefit from this focus. ITT has the capability to encourage a self-evaluatory culture without undermining a school's confidence in what it already does. It challenges but does not threaten. It is a voluntary activity and can, if necessary, be temporarily suspended should a department or a school feel circumstances are not conducive to the ITT commitment in a particular academic year.

ITT has the potential to be at the heart of the CPD culture in schools. The DfEE recognised this in March 2001: "There is growing evidence that within schools there is more emphasis on the professional development of staff. This may partly be due to the pressure on schools from targets and Ofsted inspections. But it seems to reflect the impact of other factors." Two of the four factors identified are ITT and the advent of threshold assessment. There is recognition too of the requirement of headteachers to look carefully at the evidence teachers produce to support their applications under performance management. Our view is that ITT can do much for the health of a school and that the advantages are both institutional and individual. They may not be quantifiable (Cunnah et al, 1997) but they are perceived and valued.

Similar evaluations are recorded in schools in the USA which work in partnership with universities to train teachers. Initial explorations with the School of Education, Drexel University, Pennsylvania, U.S.A. indicate encouraging outcomes for school staff: "over the past four years, our pool of cooperating teachers and schools has grown. The teachers say they feel empowered as part of the university/school collaborative and have grown

professionally.”* Equally reassuring findings are reported at Ithaca College: “ our partnership has been up and running for five years now and I am still amazed and energized about this work and the positive impact it has both on our college and the public school with whom we collaborate.”*1 There may be considerable merit in exploring and sharing the UK experience with teacher trainers in the USA. Although the educational contexts are different, it is evident that the impact on professional development and on school improvement may have much in common: where there are contrasting perceptions and experiences may be fertile ground for further research.

· *Quoted, with permission, from correspondence with Elizabeth L Haslam, School of Education, Drexel University, USA*

*1 *Quoted, with permission, from correspondence with Pat Tempesta, Director, Center for Teacher Education, Ithaca College*

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