

The Anthology Project: giving voice to the silent scholars

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Abstract

The paper describes an Anthology Project for newly-qualified teachers in the post-compulsory sector, designed to celebrate their achievements and to encourage the dissemination of their work via a printed and bound set of papers. The teachers worked in Further Education Colleges (FECs), Sixth Form Colleges, private training providers and Adult and Community Education (ACE) and had recently completed an in-service Initial Teacher Training (ITT) qualification. Some held secure, full-time positions, while others had part-time or insecure work. The project supported their transition from trainee to fully qualified, recognised professional teacher by promoting the value of their scholarship and its impact on practice. A rationale is provided, exploring themes of good practice in Higher Education (HE) using concepts of student as producer and as change agent. The paper draws on Eraut's (2004) writing on the formation of professional identity and Wenger's (1998) work on communities of practice. Vignettes are provided, using Bourdieu's (1986) work on social and cultural capital to analyse the contrasting situations of two participants. The use of the Anthology to support other trainees is described. A recommendation is made for similar projects to be developed.

Key words

Initial Teacher Training (Lifelong Learning); Higher Education; Communities of Practice; Social and Cultural Capital; Professional Identity.

Introduction

This paper reports on a project to aid the transition from newly-qualified teachers to the next stage of their professional development by celebrating their scholarly work and encouraging recognition of its impact on their practice. The focus of the project was a cohort of teachers who completed their ITT at a Further Education College in 2011. They had successfully undertaken the Certificate in Education (Cert Ed) or Professional Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) (Lifelong Learning) Awards of the University of Huddersfield. They completed their qualification on an in-service basis and were employed in the sector. The teachers worked in the main with learners aged 16 years and above in settings such as Further Education Colleges, Sixth Form Colleges, private training providers and Adult and Community Education. The cohort included people with vocational expertise in fields such as hairdressing, nursing and construction, while others were graduates from academic disciplines such as English and Psychology. They held posts with varied titles including lecturer and trainer but all taught and undertook an ITT programme. In this paper they will be referred to as 'teachers' or, when discussing their experience during the ITT course, 'trainees'.

As part of the ITT programme, second-year trainees are required to develop and present a conference paper on a topic related to their specialist subject. These papers are presented at a Specialist Conference in Huddersfield, where the trainees have the opportunity to work in groups of subject specialists from colleges across the north of England which are members of the Consortium for Post Compulsory Education and Training (Consortium for PCET). The trainees put considerable time and effort into this work, which includes an up-to-date scholarship and ideas for linking theory and practice. At the college in question (henceforth known as the College), a project was undertaken, on

behalf of the Consortium for PCET, to develop the papers submitted by the trainees based at the College into an Anthology: a printed and bound set of papers which could be shared. An event was held to launch the Anthology to celebrate the teachers' achievements and to encourage the dissemination of their work. The Anthology contributors came from a range of organisations and their papers reflect the diversity of roles and issues found in the post-compulsory sector, as well as the talents and interests of the writers. This paper explains the rationale for the project and outlines how it was organised. Those involved were asked their views on the value of the project and these responses are explored. Vignettes, which illustrate the impact on two individuals, are provided and linked to theoretical themes considered in the paper. The individuals concerned are not named and have given informed consent, as recommended by the British Educational Research Association's ethical guidelines (BERA, 2011). The paper concludes that the project benefited the participants, aiding their transition from trainee teacher to recognised professional. The use of the Anthology to support the next cohort of trainees is noted. Finally, a recommendation is made that similar projects be considered by other organisations.

