

Teacher education: a whole organisation approach

Ian Grayling

South Leicestershire College

EMCETT

Abstract

This discussion paper aims to stimulate debate, and maybe research, into the pivotal role of managers in securing high quality teacher development within the Further Education System. The quality of teacher education, initial and continuing, has an obvious impact on the confidence and competence of teachers and therefore on the quality of teaching & learning. Teacher education, however, needs to be more embedded or 'situated', focusing on real issues in real-time and often with the support of colleagues. This cannot be the sole responsibility of teacher educators and will require the commitment and active engagement of the whole organisation that employs the teacher/trainee. Teachers and their managers will need to embrace models of professional development that are **practice-led** rather than **syllabus** or **programme-led**, actively seeking out and promoting such opportunities. This would constitute a fairly radical change in both the thinking and practice of managers within the Further Education System. Without such a change, however, real improvements in teaching and learning will be slow and hard-won.

Key words

Teacher Education; Situated Learning; High Performance Teams; Manager Engagement.

Introduction

I wish to argue that a whole organisation approach to teacher education:

- recognises that the quality of teaching and learning depends, in a large part, on the confidence and competence of its teaching staff
- nurtures confidence and competence (which is a moving target) through peer-supported, situated learning
- recognises that high performance is a natural and inevitable outcome of staff being enthused - and required - to work collaboratively towards shared aims for continuous improvement
- recognises that the same good principles of teaching and learning for students can be applied to support staff development
- should favour action-led (situated) learning over programme-led (short-course) learning
- should insist that managers, and the processes of management (or, better, leadership), promote and ensure that situated-learning and critical reflection is embedded within the fabric of day-to-day operations and is highlighted within professional development and review processes
- recognises that collegiality, collaborative learning and collective responsibility for organisational quality is enshrined within HR procedures and practices.

Let me also state at the outset that the focus of much of this paper is on Further Education Institutions as large and complex organisations with significant management structures. However, this discussion paper may have resonance with larger private training providers and, possibly, Adult and Community Learning services - I invite you to decide.

Learning Organisations and organisations that just deliver learning

I know I am on safe ground stating that, despite local and sometimes national difficulties, all of us are trying to do our very best to deliver high quality and relevant vocational education and training to our learners. I am far less confident, however, about our current capability, or recent track-record, to deliver high quality and relevant vocational education and training to our staff. Despite our commitment to learning for our students, could we be neglecting to shine the same spotlight of expertise on our development?

We loudly proclaim the right of our learners to access enabling and empowering educational opportunities but our approach to our own professional development – with the aim of helping us to deliver that promise - is often, according to an abundance of anecdotal evidence, poorly delivered and equally poorly received. Teaching in the lifelong learning sector requires expertise in pedagogies that promote engaged learning and the development of expert learners. But what about all of us; are we not lifelong learners too? How much learning (with real impact) do we get by attending 'fixed menu', off-job courses, as opposed to engaging with real issues, sharing ideas and concerns with colleagues, searching the internet, etc? Real-time, real issue (situated) learning, supported by our peers, is what makes the real difference in the Information Age. Could it be that organisations that deliver learning may be struggling to demonstrate the attributes of 'learning organisations'?

Nancy Dixon describes organisational learning as:

'the organization's ability to use the amazing mental capacity of all its members to create the kind of processes that will improve its own.'

(Dixon, 1999: p.122)

According to Pedler, Burgoyne and Boydell (1998: p.3) a Learning Company 'facilitates the learning of all its members and continually transforms itself.

And no view of this concept would be complete without Peter Senge's description of learning organisations as:

'organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning to see the whole together'

(Senge, 2003: p. 3)

Senge's description is fascinating because if we were to replace the word 'organizations' with the word 'colleges', every passionate educationalist would claim these sentiments as their own, yet this was said in the context of the workplace, which this same constituency would probably view as inherently exploitative. Before I say more on this theme, it is important to note that the type of learning referred to here is **not** syllabus-led. Rather, it is learning in real-time, about real issues and often with the support of peers: and here we have a problem - this is not part of the further education psyche.

I am reminded of an occasion, some years ago, when helping vocational teachers to embed - as we would call it now - key skills within a vocational curriculum. A particular teacher had developed over 100 (!) short exercises to enable his students to cover the Numeracy requirement. Thankfully, for all concerned, he was persuaded to cover the Numeracy requirement (and the IT requirement and significant amounts of the Communication requirement, etc, etc) in about three holistic, student-led projects. Learning delivered progressively following a syllabus or units of assessment is still prevalent within the sector. Action-centered learning can therefore seem scarily anarchic to many teachers and managers in FE and it is not surprising that they sometimes find it difficult to let go of the security blanket of a linear delivery model.

