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Teacher Induction : Personal Intelligence and the Mentoring Relationship

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ABSTRACT

This article is aimed at probationer teachers in Scotland, their induction supporters and all those with a responsibility for their support and professional development. It argues that the induction process is not merely a mechanistic one, supported only by systems in schools, local authorities and the General Teaching Council for Scotland, (GTCS) but a more complex process where the relationship between the new teacher and the supporter is central to its success. In particular, the characteristics and skills of the induction supporter in relation to giving feedback are influential. This applies to feedback in all its forms – formative and summative, formal and informal. The ability of the probationer to handle that feedback and to be proactive in the process is also important.

Introduction

New arrangements for teacher induction in Scotland have been put in place as a result of the recommendations in “A Teaching Profession for the 21st Century” (2000). It lays out a set of statutory procedures by which newly qualified teachers will progress, over the course of one year, to the (SFR) Standard for Full Registration (GTCS, 2002a). For the first time, induction supporters will be appointed to work with probationer teachers, with funding allocated to provide protected time for this support mechanism.

This article suggests ways in which that professional relationship – formal and informal - and the dialogue between the probationer and the induction supporter can be enhanced by recognising the importance of the interpersonal skills of both participants. The face to face interactions between probationer and supporter, which follow observation of teaching in the classroom and which precede written feedback, are central to the success of the induction experience. Suggestions are made about the kinds of staff development opportunities which might assist in making the most of the interaction which takes place in this context. It is hoped that this contribution to the discourse on teacher induction will help those involved in the process to make it a genuinely developmental experience. This would complement the set of procedures created by the General Teaching Council Scotland to implement the Scottish Executive’s Education Departments’ (SEED) agenda to raise the standards within the profession .

The Context

There has been an established process for inducting new recruits into the teaching profession in Scotland since 1967. The General Teaching Council in Scotland (GTCS) has overseen a two-year probationary period for 35 years. The probationary process put the onus on the probationer

teacher and his/her headteacher to ensure that the GTCS was provided with all the necessary information to fully register the probationer at the end of the 2 years or to grant an extension. The induction process had in the past been a variable experience for new teachers in Scotland. The issues are well documented, showing a wide range of levels of support. Draper et al (1992) reported only 50% of probationers satisfied with the level of support they received and concluded that some probationers did indeed have a better start than others. This diversity was accentuated by the reorganisation of local government in Scotland in 1996 and the establishment of an even wider range of local authority approaches and advice for schools. The use of GTCS materials (1990a) varied from one local authority to another and indeed from one school to another. Despite the apparent uniformity within the structure of the two year probation, new teachers' real experiences of the support process over the last decade or more paint a different picture. This state of affairs informed the thinking of the McCrone Committee and their recommendations to change the induction process.

In addition, the educational agenda had shifted in the intervening years. It became apparent through a number of government publications and official reports from government agencies that school effectiveness and, therefore, teacher effectiveness was to come under increasing scrutiny. A culture of measuring all aspects of education against pre-determined performance indicators had emerged. A Teacher Induction Project (TIP) had been commissioned by SEED and the GTCS. McNally, Development Officer, GTCS/SEED (2000) reported,

“We need structure but a structure which:

- Does not squeeze out individual talents and personalities
- Has large spaces for informal (or non-formal) learning
- Serves collegiality as a superior ethic
- Does not pretend to replace processes which we do not fully understand. (p .19)

This demonstrated GTCS and SEED's commitment to creating a meaningful induction experience which includes equitable procedures balanced by the humanist dimension of professional development. This systematic support, both in and out of school, planned for probationers is unparalleled in Scottish education. A commitment – financial and practical – to improving the training of new teachers is evident.

In theory, this guaranteed induction year would allow the opportunity for a more uniform approach to the support and induction of new teachers. The GTCS provided support to local authorities, schools and probationers on the induction procedures. A range of support materials and mechanisms were developed for this purpose and many face-to-face meetings have taken place across the country in the run up to this first implementation stage.

However, there seemed to be very little information available to schools or local authorities about how this induction scheme would materialise. Indeed, the student teachers, schools and local authorities appeared to be receiving information simultaneously. The first information emerged in January 2002 as the GTCS and SEED launched their Teacher Induction Scheme publications. Information on how to register with GTCS, payment for provisional registration and outlining preferences for employing authorities were detailed at that time. There was no indication of how local authorities or schools would be involved in the process or the features of

the new induction scheme emerging. These details were being negotiated between SEED, GTCS and the groups of probationers, school and local authority personnel who were part of the consultation process. Meanwhile the Standard for Full Registration had been published – resulting from the earlier work of the Teacher Induction Project - for public consultation and the amended format was to be eagerly awaited .