Rationale

The ITT programme at the College is managed within its University Centre, which prides itself on engaging students as partners in learning. The ethos of the programme is one of active engagement in learning and the synthesis of theory and practice. The Specialist Conference is a significant event for second-year trainees, who often express reluctance, anxiety and even fear at having to participate. However, the great majority return from the event full of enthusiasm and invigorated by their experience. The opportunity to focus on the subject specialism adds to the quality of the course and supports Ofsted's emphasis on the importance of specialist-subject pedagogy in ITT (Ofsted, 2012). The trainees are required to develop their papers, engage in online learning and attend the Specialist Conference. In-service trainees on the ITT programme must satisfy course requirements whilst also meeting the expectations of their workplace and employer. Orr and Simmonds (2010) argue that this can result in tensions and may contribute to a limited conception of the teacher's role. The scholarship devoted to the Specialist Conference papers is in the context of their own work situation and requires engagement with up-to-date specialist literature: it is one of the components of the course which explicitly encourages trainees to link theory and practice. The process embodies the concepts of students as producers and as collaborators in learning (Bell, Neary and Stephenson, 2012; Taylor and Wilding, 2009). The interaction with peers and specialist tutors allows for active participation in a purposeful community of practice. The Specialist Conference is an example of:

'...engaging students in meaningful practices, of providing access to resources that enhance their participation, of opening their horizons...and of involving them in actions, discussions and reflections that make a difference to the communities that they value.'

(Wenger, 1998: p. 10)

Trainees typically return from the Specialist Conference with new ideas, new social and professional contacts and a paper which they have researched, produced and debated. They have broadened their horizons and been involved in intense reflection and discussion. They have received validation from their peers and both gained and given insight into the pedagogy of their subject. The Specialist Conference experience provides factors which are likely to increase confidence, such as the need for self-management, social interaction, feedback and achievement (Norman and Hyland, 2003). Confidence is also developed through risk-taking (Iredale et al, 2013) and some trainees experience the presentation of their papers as an inherently risky exercise. On their return to College, trainees are encouraged to share their experiences with their peers and in these

discussions express increased confidence and enthusiasm. They have shown themselves to be:

'...essential partners in the production of the knowledge and skills...not passive recipients of a service'.

(Streeting and Wise, 2009: p. 2)

The sharing of good practice in teaching and learning can take many forms, from newsletters, websites and conferences to one-to-one coaching. Passive dissemination methods are the most frequently used and the least effective (Cox and Smith, 2004). The credibility of the source and the perceived practicality of application are important factors in determining whether a shared idea is transferred into practice. Awareness of differences between disciplines is crucial (Becher and Trowler, 2001; Cox and Smith, 2004). The focus on the subject specialism is one of the key benefits of the Specialist Conference. The Specialist Conference experience gives trainees access to a wider community of practice and allows them to develop their professional network beyond their own workplace and base college. The interactions with other specialists, both trainees and tutors, mean that the trainees experience active approaches to learning in the context of their own academic discipline. At this point in the programme, trainees are also close to the end of their course and to achieving their teaching qualification. It may therefore indicate that they are in a strong position to share their insights within their own organisation and to attempt to implement the new ideas they have developed.

However, the transition between knowledge and skills gained for the purposes of passing a course and meaningful implementation in a real work context may be problematic. The Specialist Conference papers are developed in the context of a work role but the insights gained are not always shared or recognised in the workplace. The opportunity to '*make a difference*' (Wenger, 1998: p. 10) in this context may not be available. The freedom to take risks in implementing their ideas for improvements in practice, as advocated by Iredale et al (2013), may be constrained. The teachers work within social situations with their learners and colleagues. They bring their own professional perspectives and '*learning histories*' (Eraut, 2000: p. 132). They are enmeshed within '*communities of practice*' (Wenger, 1998: p.6), which are likely to include course teams and other organisational groups, as well as wider professional networks. They are not free to act in unfettered ways to take up new ideas: there are organisational, regulatory, resource and cultural constraints. The culture of the specific workplace and the style of management they encounter will affect their learning and development (Eraut, 2004). Some must forge their professional identities in settings similar to those encountered by the teachers described by Avis and Bathmaker (2009), where '*...students were frequently lacking motivation, teaching staff were demoralised and management practices were less than helpful*' (p. 214).