Reginald Revans, the pioneer of 'Action Learning', wrote that people:

'...start to learn with and from each other only when they discover that no one knows the answer but all are obliged to find it.'

(Revans, 1997: p. 5)

Action Learning recognises that staff are also 'adult learners' – an obvious fact maybe, but one that is often overlooked by human resource practices. Speck (1996: p.36-7) argues that any professional development activity designed for educators should take full account of adult learning theory. For example, adults need learning goals that are both realistic and important to them, particularly with regard to the 'real world' and their personal and professional needs. They wish to see a clear link between development opportunities and professional practice and prefer opportunities to apply learning in real work situations. They also wish to have a degree of control over their learning and resist what they perceive to be an attack on their competence. Further, adult learning may impact on self-esteem, making peer support and a non-judgemental learning environment important. Speck (1996: p.36-7) also notes that:

'...adults need to participate in small-group activities during the learning to move them beyond understanding to application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Small-group activities provide an opportunity to share, reflect, and generalize their learning experiences.'

This paradigm should resonate within the culture and practice of vocational education and training organisations. It reminds us that we can turn around our expertise in teaching and learning to give us the sound principles needed to underpin effective and efficient staff development. If this can be achieved, organisations delivering learning stand a real chance of becoming Learning Organisations.

'Training' - the work of the devil?

Talking to colleagues for over twenty five years now, I am still disappointed that the educational prejudice against anything described as 'training' - an anachronism then, let alone now - is still regularly found in the Further Education System. Here is not the place to discuss this in depth, but I am quite convinced that this prejudice undermines the perceived value of professional development which is seen as *training* rather than *real education*. It is, however, a significant irony that professional development, for teachers in the sector, is frequently delivered as a static, discrete, short-course provision - effectively, menu-led - rather than as dynamic, action-led learning in the work-place that is increasingly the norm in work-based learning (see below). It is also fascinating to hear 'education people' say, disparagingly, that they will need to 'do training' to progress in their careers whilst 'training people' worry that they will only 'get on' by doing (higher) education. Funny old world!

Over reliance on short-course provision is not only staid, it is also responsible for creating an 'evaluation crisis' whereby we need to resort to models (for example, see Kirkpatrick, 1998) to help us determine the impact of a training event on performance. The problem is, if performance improves we cannot be sure that it is a direct consequence of prior training because intervening variables will inevitably have played their part (reinforcing or inhibiting). There is no such problem however with action-based, real-time learning where intervention, result and

learning are continually linked. Shouldn't this be what reflective practice and action research is all about? Also, what is wrong with calling this 'training'?

Teacher performance - organisational performance

It is an obvious truism to state that the overall quality of any organisation is the product of the expertise of its staff and their ability to work in concert to shared aims. Frank Coffield reinforces this view, in his (already) influential discussion pamphlet, by arguing:

'...for the professional development of tutors as the main lever for improving Teaching and Learning because of a growing research base on the influences on student learning, which shows that teacher quality trumps virtually all other influences on student achievement'

(Coffield, 2008: p. 23 referring to Thompson & William, 2007:p. 2)

Ofsted (2006), however, have reported that senior managers (still) need to make the connection 'that the quality of ITT will improve the overall standards of teaching and learning'.

Anyone who is committed to high quality teacher education should have seen the *10 Pedagogies*, promoted by the Learning & Skills Improvement Service (LSIS - formally QIA and CEL) within their Talking, Teaching, Training and Learning e-resource (2008). This resource presents ten diverse and important strategies to encourage engaged learning, namely:

- assessment for learning
- co-operative learning
- differentiation
- embedding literacy, language and numeracy (LLN)
- experiential learning
- learning conversations
- modelling
- multi-sensory learning
- relating theory and practice
- using e-learning and technology.

Any teacher deploying at least some (and maybe some more than others) of these pedagogies is likely to significantly improve learner outcomes and classroom observation grades, along the way. If these pedagogies represent good practice in teaching and learning, why not use them to support our own staff development. If you think any of them are not likely to be relevant then, think again.

