

The Changing Primary Curriculum: future directions for schools and teacher education

NaPTEC/GTC(E) workshop 19th March 2010

The workshop was very well attended with nearly forty delegates representing teacher educators joined by ten teachers from partner schools. Contributions from Sarah Jennings, giving the GTC perspectives on curriculum change, were followed by Mark Orrow-Whiting, updating delegates on the latest QCDA thinking. Robert Fisher led a response showing how Creative Dialogue is central to the primary curriculum. Powerpoint slides from all three presenters are available with this overview on the website: www.naptec.org.uk

The workshop concluded with discussion groups examining a series of relevant topics. Summary notes of those discussions are as follows:

Planning, pedagogy and assessment

View of teacher expertise from Cambridge review: what experts do is not the same as novices, becoming expert is a subtle process. Maybe teacher start off working to a recipe and gradually expand their repertoire – there should be progression through the ITE programme.

Importance of flexibility – but what exactly do we mean by flexibility? There is much to be learned from the EYFS approach to planning for all students. Students need to be well-versed in Child Development and in using observation for assessment purposes.

Challenge of finding/choosing student placements. Ideally HEIs need a very good knowledge of partnership schools.

Benefits of non-assessed placements were considered.

Innovation vs. compliance

ITE responding to curriculum changes vs. Ofsted framework. Ofsted value innovative approaches if they work – this is high risk. Managing this risk is a difficult balancing act.

Trainees experience of diverse planning models

Dilemma of preparing future teachers and preparing them to go on placement now, many students totally inculturated in education in the last 12 years of National Strategies. We must give them the principles of planning, learning, assessment; these are really important and then students can be encouraged to present them in different ways that schools are using.

Models of planning are coming in from schools.

Adaptability needs to be promoted by HEIs as the “State theory” of learning is shifting. It is important for leaders in schools and HEIs to have confidence in order to innovate and persuade others of the success of this.

Understanding purposes and types of assessment, including APP

Some schools are saying that the principles of APP are good but it does not appear user friendly. HEIs do not receive training on APP as of right.

Students need to know the principles of assessment and how to assess in terms of identifying children’s learning and analysing it. This is more important than the content and presentation of the record keeping. There is a need to promote consistency of judgement.

What it is to be a (subject?) specialist

- Challenges of cross curricular approaches
- Organising specialist curriculum content and sequence in new contexts
- Issues of progression
- Role of specialised pedagogical knowledge

The first and last points were linked. Distinctions are drawn between subject specialism and pedagogy. Knowledge about a subject is important but equally, knowledge about how to teach it i.e. pedagogy. Members of the group felt that pedagogy is a 'subject' in its own right, and that subject knowledge alone is not sufficient to be a specialist in the subject. The group discussed 'techniques' and 'methods' for teaching but felt that pedagogy was so much more and incorporated philosophical ideals as well as the ethos of the specific school.

Challenges of cross curricular approaches: issues of progression

It was felt that planning for cross-curricular links should be assessment led, where knowledge of the level descriptors support the teachers in making links. Synergy between elements of the level descriptors would ensure progression in skills.

Organising specialist curriculum content and sequence in new contexts

Key discussion here on where subjects filter out from cross-curricular planning. In Yr5 and 6, distinct subjects would drive the curriculum in preparation for subject organisation in secondary. One important consideration is to work to ease primary/secondary transition.

Working in partnership

General feeling that there is a lot of good practice in schools which involves cross-curricular planning, but most schools have not yet engaged with the new curriculum. Agreed that for ITT providers, subject knowledge remains important, but that students need to learn to be adaptable. This is particularly important next year when students on PG courses or in final year of UG programme will be experiencing the current NC on school placement but (leaving aside the uncertainties around the general election) working with the new curriculum in their NQT year.

Most felt that generally changes to curriculum can be accommodated within the existing PG programmes; undergraduate courses might provide more opportunities for change. Cumbria is revalidating all courses in line with the new curriculum for implementation from 2011.

Implications for mentor training with new curriculum.

Exeter (Carol Murphy) has been doing some work with mentors around more dialogic approaches to teaching, moving away from prescription - this might be a way of moving practice into schools?

Concluding statements

Students need to be adaptable and have an informed opinion, a philosophy, a belief with an understanding of the underpinning principles, this is what schools want and what we believe is required in these uncertain and changing times. Also, we need to encourage students (and pupils) to take well calculated risks, understanding that it is acceptable to be unsuccessful - knowing what to do about it is important. This is about building resilience. This is challenging within a culture of compliance, but we need to argue this case strong and ensure we are heard. ITE should be taking a leading role here.