Agreement upon allocation of the training placements to local authorities and schools was reached very late in the chain of events. Some local authorities had the numbers of probationer teachers and their subject areas confirmed late in May. Probationer teachers were being asked to contact their schools and meet their induction supporters ahead of the information on the induction process itself. Ultimately, the final “Standard for Full Registration” and the “Guidance on Achieving the Standard for Full Registration” were launched in June 2003. The information was arriving in schools as they broke up for their vacation period. There was little or no time to consider who would make the best induction supporter or to familiarise school staff with what would be involved in supporting the probationer teacher in the training placement. The myths and confusions around the Teacher Induction Scheme were played out in the press throughout. (Munro, 2002, Naysmith, 2002, Ross, 2002). Reports cited,

“ The most common complaint from union officials are lack of planning from the Scottish Executive and local authorities and no information or consultation about what is about to happen to a valuable group of teachers, many of whom have given years of loyal service.” (Blane, 2002)

In essence, the emphasis in the first year of its implementation, SEED and GTCS’s agenda was to create the mechanisms for a rigorous teacher induction scheme with little regard for how this would be *experienced by the participants*. It concentrated on the easily measured and recorded aspects of induction rather than the quality of the mentoring relationships conducive to effective professional development for teachers despite earlier soundbites reported by the Teacher Induction Project.

Analytical Framework

The argument put forward in this article is based on the notion that personal intelligence is central to effective relationships and therefore crucially important in the context of a mentoring relationship. Gardner identified personal intelligence within his theory of multiple intelligences (1983). This theory is based on empirical evidence reviewed in many studies and identifies intelligences on the basis of findings from brain science, psychology, anthropology and other relevant disciplines. Now cited in most work relating to the study of intelligence, his theory broadened the definition, proposing at that time, seven separate intelligences – linguistic, logical – mathematical, musical, bodily- kinaesthetic, spatial, interpersonal and intrapersonal. He has since identified additional intelligences, but for the purposes of this article, the focus is on the two personal intelligences identified – interpersonal and intrapersonal.

Interpersonal intelligence “denotes a person’s capacity to understand the intentions, motivations, and desires of other people and, consequently to work effectively with others.” (Gardner, 1999 p.43) He suggests teachers as being amongst those specified groups for whom acute

interpersonal intelligence would be crucial. This intelligence would include the potential to read the moods of others, including the appraisal of non verbal messages, and the ability to empathise with another's feelings.

Intra personal intelligence " involves the capacity to understand oneself, to have an effective working model of oneself – including one's own desires, fears, and capacities – and to use such information effectively in regulating one's own life." (Gardner, 1999 p.43) This kind of self knowledge and awareness is closely connected to the capacity to then relate to others.

The concept of emotional intelligence, first proposed by Salovey and Mayer (1990) and popularised and broadened further by Goleman, (1995) stems in part from Gardner's work. Goleman differentiates between intellectual and emotional intelligence and makes a similar distinction between personal and social competence. He adapted Mayer's model and identified five basic social and emotional competencies : self- awareness, self- regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills. For the purposes of this study, three of these are particularly relevant :

- *self awareness* - knowing our feelings and using them to guide decision making : having a realistic sense of our own abilities and self confidence
- *empathy* – sensing what people are feeling, being able to take their perspective, cultivating rapport with a wide range of people
- *social skills* – handling emotions well in relationships, accurately reading social situations, interacting smoothly, using these skills for co-operation and teamwork

The two dimensions of emotional intelligence, personal and social, are related, and this awareness of one's own and others' feelings, needs and concerns, as well as skill at handling them, seem to be particularly relevant to this study. Covey (1998) stresses the importance of working from the "inside - out" in this way, establishing an inner confidence and self awareness before working on the skills required to deal more effectively with others.

A second key premise is that emotional intelligence is not fixed and can be developed in the light of experience and understanding (Goleman, 1998). People can increase their own self awareness and explore the values which underpin their perceptions, They can learn to interact differently with one another and improve the effectiveness of their communication (Covey 1998, Gillen 1992). Appropriate personal development opportunities are helpful in the process. These two perspectives on personal intelligence and its potential development will illuminate the findings of this study and inform the analysis and discussion which follows.