This contributes to the sense that learning to teach involves compliance with bureaucratic impositions and learning to cope in difficult circumstances (Orr and Simmonds, 2010). Furthermore, the trainees completing the programme may have peripheral roles in their organisations, such as part-time or temporary posts, and lack the status necessary for their voice to be heard. Their insights gained from the course and Specialist Conference may not be welcomed:

'...many groups discourage finding out about the knowledge resources and networks of new members, regard external contacts and learning opportunities as diversions from their work, and do not seek to learn from diversity of experience or perspective'.

(Eraut, 2004: p. 268)

Some are thus not in a position to be able to disseminate their ideas or to implement them in their professional practice.

The Anthology Project was designed to draw attention to, and celebrate the work of, these teachers. It was hoped that providing this showcase would increase the interest in their work and support them in engaging in dialogues within their workplaces, linking their scholarship to improvement in teaching and learning.

Social and Cultural Capital

Social relations can be analysed in terms of forms of capital: social and cultural as well as economic (Bourdieu, 1986). Cultural capital is expressed in the knowledge, skill and attitudes possessed by an individual and in formal recognition by society in the form of qualifications. Social capital comprises the contacts, networks and recognition deriving from the membership of a group. These concepts have been used to explore social phenomena at levels from the individual to the national (Halpern, 2005). The recent report on HE and social mobility emphasises the importance of broadening access to forms of capital as part of a vision of a more just society:

'Social mobility is not just about moving people up the earnings ladder. It is also about ensuring that access to social and educational capital is open to all, so that people from all walks of life can contribute to the flourishing of the nation'.

(Milburn, 2012: p. 16)

Trainees start the ITT course with cultural capital deriving from their education and upbringing and increase it by the development of their pedagogical skills and by gaining a recognised teaching qualification. They may also increase their social capital in developing links with other course members, both at college level and through the contacts made at the Specialist Conference. The building of such networks is explicitly encouraged. The peripheral trainees, discussed above, can be considered to lack social capital in the context of their workplace. The two vignettes presented below explore these concepts in the context of specific individuals.

The Project

The Anthology Project 2011-2012 built on work done by a member of the team at the College in their internal discussion paper *The Silent Scholars*, which accompanied a previous, pilot version of an Anthology of Specialist Conference papers. It was pointed out that:

'To date these conference papers have remained dormant within the portfolio of achievement, with greater emphasis placed on the "ticking of the box". The opportunity for celebrating the fact that staff have demonstrated the ability to carry out action research and propose possible interventions for the benefit of teaching and learning has been missed'.

(Johnstone, 2010: p. 1)

The previous pilot had focused on showcasing the work done by trainees who were also staff members at the College. The 2011-2012 project was broader in scope, encompassing the work of trainees from a range of organisations. A submission was made to the Consortium for PCET for funding to support the project and the Consortium's financial support, and personal involvement by the Director, helped to make the Anthology Project possible.

All 30 trainees who had produced conference papers were eligible to be considered for inclusion in the Anthology and were invited to submit an electronic version of their work. Members of the HE team at the College read the papers and discussed the standard required for inclusion in an Anthology of selected papers. It was agreed that publishable quality was not an achievable or necessarily desirable goal. The raw papers vary in quality, but all are an authentic product of trainees grappling with, and applying scholarship to, the complex and challenging reality of their working lives. They represent their genuine stage of development and are of value in themselves. It was agreed that the papers chosen for the Anthology should represent the diverse cohort of students, with a balance between Certificate in Education and PGCE trainees and a spread of subject specialisms and work contexts. Fifteen accepted the invitation: seven were PGCE and eight were Certificate in Education students. They came from a diverse range of workplaces and they each addressed different issues in their papers. This allowed all the submissions to be accepted. Thus, the selection process was not required although this had been specified in the original bid for Consortium funding.

