

Thinking Like a Teacher: Is the Early Career Framework the answer to Early Career Teachers' prayers?

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It's a declaration that every teacher educator has heard from their trainees: "I've passed all the teaching standards so now I am a teacher!" The current structure of teacher education encourages the view that training is a series of experiences that once completed, provide confirmation of competency, rather than a construction of a robust and well rooted professional identity that we identified in a [previous blog post \(Wolstencroft and Gretton, 2020\)](#). Since the articulation of required teacher knowledge was captured in the form of [Teacher Standards \(DfE, 2012\)](#), it has been assumed that knowledge occurs at the point of performance (Verran *et al*, 2007), something which may not be wholly true as these performances must be consistently re-enacted into their own practice to demonstrate that any real learning has occurred (Tenenber, 2016).

Whilst a series of competencies does create a degree of standardisation and consistency, it simplifies the complex processes of teaching and learning, potentially encouraging trainees to neglect less quantifiable aspects of the profession, that whilst not explicitly stated in the standards, are intrinsically embedded within them. This approach, characterised as 'thinking like a teacher' (Flores, 2020) can be likened to Dewey's 'habits of the mind' (Dewey, 1933). The idea behind it, is if a trainee has to consciously think through a process before taking action, then not only does that slow things down, but also it means that they will always be looking for outside guidance when dealing with their job, rendering actions as performance (Verran *et al*, 2007) and cloning (Ethel and McMeniman, 2000) rather than professional ability through well embedded learning (Tenenber, 2016).

If we accept that 'thinking like a teacher' (Flores, 2020) is a threshold concept (Meyer and Land, 2003) that needs to be grasped in order for new teachers to be effective, then our role as educators is to support new teachers' rite of passage through the liminality that they experience during the early stage of their careers. The liminal state (Meyer and Land, 2003) often occurs in the period after training has been completed and before unconscious competency (Broadwell, 1969) starts, signifying that a more embedded state has been achieved. The advent of the [Early Career Framework \(ECF\) \(DfE, 2021\)](#) appears to provide an opportunity to move Early Career Teachers (ECTs) past liminality as it allows for two years of mentoring, guidance and time away from the classroom to reflect on professional practice rather than assuming that the trainee is fully qualified once the Teacher Standards have been evidenced. The framework, with a nod to Dewey, stresses the importance of developing positive working habits during the formative phase of careers (DfE, 2021).

The [Teacher Development Trust \(2015\)](#) define effective professional development for teachers as being strategies that translate into the classroom; opportunities for experimentation; engagement in analysis and reflection, alongside a consideration of the rationales and evidence base underpinning approaches. These principles could be represented within the potential scope of the ECF in that correlations can be drawn between the ECF's direction to provide *space* for ECTs to think in the form of reduced timetables and to benefit from *coaching*, in the form of specific mentoring

and *feedback*, via observations and formal assessments back to the principles from the Teacher Development Trust, hopefully setting the scene for ECTs to benefit from high quality support that will become as the ECF envisions: 'the cornerstone of a successful career in teaching' (DfE, 2021, p.4).

References

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