Methodology

The data was gathered as part of a collaborative study carried out at two Scottish universities, the University of Glasgow and the University of Strathclyde. These students would be the first probationer teachers to experience the new induction arrangements. The questionnaire included open ended as well as closed questions covering such issues as respondents' perceptions of a useful induction process, the characteristics of a good induction supporter - both professional and personal - the form of support they would like to experience and their view of their own

continuing professional development needs. The questionnaire was piloted early in 2002 and the revised version was used in the survey in March of that year. The sample study included all final year students (1136 students) on the Post Graduate Certificate in Education course, (both primary and secondary) and on the Bachelor of Education course. A total of 271 returns were received, which constitutes 24% of the target group and approximately 11% of all teachers entering the profession in August 2002.

The response rate to this postal survey was less than expected and efforts were made to follow up to increase the return rate. Email contact was made with all students attaching a further electronic version of the questionnaire and arrangements were made for drop off facilities for completed questionnaires in both universities. However the time of year, when most students were on school placements, may not have been helpful. A decision was taken by the authors not to pursue the student teacher sample at the risk of compromising reliability. It was important that students did not feel compelled to respond or respond in a particular way. There was a concern that further contact could have been viewed as an abuse of the relationship between lecturer and student. The participants had been guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality throughout. This would include not being identified for non-participation in the study.

The authors recognise the limitations of the size of the survey, but because of the balance of qualitative and quantitative data, argue that an interesting snap-shot of respondents' perceptions has emerged nevertheless. Seven out of twelve question items allowed the participants an open response. From these it was possible to identify common themes of personal importance to the student teachers. This article focuses on questions about personal traits of the induction supporter; the nature of feedback; the dual role of support and assessment and the self-evaluation process.

The quantitative results were collated and analysed using SPSS software. The qualitative data was coded to categorise responses under appropriate headings and collated using Excel. The themes emerging from their responses corresponded closely with the findings of other studies using probationer teacher samples. (Draper et al, 1992, Huberman, 1993, GTCS, 2000). This triangulation of data provides a degree of validity to the study especially in determining the direction of the focus group discussion.

The focus group session was arranged with volunteers from the survey who had indicated a willingness to attend. An interview schedule was designed to explore the issues arising from the analysis of the questionnaires and the sessions were recorded using audio-tape. Any quotes from respondents used in this article are taken from transcripts of focus groups or from the open responses provided on questionnaire returns.

The authors recognise the need to probe the findings in more depth. A group of 20 students has agreed to continue to communicate with the researchers over the first year of their induction. Through a series of 5 face-to-face meetings and regular email contact, the experiences of individual probationers will be tracked as they progress through the first year of these new arrangements for teacher induction in Scotland.

Student Teachers’ Views on the Mentoring Relationship

The Traits of the Induction Supporter

In broad terms the study highlighted overwhelmingly the importance of the quality of relationships between the induction supporter and the probationer in the induction process. It also focused attention on the nature and extent of feedback. There was a clear message in both the qualitative and quantitative data about the importance for respondents of these aspects of the induction process. When asked to identify the desired personal and professional traits of induction supporters, respondents were much more concerned with the former.

“Approachability” was mentioned most frequently to sum up a range of interpersonal skills and attitudes seen as desirable in this relationship. 86 % of respondents mentioned this trait. In this category the following words were used often.

friendly	sympathetic	empathetic	understanding	honest
available	trustworthy	reliable	compassionate	helpful
reasonable	not domineering	fair	positive	patient
flexible	non judgemental	easy to talk to	good listener	genuine

Fig. 1

This is reflected in other studies. In her manual for NQTs in England, Bubb (2000) has cited a similar range of comments made by new teachers about their tutors. Tickle (1994) provides a list of essential qualities of the teacher-tutor which also reflects the same concerns about approachability. Stephenson (1995) argues that the emotional condition of student teachers, so crucial to the effectiveness of their school experience, is often dependent on the confidence gained from their mentoring relationship. Williams and Prestage (2002) recognise this need in NQT’s to feel genuinely supported and encouraged in their first year of teaching. Hobson’s (2002) study of secondary student teachers showed how much they valued having access to a supportive and reassuring mentor who would make the time to spend with them and provide constructive feedback.

Concerns about Support and Assessment Roles

The nature of the feedback process, which is vital for professional development, is closely related to the issue of approachability. Respondents were very interested in the interpersonal skills of the person providing feedback. The quality of this type of informal, formative feedback is important as evidenced by comments from the cohort.