So are curriculum/line managers making the connection between teacher education and the overall standards of teaching and learning? And, if they are, are they promoting peer supported, action-based learning or 'fixed menu', off-the-shelf short courses? My experience is that it is usually the latter - **but teacher education, both initial and continuing, cannot be consigned solely to discrete, syllabus-led, 'off-job' provision.**

Confidence and competence in teaching needs to be nurtured, not just in periods of study - which is, of course, a totally necessary pre- (or co-)requisite - but in professional practice within the classroom supported by a culture of collegiality and collaboration within the wider workplace. What is required is staff development in which learning is in 'real-time' and related to real issues and this can only happen with the active support of line/curriculum managers with the backing of senior management teams. This is one aspect of a *whole organisation approach* in which individual and organisational development is meaningfully aligned with strategy. Alignment in this way ensures that individual development opportunities are seen by staff as valid and relevant which, according to Speck (1996: p.36-7), is an essential feature of effective adult education.

A useful step in the right direction would be for curriculum managers to read LLUK's new Professional Standards for all teachers in the Lifelong Learning Sector (LLUK). These standards have been designed by the sector, for the sector and clearly describe what good teaching and learning looks like. They also provide guidance on what development a teacher might need to be more effective in the current reality of teaching within the sector. Dare I say, managers might even use these tools to inform classroom observation and professional development review. After all, they are also the basis for meeting the requirements of Professional Formation.

Another, but highly complementary, way of looking at this would be to consider whether teacher education should incorporate a larger measure of the principles of Situated Learning, which according to Lave & Wenger (1990):

- takes place in a valid environment and, ideally, the setting and context in which that learning would normally be applied
- is facilitated by interaction and collaboration between colleagues - i.e. a community of practice
- requires the consent of all stakeholders in order to be achieved in a organisational setting.

The overlap between the principles of Situated Learning and Speck's (1996) essential components of adult learning are striking. The importance of 'communities of practice' in staff development has been highlighted more recently

by Fuller and Unwin’s observations of expansive and restrictive learning environments in the workplace (2004: p. 134). It would appear that organisations with a more ‘expansive’ approach – which is clearly preferred - enable staff to engage in multiple communities of practice, both within and outside of the organisation, and provide time off for education and reflection.

The need for high performance teams

Whether we consider Action Learning, Situated Learning or other sound principles of Adult Learning, we find that learning is often best when it is collaborative, peer-supported, within a team context or a community of practice (which all adds up to much the same thing). Research into high performing organisations also tells us that an assembly of highly developed and high performing **individuals cannot guarantee high performance** at the organisational level whereas an assembly of high performing **teams almost certainly can**. Katzenberg & Smith assert that:

‘...any team - if it focuses on performance regardless of where it is in an organisation or what it does - will deliver results well beyond what individuals acting alone in non-team working situations could achieve.’

and

‘Organizational leaders can foster team performance best by building a strong performance ethic rather than by establishing a team-promoting environment alone’

(Katzenberg & Smith, 1998: p. 12-13)

It appears that you can’t manufacture *high performance teams* but you can create the compelling vision and (staff) learning culture that will give birth to, and nurture, them. High performing teams have a far greater impact within organisations because they exert a downward influence on the behaviour of individuals and an upward influence on organisational development and performance (see Figure 1).

High performance teams help individuals to align around a common purpose. Further, team goals, rather than individual performance targets, are more easily aligned within higher level business plans and organisational strategy.

Ashton & Sung (2002: p.4) describe four clusters of HR practice that are typically found in High Performance Organisations (as follows):

1. employee autonomy and involvement in decision-making: through empowered teams, made up of multi-skilled and emotionally intelligent individuals who are as skilled interpersonally as they are in their subject or vocational area
2. support for employee performance: through continuous learning and often supported by a mentor or coach
3. rewards for performance: which may amount to ‘generous and public recognition’ but is often related to individual and group-based performance pay, in the private sector
4. the sharing of information and knowledge: through open and immediate access to all information relevant for individuals and groups to contribute to decision-making and the management of the work process, and the free flow of feedback to those responsible for organisational strategy to ensure operational and strategic coherence.

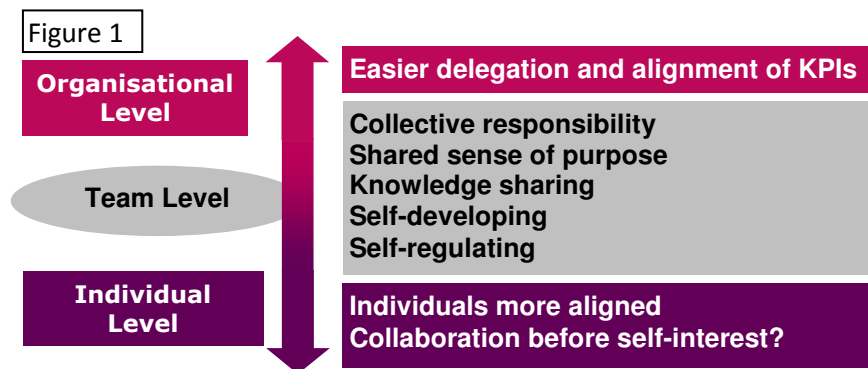
High Performance Organisations (also see CIPD 2008, for a critical review) typically display less hierarchical structures in which communication, participative decision making and collaborative learning and, above all, trust is prevalent. In high performing organisations, staff don’t just learn at work, work and learning are synonymous...and this is a ‘cultural thing’ and inevitably, therefore, a ‘leadership thing’.

