



RQT perspectives on the English subject PGCE

Dr Clare Lawrence

This research involved discussing the PGCE English subject course with three teachers who completed the course two years earlier.

Feedback focussed strongly on relationships. The teachers articulated that they had felt, during training, an unnecessary and self-inflicted focus on their individual 'performance' in the classroom and that now they could understand the extent to which teaching is a team effort. They now plan collaboratively, support each other, discuss issues and share ideas and resources. They suggested that their reluctance to do these things while still in training may have been because they were – at least in some elements – in competition with each other and because they lacked confidence in their own teaching styles. One described how during the PGCE they had been 'trying on different jackets' as they adapted their approach to be like those around them.

They described how their appreciation of the course content has developed with distance. At the time, anything not directly related to 'survival strategy', they said, seemed irrelevant. Now they are more interested in the abstract concepts, in pedagogy and theory and the 'why' and 'how' of teaching. They articulated how some elements of the course that they had found irritating at the time became the most useful – citing the EAL session where they were 'talked at' in Polish for twenty minutes as a particularly strong example.

'I was flummoxed; at the time I didn't get it... but looking back, it made the point'.

They particularly value the concept within the course of 'finding things out'. They continue to be curious and experimental and have begun to realise that this approach as researchers is part of their on-going development as teachers.

The full article, Learning to teach English: three RQT perspectives on English subject Secondary PGCE will appear in the National Association for the Teaching of English (NATE) magazine Teaching English in February.



"Something useful I observed": an evaluation into the benefits of specific coaching for trainee teachers in the skill of lesson observation.

Jean Wood

Observation of working teachers' practices is a familiar way of introducing trainee teachers to the profession. However, trainees may lack the tools to understand how to observe in a meaningful way; at the beginning of a PGCE course the trainee has no experience to draw upon to understand what is going on beneath the surface of a lesson and research suggests that observers may gauge lessons in a purely impressionist manner. This study investigates the benefits of specific coaching for trainees in the skill of lesson observation. It asks whether it is a useful exercise to observe the lessons of experienced teachers together with a tutor so that the tutor can explain the elements of the lessons, and whether targeted and specific discussion after observations helps trainees to develop their observation skills. A cohort of MFL trainees observed a variety of lessons over the course of one day, during which lessons pairs of trainees were given specific indicators on which to focus. After each lesson, the researcher discussed the trainees' observations and explained the pedagogical theories being used by the teacher. Pre- and post- observation questionnaires were used to elicit trainees' thoughts, together with group discussions held with trainees and tutor. Results suggest that, although they found the observations themselves to be useful in positioning themselves as trainee teachers, trainees lacked the sophistication at this stage in their training to focus on either pedagogy or the issue of observation, rather becoming quickly immersed in lesson content. Implications for trainee-teachers' programmes of study are discussed.

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Threshold Connections: employing the Threshold Concept Framework to impact on classroom practice in secondary schools through collaborative research.

A paper accepted for presentation at TC2020, the 8th Biennial Threshold Concepts Conference at University College London. 8th-10th July, 2020.

Dr Matt Dunn and Dr Jenny Wynn, Bishop Grosseteste University, Lincoln.

Significant changes to the delivery and assessment methods of A-level specifications in schools in England have introduced increasing levels of difficulty (CIFE, 2018). In light of this, recent investigations into students' transition from GCSE to A-level study have highlighted the cognitive and affective discomfort brought about by encounters with threshold concepts (Dunn, 2019a; 2019b), which serve to exacerbate these troublesome journeys. In our current paper, we argue that focusing on threshold concepts (Meyer & Land, 2003) within A-level and GCSE teaching is a pedagogically productive endeavour which has the potential to impact positively on teaching practice and student learning. This paper will report on an ongoing, collaborative project involving student teachers, academics, school teachers and pupils.



Whilst there are many references to threshold concepts evident within social media, popular education texts and guidance documents, we have become increasingly concerned by the throwaway use of the term 'threshold concepts' in this discourse, often without reference to the underlying theoretical framework, or with superficial application. We have therefore based

our project design on a critical appraisal of the Threshold Concept Framework (TCF), particularly how the TCF characteristics have been applied in empirical studies throughout the literature, and with consideration of the published critique of the TCF.

We will update delegates at the conference on the Threshold Connections project: outlining the research design; presenting findings and analysis from phase one; explaining the design and implementation of phase two and direction of travel for phase three. Whilst the project is centred around UK secondary schools and teacher education, the principles and theoretical approaches are potentially transferable to other international contexts and educational phases. Following the conference, we intend to publish the full paper in a relevant educational journal.

If you are interested in finding out more about the project, please contact Dr Matt Dunn via email matthew.dunn@bishopg.ac.uk in the first instance.

References

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The Secondary PGCE newsletter is designed to enable our partnership school professional colleagues to remain up to date with the team's current research interests. Would you like to hear more about a project? Would you like to get involved in our research? Do you have any research you would like to share? Please do let us know.