“ Approachable and willing to take the time to talk and offer advice “

“ Sympathetic to the needs and problems facing new teachers”

“ To respect you as an equal member of staff, regardless of lack of experience. We have been through training and don’t need to be made to feel inadequate”

As well as the support remit, induction supporters are also responsible, in the new scheme, for formal assessment of the progress of probationer teachers over the course of the year. Specific assessment activities are detailed in the advice to schools (GTCS, 2002b). How this potentially difficult area is approached is crucial. The dual role of supporter and assessor may prove problematic for both supporter and probationer and so this relationship will need careful handling. Williams and Prestage (2002) discuss the definition of roles for the induction tutor and show that teachers themselves have very different views about these two dimensions of the work. Indeed many of their sample of NQTs expressed concern about the tension between the two remits.

In this study, when asked whether the same person should undertake both functions comments varied,

“ I feel this would be useful as this person could work closely with you and get to know you and your style.”

“ The view of two people would be a more reliable system than just one person taking on both tasks.”

“ On the one hand I do think it is good for someone to know about my whole progress and be able to offer advice based on this. On the other hand, it may make tutor less approachable/ more formal if also assessing.”

When asked how they would like support and advice to be provided during their induction year, respondents overwhelmingly favoured one-to-one sessions on a regular basis arranged formally with their induction supporter. Some expanded on this,

“ They should have time to deal with probationer.”

“ They should have time to spend discussing problems and how to deal with them.”

“ Even to know they have half a day gives me confidence ... I know they are busy and don't like to ask.”

Respondents are expressing a need for informal feedback and formal assessment of their progress as outlined below.

“It's good when it's informal – a chat, no checklist.”

“Someone you can go to with problems but still feel part of a team.”

“You are seeking reassurance, positive reinforcement, to feel secure in your own abilities.”

And,

“Able to give clear , constructive and practical advice on how to improve.”

“Able to criticise constructively, giving help and strategies to improve.”

However, whilst valuing that input and seemingly very aware of the need for regular feedback, many expressed concern about how it would be handled. Final year students have considerable experience of feedback in the context of school placements. The impact of the skills and attitudes of teachers and tutors in this area are well known to them. Their confidence and well being on

school placements are greatly influenced by how this sensitive issue is handled. Their expectations as a probationer are influenced by their previous experience and the reported experience of peers.

“ Criticism if put properly is no problem – identifying your mistakes in a positive light.”

Clearly feedback is an area of concern for respondents. But the dilemma facing probationers and supporters in this dual role would be less problematic if both were skilled in handling feedback and setting a context where criticism is welcomed and sought out rather than something to be feared. The establishment of such a relationship requires skill and understanding and should be explored alongside the teaching of technique.

The Mentoring Relationship in Action

Tickle (2000) focuses on the importance of a humanist perspective on the induction process which, he argues, can be lost if there is too strong an emphasis on “*managing*” the process.

“ The relatively unexplored realms of personal qualities and professional characteristics leave us wondering how these might be supported and developed. Perhaps it is necessary to look elsewhere, outside of teaching, in the personal development literature, to answer the question : how do we gain and sustain the capacity to engage in the process of the development of aspects of self? “ (Tickle, 2000, p112)

Personal development literature is useful in exploring self awareness, empathy and the social skills required to build the kind of safe and supportive relationships within which feedback can be given and received with confidence.

Intelligent Feedback

Assertiveness skills are key in the range of interpersonal skills required in handling criticism or negative feedback effectively. Rights are the basis upon which assertiveness operates. From the concept of rights come attitudes and expectations and behaviour. Gillen (1992) describes the rights of those giving and receiving feedback in this way

Those Criticising

agreed standards of performance
attempt to change other’s behaviour
constructively criticise
be listened to
honesty

Those Being criticised

respect/ dignity
fair treatment
not feel threatened
make reasonable mistakes
defend yourself from unjust criticism
be listened to
good working relationships

(pp. 106, 117, Gillen, 1992)

Fig. 2

He points to the expectation each party might have of an open, honest and objective discussion about behaviour, rather than personalities, to improve performance and enhance the working relationship. Appropriate timing and environment, essential assertiveness skills, and positive body language (e.g. tone of voice, pace and eye contact) were also seen as important. This is a helpful starting point when applied to the induction context. It highlights the key areas of importance: the respectful nature of the relationship, the expectations and social skills of both parties and the need for attention to the detail of the physical aspects of the interchange.