Do we have the right culture?

But surely this culture of peer-supported learning and collegiality is prevalent within our sector. Sadly not, according to a Learning and Skills Development Agency report (Davies & Owen, 2001) which carried out a survey of staff satisfaction across 80 colleges and noted that:

‘Overall, the profile of staff opinion that emerged from the survey gives considerable cause for concern. This is particularly so in general FE/tertiary colleges. In our experience, it is uncommon for average ratings to be as negative within a single organization and very rare for them to be so negative across a whole sector’

(Davies & Owen, 2001: p. 7-8).



The study also identified two factors underpinning job satisfaction and job fulfilment which, intuitively, appear to be universal and are, in fact, empirically reinforced in the wider discourse regarding learning cultures, organisational learning and high performance. The first factor was:

'whether or not the "college cared about them"; whether or not they were valued; and whether they felt secure'

The second factor was:

'how effectively staff were communicated with, consulted and involved in the decision-making process'

(Davies & Owen 2001: p. 7-8).

Where staff did feel valued, this was less a product of 'soft' management style and more a perception of being:

'connected with an embedded culture of continuous improvement – rather than one of blame – which encouraged bottom-up initiatives within a clearly understood framework'

(Davies & Owen 2001: p. 7-8).

Finally, the researchers noted (with a degree of caution due to sample size) that staff satisfaction in beacon and accredited colleges were substantially better than the average for the survey enabling them to conclude that, whilst organizational success undoubtedly influences staff morale, there is some evidence to suggest that positive staff attitudes are more likely to lead to a high performing college (Davies & Owen, 2001: p. 8).

This study is somewhat dated now, and we might have hoped that things have improved since. Sadly, this is not the case - in a far more recent study, by the Learning & Skills Network, Villeneuve-Smith, Munoz and McKenzie (2008) report that college staff show high levels of dissatisfaction with their own institution with teaching staff being the most dissatisfied. Key findings of this study showed that whilst 86% of college teaching staff responding felt they were making a valuable contribution to society:

- half did not feel valued by their employers
- only 22% believed they were rewarded adequately
- 51% felt they could not achieve a good work-life balance (comparing poorly with other workplaces) - in the UK as a whole, 66% of employees in all sectors say they can
- 51% of teaching staff indicated they were likely to leave FE in the next 5 years
- less than a third would recommend their college as a good place to work
- there is widespread stress and 47% feel their college tolerates bullying (which according to these researchers is a clear sign of a sector under severe pressure).

This is a serious indictment.

Research into High Performing Organisations and the well-established discourse regarding staff motivation at work (for example, McClelland 1987, Herzberg 1966 and also McGregor 1960) all reinforce what experience tells us; namely, that people are intrinsically motivated to achieve their 'level best' provided that they are given: the autonomy to do so; a compelling vision to strive for; an environment of mutual support; access to relevant information and feedback and, last but definitely not least, recognition for their achievements. This should of course be the first and most important role of all managers (at least, if they wish to be 'leaders') but, unfortunately, operational pressures too often distract from this mission and only a "no buts" (learning) culture of continuous, peer-supported staff learning is capable of overcoming this.

Implementing a whole organisational approach

So what in practical terms would a *whole organisation approach* to teacher education look like? Well, taking these arguments to their logical conclusion, the following would be an excellent start.

All staff must promote, search out and applaud initiative, innovation and collaboration in pursuit of excellent teaching and learning and local strategic priorities.

Senior Management Teams will need to ensure that the Professional Development Reviews of curriculum/middle managers strongly emphasise the promotion of this ethos.

Curriculum and Middle Managers must recognise that excellence in teaching and learning will flow from:

- the application of engaged learning pedagogies (for staff as well as students)
- peer-to-peer support and collaborative (staff) learning
- subject-specific coaching, mentoring and communities of practice.

They must also require 'reflective practice', individually and team-based to be an intrinsic aspect of professional practice, inside and outside the classroom.

