

Partnerships in Pedagogy

EBL within EBL

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The PGCE course

- 250 secondary PGCE trainees per year from the University
- 6 mainly shortage subjects
- This project involved science, maths and design and technology teachers (2 from each subject)

What was the purpose of the project?

- Teachers act as mentors to PGCE trainee teachers in many local secondary schools.
- They do this week by week, through feedback on lessons and weekly meetings
- Anecdotal and limited documentary evidence suggested that the main focus of their talk together is classroom management
- And that **pedagogy** is little discussed

What is pedagogy?

- Recognising the kinds of teaching that facilitate effective learning (**our working definition**)
- ‘Pedagogy is the act of teaching together with its attendant discourse. It is what one needs to know, and the skills one needs to command, in order to make and justify the many different kinds of decisions of which teaching is constituted’ (Alexander, 2003 p.5)

The potential of mentoring

- Given this definition...
- Mentoring **could** provide resources (language, questions, models) for critical reflection
- So as to assist new teachers to develop the ability to make and justify their decisions

Why no pedagogy (in the UK)?

- Current emphasis... on an input-output view of the transmission of subject knowledge at both the primary and secondary phases of education...
- Student teacher subject knowledge and its application in classrooms is given priority in government documentation...
- Processes by which both school pupils and the student teachers themselves learn are weighted less heavily (Edwards, 1995 p.598)

First phase

- Baseline study of conversation during mentoring meetings
- Recorded in schools by the trainee
- Main findings: in most cases, there was **very little pedagogical exploration** – but there were exceptions (021205b.WMA, 26 mins)

2nd phase: EBL Task

- **May 2005**
- **Preparation meeting (lasting up to an hour, recorded)**
- Select two of the Qualified Teacher Status Standards, from those listed on the other side, which you think could provide a useful **focus on pedagogy**.
- Unpack these standards by considering the meaning of words, particularly in relation to your **understanding of pedagogy**.
- Focusing on these standards, consider how an observer in your teaching room would be able to observe your abilities in these areas.
- Design or adapt a **simple lesson observation schedule** which you can then both use (trainee and mentor) to focus your attention on these aspects of your lessons.
- **Observations**
- Carry out mutual observation in selected lessons, using this schedule.
- **Reflection meeting (lasting up to an hour, recorded)**
- Use these observations to reflect together on **the pedagogy you employ in your subject**.

Initial analysis of outcomes of the EBL sessions

- Unpacking the standards – TB and AR, South Manchester school, summer 2006
- Trainee and mentor chose a standard on which to focus:
- **S3.3.3** *They teach clearly structured lessons or sequences of work which interest and motivate pupils and which:*
 - *make learning objectives clear to pupils*
 - *employ interactive teaching methods and collaborative group work*
 - *promote active and independent learning that enables pupils to think for themselves, and to plan and manage their own learning.*

‘Criteria’ to guide observation were developed by mentor and trainee

- For example: ‘In science, **provide examples** of everyday life applications, to aid pupils’ learning eg. limestone use to heat up instant coffee.
- Use different activities to introduce the objectives – **throw in activities** such as crosswords, guess the mystery word, to introduce the topic / objectives of the day. Use the objectives at the end to a relaxing plenary.
- Employ the use of different strategies (sometimes too focused on what the pupils write in their books). Introduce more **metacognitive** activities eg. the bike and balloons to elicit pupils’ ideas about gas pressure
- Get pupils to **evaluate their own learning** by writing 3-5 things they’ve learn from the lesson, or drawing thought bubbles.
- Promote activities such as pupils writing questions for the rest of the class on a particular topic, eg write 5 questions on solids, liquids and gases
- Start to develop pupils’ **ownership** of the act of being a scientist, thus encourage independent planning of experiments – this can be a practical for learning’.
- **The trainee then combined these criteria with others from their subject handbook to create an observation report form specific to this target.**
- **Trainee and mentor discussed the observation after the event**

‘Criteria’ or indicators?

- The criteria produced to observe the lesson were mostly indicators
- They pointed to activities and features of the lesson which, if observed, might suggest that the teaching was hitting the right buttons
- But they appear to be ineffective in creating critical thinking

Extract from discussion of 3.3.3. after year 10 lesson

- *This discussion was dominated by the mentor, raising issues to do with timing, pace, ownership.*
- Mentor: When it came to 3.3.3. I was supposed to be looking at independent learning, collaborative learning, basically the opportunities for students to take **ownership**. And that you were trying to engage them in a **variety** of different activities.
- You were using their **prior knowledge**, there was effective feedback from you, I thought there was good distribution of questions. And you gave them a timeframe via the use of music. And that was giving them **ownership**. They had to get an **appreciation of pace**, and I thought that was **admirable**.
- Then I talked about the summative game, which was a combination of a DARTS exercise and a presentation. ... a reason why the exercise fell down was where only one or two people **shouted out the answers**... they weren't really talking to their friends. ... it will work, but you need to think.... Sometimes when you do your very creative activities, you need to think about how many people will actually be involved....
- **What we see here is a comparison of lists: what I saw in the lesson, vs. what we said would be good to see**

Participants' attitudes to the EBL task

- **Extract from discussion after year 7 lesson.**

AB: You've been looking at your low level management, your variety of tasks. The time you've spent on the form, and refining it, has been well worth it. I could take that in and observe some of the staff here. How useful do you think this is compared to a normal bog standard lesson observation?

TB: Because I was more involved in the setting the criteria, I was, like the kids, **more taking ownership** of it.

AB: **Brilliant**. That's exactly what's going through my mind. I learnt early in my career, that when you went on courses, when you had to do things, you learnt best by ownership. That's a vital thing really.

AB: Do you think it was a better thing to take a couple of statements and focus on those, rather than getting the bog standard observation form?

TB: I think it has its place.

AB: Do you think you would have come up with that yourself?

TB: To be honest, no.

AB: I have done it in the past, with someone really struggling with their class management, where they were going to fail, and it was crucial. But **perhaps this is something I've learnt: perhaps I must be more selective**. Perhaps I can get feedback from Andy.. whether I can devise my own.

Analysis of transcripts - DT

- Summary: 'quite frankly astonishing'
- 'Essentially they didn't do the task but also in the course of this reveal an amazing lack of vocabulary to be able to discuss pedagogy'

First impressions of a DT transcript

- the mentor was being over friendly...
- the discussion of grades is not underpinned by any pedagogical understanding or reference. **It as if the mentor is awarding certificates for god behaviour**
- the mentor uses little vocabulary relating to teaching and learning - **'stuff'**
- the mentor **goes off on tangents** and avoids discussing the lesson
- the **only** perceptive question was by the trainee which was not answered

Our interim reflections

- Whilst we had a clear learning objective for the project, we **overestimated** the clarity of that objective to the participants, given that we were communicating it mainly through writing and at a distance.
- We suggested 'the development of criteria' as a task, but did not consider how 'criteria' might be interpreted
- The 'learners' interpreted the task according to their own assumptions and constraints
- There are other influences in the context - including the need to maintain a working relationship; a situation where one is acting as the assessor of the other, rather than the peer.. etc.
- **Next steps: further enquiry...**