The disposition towards equality and mutual respect in the interactions between the participants is as important as the techniques outlined below. The balance between courage and consideration, described by Covey (1989), is crucial in this area. This is not about “being nice” to people for the sake of it. He advocates seeking first to understand, before you try to evaluate and prescribe, before you try to present your own ideas. Trust is crucial and lets you focus on the issues, not the personalities or positions involved. It is about taking other people’s feelings into account, making an effort to genuinely understand their viewpoint, but having the courage to say the things which need to be said in the knowledge that the other person may not necessarily like what they hear. The respondents are in agreement,

“It’s equally important to hear the bad points.”

“Criticism if put properly is no problem – identifying your mistakes in a positive light.”

“Can give constructive criticism without causing offence.”

“To be honest and open with both my abilities and inabilities and be able to praise as well as criticise.”

“Feedback is useful if not too negative.”

“Only through our own understanding of our progress and development can the induction tutor really help us.”

Rakos (1991) describes “standard assertion” as expression of rights alone and argues that “empathetic assertion”, which involves elaboration (explanations, acknowledgement of feelings, compromises etc.) will have more impact while still maintaining the long term health of the relationship. The underlying principle is that the feedback is being given for the purposes of development and improvement and not to attach blame or make personal attacks, that people have a right to effective feedback and the right to be treated with respect and courtesy.

The key to success is genuine personal interest in the person being guided; empathy and understanding; trust and respect. Ineffective criticism, voiced as personal attacks,

“ ... displays an ignorance of the feelings it will trigger in those who receive it and the devastating effect those feelings will have on their motivation, energy and confidence in doing their work. ” (Goleman, 1996, p151)

Goleman (1998) argues that the way in which criticism is delivered affects the effectiveness, satisfaction and productivity of people at work. He cites many examples in the workplace where criticism given badly, had damaging effects on the morale, confidence and motivation of those on the receiving end. In his work on emotional intelligence he argues strongly “the hard case for

soft skills” in the workplace and that open, trusting relationships are the basis of effective coaching.

The induction supporter will be involved in feedback at a number of levels with the probationer. The GTCS guidelines lay out a procedure which includes a programme of feedback after observations over the course of the induction year. Others will also be involved in that process which will be formally recorded for assessment purposes. The stakes are high for the probationer and the experience of receiving feedback will not be neutral. There is an investment of self and a public accountability in the process which means that the skills of those giving feedback are crucial. The informal feedback given in the normal course of the working week, the formal recording of assessments made in observed sessions and the formal, summative assessments made by the school all revolve around this central set of skills. The likelihood that the probationer will hear, understand and accept and act upon valid criticism at each of these stages is related to the context within which it is given. In many ways it can be argued that attention to detail in this area would prevent difficulties arising at the end of the process.

Developing the skills

It cannot be stressed enough that the building of such relationships is time well invested as stated by the respondents’ comments above. Having begun to establish the right relationship, it is also important to become aware of the range of skills involved in giving effective feedback. These skills are helpful in assisting those involved in the induction process to tackle feedback with more confidence. Working from the premise outlined earlier, there are some straightforward techniques which can be employed to enhance the dialogue between participants in the feedback process.

Effective feedback:

- is given to be helpful, not judgemental;
- focuses on specific behaviour – is not general or personal;
- explains the impact of the behaviour clearly;
- allows the person to present their side of the problem in a dialogue;
- asks for a specific change and focused on the future;
- offers useful suggestions to prevent similar mistakes in the future;
- clearly identifies the positive outcomes of a change in behaviour;
- is well timed and calmly expressed;
- is not done publicly;
- provides a balance of positive and negative comment.

(Davis et al., 1992)

Fig 3

Goleman (1995) argues artful critique should require the appraiser to:

- *be specific* – referring to a significant incident or event which illustrates a key problem;
- *offer a solution* – suggesting ways in which the problem can be addressed;

- *be present* – offering the criticism face to face, in person;
- *be sensitive* – showing an awareness of the possible impact of the criticism.

In the absence of these skills, where the criticism is seen as a personal attack, the interaction is likely to result in the defensiveness, avoidance of responsibility and passive resistance which results from people feeling unfairly treated. He also argues for a suitable challenge combined with a vote of confidence - a positive expectation of a person's ability to improve.