Human Resources need to:

- gain a better understanding of professional formation, reflective practice, and the application of the new Professional Standards in the context of teaching and learning
- make collegiality and engagement with organisational quality improvement and assurance a significant requirement of all teachers' job descriptions

- work with Quality Managers, Staff Development and ITE teams to gain a better understanding of the context of teaching and learning and to ‘constructively align’ human resource management and development with the teacher education reform agenda.

Teacher Education Teams need to:

- exploit LSIS and Centre for Excellence in Teacher Training (CETT) resources and programmes to support both professional practice and professional development
- apply IFL’s REFLECT, or similar, software to facilitate networking and ongoing critical reflection (as well as introducing trainees to the process of recording and returning evidence of professional formation and professional development to IFL)
- support cross-college and cross-sector peer review and development activities.

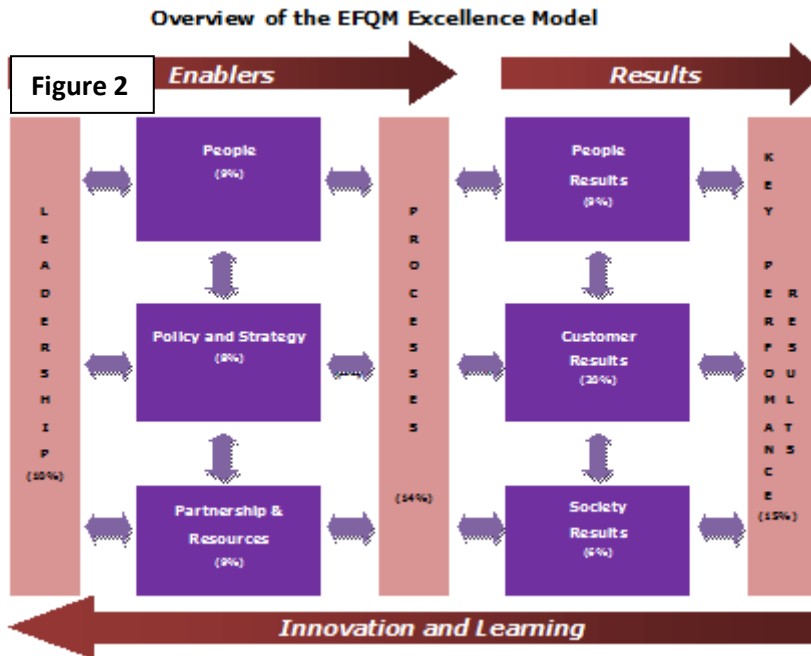
Conclusions and recommendations

It is my belief that without a whole organisation approach to staff development, the best efforts of CETTs, the LSIS Quality Improvement Programme and even the move towards self-regulation may be obstructed. Ensuring that managers engage fully with this agenda will probably require the efforts of agencies for funding, quality improvement and quality assurance to be fully working in concert. For example, a requisite of funding may be the requirement to demonstrate collegiality and peer-support, within and between institutions - an obvious pre-requisite for self-regulation. Inspection should focus, in part, on how well a vision of high performance is being promoted and enacted within an institution. Approved quality interventions should be more significant drivers of funding and subsequent inspection to measure impact.

So are there any familiar anchors here? Well, many education and training institutions have, at some time, collected the Investors in People ‘badge’ - but have a look at this again because it provides an excellent blueprint on how to align individual and team development in support of a shared vision of strategic development (see Profile Self Check). What is more, you do not have to ‘go for’ assessment in order to use the standard as a diagnostic and development tool. Secondly, and for a conceptual model of what a whole organisation approach to organisational quality and development looks like, refer to the European Foundation for Quality Management, Excellence Model. This model (see Fig 2) explains how:

‘excellent results with respect to Performance, Customers, People and Society are achieved through Leadership driving Policy and Strategy, that is delivered through People, Partnerships and Resources, and Processes.’

(EFQM)



Sitting behind all of this, and perhaps before it, is the need to (re) educate managers in the ways of ‘situated learning’. The old ways of doing things may feel comfortable but organisations that deliver learning must become ‘learning organisations’ and that will require a new style of enabling management or, perhaps, leadership. Managers will need to inspire and enable staff to work collectively towards high performance, which inevitably means change and learning. For example, our students already live fully in the Information Age, whereas the rest of us are dithering at its portal. The sector needs to catch up quickly and the best, and probably least painful, place to start is with fully embedded teacher education,

where training and quality improvement become both synchronous and synonymous. Nostalgia may be a nice place, but it is on the road to nowhere.

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