A workshop evening was held during which the project aims were discussed with the contributors and arrangements made for the launch event. It was agreed that some amendments would be needed to grammar, spelling, punctuation and presentation of references and that a consistent font style and size would be standardised throughout to create an attractive and professionally finished product. Pen portraits would be included with brief details of each contributor. The inclusion of family and friends, Specialist Conference tutors and mentors, as well as employers, managers and current students on the guest list for the launch event was facilitated in accordance with the wishes of the contributors and helped to make the event a celebration. It was agreed that there should be an 'academic' external speaker as well as speeches by contributors.

Individual appointments and email contacts were made in which support was given for making improvements. This process did not achieve perfection, even within the limited aims outlined above in that some errors were still found in the completed Anthology. It did succeed in encouraging the contributors to re-visit their own work and to reflect on its implications and relevance to their current situation. The Anthology was printed and bound in-house at the College, using high-quality paper and colour photographs. The finished product was well-produced and attractive; it is a physical symbol that the scholarly work of these trainees is of value.

The Launch Event

The audience for the launch event included family and friends of contributors, current trainees and College managers. However, the event was not successful in attracting managers who did not work for the College. The first speaker, a Motor Vehicle tutor, spoke eloquently about the impact that the Certificate in Education course – and in particular the experience of preparing the paper for and attending the Subject Specialist Conference – had had on his understanding of the needs of his learners and on his practice. He was followed by a second contributor, a Sports tutor and gym manager, who shared his extraordinary life story. He had worked as a truck driver but after amputation of both legs had become involved in sport, sports coaching and charity fundraising. He explained how the course and the Specialist Conference had helped him improve his teaching and academic skills and had equipped him to gain the role of Olympic Sports Maker. He has since been an Olympic Torchbearer and has become a Coach Educator for the British Triathlon.

The Director of the Consortium for PCET provided the keynote address entitled *Scholars in FE: Realising the Potential*. She spoke about the national context in which the assumption that Further Education lecturers had no need to undertake research was no longer valid. She suggested that research and scholarly activity was vital: the sector requires sophisticated practitioners who can deal with complexity and respond effectively to policy proposals. Such activity could contribute to improvements at all levels, from the classroom and organisation to the national arena. The formal part of the evening concluded with the presentation of gifts to the contributors. After the event there were many lively conversations; photographs were taken, and the pride of family members and colleagues in the contributors was evident. A current trainee (a lecturer in Construction) remarked that he wanted to be the man in the suit giving the address and that he had been inspired by what he had heard.

The Impact of the Project

The contributors were provided with copies of the Anthology and were asked to complete a short questionnaire. Seven of the 15 did so and 100 per cent of these agreed that both the production of the Anthology and the launch event were worthwhile. Furthermore, 86 per cent had used the Anthology to share their papers in the workplace in some way: for example, from the range of options given in the questionnaire, 43 per cent with their manager and 71 per cent with their colleagues. 86 per cent thought that the work they had done had an impact on their practice. Vignettes on two of the Anthology contributors are offered below to illustrate the impact on individuals in their specific situations.

Current trainees commented that they felt inspired and gave enthusiastic accounts of the event to their class groups. The Anthology has since been used as a resource with these trainees. It provided real examples of papers to discuss and helped them to generate ideas for their own projects. Contributors have also returned to the College to talk about their Specialist Conference experiences.

A further benefit of the project has been increased interaction by the course team with the trainees who were involved. Contributors have volunteered to be used as case studies in promoting the programme and these case studies, known as 'Success Stories', have proved of interest to prospective candidates, especially those coming from similar sectors. The questionnaire included a request for suggestions for other ideas for celebrating and sharing the work done by trainees. This has generated ideas such as having second-year students come to talk to the new intake about the course and joint Continuing Professional Development (CPD) events where previous trainees could return to share their experiences and learn about new initiatives. These ideas formed the foundation for further future considerations. This increased involvement, beyond the already strong Student Voice processes used in the College and on the course, has enhanced the role of the trainees as change agents (Dunne, Hutchinson and Kay, 2010), helping to shape the experiences of future students on the course.

