<CT>Joining the dots: Encouraging the transfer of professional learning for student teachers

At Liverpool John Moores University, we work alongside 400 primary student teachers each year. This case study focuses upon the creation and implementation of the 'Reflection, Observation and Planning' (ROP) initiative that is embedded as explicit sessions within our Professional Studies modules across both undergraduate and postgraduate routes.

<A>The goal

Our teacher training programmes consist of two linked components: taught sessions on campus and placement experiences in school. The teachers operating across these components as tutors and mentors have become what the Core Content Framework (CCF) (DfE, 2021) term 'expert colleagues'. They have accrued what Dewey (1933) would deem 'habits of mind', which consists of thought patterns, frames of reference, expertise and grasp of pupil learning. This is what we hope to develop with our new teachers so that they too can develop a sense of agency, professional rationales and reasoning for their actions and their own identity as professionals.

<A>The puzzle

When I first started to visit students as an 'expert colleague', it was interesting to note that student teachers did not seem to naturally be able to make the connections between what they had explored in taught sessions and its enactment in the classroom. Mentors and tutors alike directed student teachers to observe, plan and reflect, but this did not seem to ensure that the transfer of learning occurred. As such, their experiences remained situated within the parameters of where and how they happened (Lave and Wenger, 1991): theory and research in university folders and enactment and practice in classrooms, with concepts such as 'research-informed practice' not implying a connection between the two.

<A>Pilot study

To explore this further, I conducted a small, informal action research study, initially focused upon observation with several student teachers (n = 15). This revealed that although the student teachers were noting down what was happening within observational experiences, they could not access, as Kennedy (2016) outlines, the purpose or motives behind the behaviours and performances that they were seeing. Description did not always give way to analysis, and as such, this had the potential to render the students' own practice solely imitation. This is not wholly negative, as Bandura (1977) indicates that we learn through imitation, and Swann (1993) suggests that there is an awareness to enactment lag that happens naturally with new teachers. In an attempt to give the student teachers access to 'habits of mind' (Dewey, 1933) and expose the motivations (Kennedy, 2016) behind teaching and learning episodes, 'lesson narrations' were conducted. I would narrate their mentor's lesson live to the student, hoping to expose the thought process of the teacher as it happened. This proved powerful, with student teachers reporting that they had not grasped the 'hidden meanings' behind the externally observable aspects of teaching and learning in the classrooms within which they had been, with one student adding that after exposing the missing connection that they needed, they felt the shift of what it was to have impact on pupil learning.

<A>The response

This research prompted us to further interrogate the components of our programme, where it became clear that although these professional skills were indeed referenced and exemplified implicitly across our programmes, there was no cohesive or explicit instruction around them. In hindsight, this preceded but has a correlation with the 'learn that' and 'how to' statements within the CCF framework that has since been published (DfE, 2021).

The approach was developed using a range of relevant research bases, embracing work on early teacher metacognition and trajectory from Dreyfus (2004); constructive alignment of teacher subject knowledge for learning design from Shulman (1986) and Biggs (2011); and a focus upon the role of observation for quality improvement rather than quality assurance from Wragg (2011) and O'Leary (2013). These models were

synthesised together with an adaption to the reflective framework of Rolfe et al. (2001), posing the questions of *what* (is the problem or my focus and the evidence that I have), *so what* (are the challenges and the tacit knowledge that I need) and *now what* (how I will implement this reflexively to improve my own practice and pupil learning).

ROP was first implemented within our postgraduate programme (n = 120), as due to the timeframe it was easier to gauge the possible impact of the sessions on students' outcomes and consequently, and most importantly, their impact on learning, which is the focus of all our work within our programmes. It consisted of a redesign of our placement proformas and incrementally challenging sessions that followed the trajectory of the student teachers' training. Student teachers had explicitly taught lectures, workshops and blended learning tasks around planning, observation, assessment and reflection. Although adhering to the research from Dreyfus (2004) around novices' needs for rules, scripting and mechanistic processes, my initial concerns centred around whether the approach appeared to be too reductionist to expert colleagues, with them being concerned that ROP would simplify the complex web of variables (Davis and Fantozzi, 2016) of teaching and learning down to a set of behaviourist principles. However, the mentors and student teachers alike stated that they valued the somewhat reductionist, behaviouristic approach, as it gave them a platform upon which to build more complex knowledge, with one student teacher describing it as a 'point of reference, like a life raft'.