External examiners have commented that the Subject Specialist Conference and the papers produced by the trainees are a particular strength of the course and commended their efforts to share the papers through initiatives such as the Anthology Project.

The project was shared as a parallel paper at the Consortium for PCET Annual Conference 2012 and was well received. In discussion, members of the audience said they saw it as worthwhile and would consider similar projects in their own organisations. The following comment was made as part of the event evaluation: *'An insightful presentation making excellent use of how aspirations of trainees can be encouraged and*

developed. It was requested that the Anthology be made available online and this was implemented so that it could be shared with trainees in other Consortium colleges. Colleagues in five colleges have made contact with the author to report their use of the Anthology with their trainees. One stated that the Anthology was: *'Very useful. Students are able to feel confident about the format and level, as well as in some cases helping them to improve their work'*. A colleague in an additional college confirmed that they will be using the idea in future, both for their own students and for staff development.

Vignettes

The Motor Vehicle tutor who spoke at the launch event is an employee of the College. He already held a position of respect as a full-time staff member and as a qualified and experienced practitioner of his original trade, thus holding a degree of both social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). The development of his pedagogical skills via the course and Specialist Conference has enhanced his position. He is a dual professional now, both as a skilled craftsman and a qualified teacher. He has gained increased recognition and respect for the quality of his work, being awarded an 'Outstanding' grade in internal lesson observations. He stated that: *'...research for my paper has answered so many questions and given me lots of inspiration, which has enabled me to become much more innovative within my practice'*. His contribution to the Anthology Project has helped to raise his profile within the College. He has provided inspiration for other craft-based tutors already on the programme to emulate his achievements and has encouraged other colleagues to apply for a place on the course. He has undertaken mentor training and is now a mentor for a colleague who has recently joined the course. He has become more central to the community of practice in his department and college. He has brought new ideas to his colleagues and enhanced external social capital (Halpern, 2005) in the form of links to practitioners in other organisations. He has thus become a more able teacher and a more influential staff member which will be of benefit to his learners, colleagues, the organisation and to his own career.

In contrast, a Community Education tutor completed her PGCE course while her main employment was as a teaching assistant. She had a small number of paid teaching hours, which were sufficient to allow her to meet course requirements, but in the context of her workplace she was viewed in terms of her substantive role as an assistant. This split role gave her a difficult, peripheral and ambiguous status. As a graduate and a person completing a full teacher training qualification, she was better qualified than some of her more senior colleagues with higher status positions but she lacked the recognition within the workplace that her skills, knowledge and insights deserved. In terms of Bourdieu's (1986) analysis, she could be said to possess cultural capital gained during her degree-level studies and the ITT course. However, her perceived low status in the organisation meant that her capability was not fully recognised by her peers and managers; she lacked social capital in the context of the organisation. She was a keen contributor to the Anthology and her paper is a thoughtful and critical analysis of the impact of a required aspect of workplace practice on her learners. Completion of the course and the recognition accorded by inclusion in the Anthology has given her increased confidence and an enhanced sense of her own ability. She has been influential in recruiting new members to the course, both by personal recommendation and by contributing a 'Success Story' of her experiences to the College website. She has since gained more substantial teaching employment.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This is a report on a small-scale project involving 15 contributors, of whom seven responded to a questionnaire. The wider issues of supporting trainees into the next phase

of their careers is worthy of a much more substantial study. However, as explored in the vignettes and questionnaire responses above, the project has had some success in supporting the teachers' transition from the status of trainee to fully qualified professional with a strong and valued voice. The majority of respondents reported that the work they had done had an impact on their practice and that they had shared their papers in their workplace. The launch event provided recognition from peers, family, tutors and college managers. The Anthology has also been a beneficial resource for use by other trainees. It is therefore recommended that other teacher training organisations consider running similar projects or find other ways to achieve the same goals for their trainees.

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