<A>Moving forward

Each year, feedback is collected from tutors, mentors and student teachers informally through ongoing dialogue, online surveys, liaison with mentors and accessing school-based planning, assessment and reflection through our shared online placement files. Generally, the feedback has been positive, with students excited to be part of the evolution of these sessions, and they have found it the key to 'tying' everything together. Comments included:

<Q>*'The best module that was implemented during my three-year degree. Taught me how to be the teacher I am.'* *(Final year undergraduate)*<Q>

<Q>*'Challenging and intense, like when starting to make a jigsaw puzzle, but beneficial and satisfying once the puzzle is complete.'* (*Final year undergraduate)*<Q>

<Q>*'I have directly used my assessment skills which I developed through the ROP sessions. The class teacher gave me the opportunity to mark children's workbooks, and in addition, independently I have used questioning to help children overcome any misconceptions. I had the confidence to try this because I had experienced it before.'* (*Postgraduate)*<Q>

<Q>*'When faced with planning as a pedagogy for their own professional learning within my subject knowledge sessions, students no longer seem daunted and can focus on the subject content in hand, as the planning is becoming embedded. As a staff, we have increased consistency and understanding of where student teachers' skills should be at and manage expectations in our own sessions and across placements appropriately.'* (*LJMU staff)*<Q>

Ways forward that were offered centred around the continued abstract nature of the professional skills of ROP and the fact that it still felt 'overwhelming and disconnected from their "real life" practice'. ROP continues to respond to student teacher needs and, as such, current sessions have taken a slightly different approach to before, which has been made particularly possible because we now have several cohorts who have passed through the sessions, and with them a rich and realistic repertoire of student teacher reflections and documentary evidence has developed upon which for us to draw. ROP is now embracing the situated nature of professional knowledge and skills and uses problem-based scenarios that the novices are likely to face in the field as a vehicle for learning. Indeed, student teachers not only contribute example paperwork but have also offered reflective diary-style videos to be shared with future cohorts, including recounts around a move away from didactic direct instruction into learner-led lessons, and students exchanging their thoughts around the role of teacher subject knowledge in their ability to design learning. An example session for our second-year undergraduate student teachers drew upon a common target from their previous placements around

pace of teaching and learning, and looked at the collection and interpretation of summative and formative assessment, its connection to teacher subject knowledge and aspects of adaptive teaching. Student teachers used class data to make decisions about learning design, linked to video footage of corresponding teaching and learning in a Key Stage 2 classroom. We have also embraced the CCF (DfE, 2021) as a joint curriculum, sharing our weekly curriculum with schools with suggested tasks and foci for mentoring conversations so that expert colleagues in both settings contribute to the same focus.

<A>Impact

ROP is now embedded across both our undergraduate and postgraduate programmes (n = 400). The hope is to have impact primarily because students are motivated and value the learning that is rooted in authentic scenarios that they are likely to face at that point in their training trajectory. The programme offers students frequent and low-stakes opportunities to become involved in collaboration with their peers and expert colleagues around real-life scenarios that they will have to deconstruct, problem-solve and think strategically about in their own everyday work and practice. This also supports our novice teachers to manage workload more smartly, as they start to grasp how the paperwork surrounding teaching and learning is interconnected and has purpose, rather than tackling it as disjointed, box-ticking exercises around issues of performativity (Ball, 2003) and quality assurance. By the time that they are expected to enact these thoughts with greater independence on a placement, it is hoped that the repertoire of experiences from the sessions will have enabled them to have a clear and useful mental model and embedded rationales from collaboration with peers and feedback from expert colleagues, therefore giving them confidence with the puzzles or problems that they may encounter. This allows new teachers to greet these scenarios with questions around how they will do something, rather than whether they can do it.

<A>What next?

ROP continues to evolve, also providing us with a platform to make connections between the ‘learn that’ and ‘how to’ statements of the CCF (DfE, 2021). Our close connections with our partnership schools enable us to continually reflect on the relevance of the scenarios in which we embed the learning. We are not only starting to develop scenarios using materials from previous cohorts, but also considering how common curriculum schemes could be included. We will also draw upon these school-based partners for feedback around how effectively the professional learning within ROP is being deployed, and listen to their ways forward.

<A>Takeaways

- <BL>Learning of novice teachers can become situated within the context in which it is embedded
- To overcome this, scenario- and problem-based approaches appear to encourage learning transfer and increase purpose and value
- Both knowledge and skills must be explicitly taught and implicitly expected
- Expert colleagues in both settings can contribute to professional learning based in authentic scenarios, which are generally hypothetical or ‘on action’ in university and ‘in action’ within placement (Schon, 1983)
- The CCF (DfE, 2021) is a shared curriculum across settings and must be facilitated as such.<BL>

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