Hayes (2001) identified feedback as an area of concern for student teachers. He found that the format of feedback from teachers affected the confidence and sense of well being of students. The quality of the feedback they received was related to three factors – sensitivity to the need for constructive comment, understanding the student's emotional condition and sufficient time to ensure genuine dialogue. He found that the relationship between student and mentor was enhanced when feedback was direct but non-threatening. In other words, "*to be friendly and supportive so that the tutor doesn't feel like an examiner.*"

Non-verbal Communication

But much of the skill in handling feedback is not about what is said. Goleman (1998) states that emotions are most commonly expressed through non verbal cues. Rakos (1991) breaks assertion down in to the following components :

- *content* – what the person says
- *paralinguistic elements* – how they sound
- *non verbal behaviours* – how they appear
- *social interaction skills* – timing, initiation, persistence, context

Tone of voice, pace, posture, proximity, eye contact and gestures all contribute to the overall impression. Becoming aware of the detail of these individual features and making minor adjustments can improve the effectiveness of communication with others. More importantly, an awareness of body language will heighten awareness of our real feelings while giving or receiving feedback.

Non-verbal communication gives strong clues as to our real feelings and emerges spontaneously, especially in difficult situations. This is why feedback technique alone is not enough. Body language is described by Gillen (1992) as accounting for a large part of our communication. He points out that when it sends contradictory messages to our verbal communications, people are more likely to believe what they see. If assessors of probationers are simply going through the motions, ticking off a list of skills, then recipients of feedback may recognise the superficiality of such an approach. This has relevance to the procedures of the new induction scheme. Body language often betrays the attitudes and values underpinning our approach to these complex human interactions. If the basic non-verbal communication is flawed then the authenticity of the mentoring relationship is compromised.

These skills can be practised in role-play and developed for use in real situations. Staff development opportunities in this area should be experiential and interactive so that participants can develop an understanding of their own behaviour and others' in a potentially difficult situation. Induction supporters would be better prepared for their mentoring role if this kind of professional development opportunity were made available to them.

Developing an Intelligent Dialogue

However, handling feedback is a two way process and new teachers may face real challenges in dealing with criticism. They could be better prepared too. Fletcher (2000) argues that mentoring is something that should be done *with* a trainee and not *to* them. She sees it as an active and creative process, rather than simply a mechanism to find evidence to support externally imposed standards.

Students in this study felt the same way,

“ You want to be involved in it, not have it done to you.”

“ I want to be treated like a professional, as a human being.”

“ I don't want to feel like the student at the bottom of the pile.”

If the mentoring relationship is to be successful, it is important then that the role of the probationer in the process should be proactive. The use of teaching profiles, portfolios and self evaluation tools recommended by GTCs (2002 b,c,d,e,) are helpful starting points for this process. The advice for schools emphasises the importance of the probationer's self evaluation as a starting point for setting development goals for the induction period. Their own professional role in the process is recognised as an important factor. Such a formative dialogue is as influential to professional development as any other form of assessment.

“It is difficult to identify many of your weaknesses and strengths without input from others.”

“I have found this to be one of the most beneficial aspects of the tutor visit during school experience.”

“Quite often progress or lack of progress is only recognised when it is discussed .”

“Need help and guidance with self-evaluation for it to be effective.”

There is a responsibility on Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs) to equip students for this role on completion of their course. Indeed the interaction between student and school experience tutors throughout teacher education courses is important. The engagement of students in a real dialogue about progress and development would be helpful in preparing students. The student should be treated as an equal partner whose views are valid and valued. There are obvious similarities between the tutor/ student relationship in universities during teacher education courses and the supporter/ probationer relationship in schools during induction. The experience of the relationship between tutor and student during training will have had an impact on their thinking in this area. This is especially the case on courses where students are assigned to a school experience tutor over an extended period of time. The findings relating to approachability and feedback may therefore be of interest to school experience tutors in TEIs in considering the nature of their relationship with students.

Final year students were aware of the need for the feedback process to be a two-way relationship involving real dialogue between new teachers and their supporters. They hoped to be able to make a contribution themselves to the process. This was reflected in their comments,

“ Self evaluation is something that is integral to teaching and should be done by all teachers. It will be particularly helpful to new teachers.”

“ Insights gained from self evaluation are more immediate and make a greater impression than ones passed on from someone else.”

“ Keeps me on target and feeling in control.”

Although respondents clearly identified self-evaluation as crucial to their development, they also signalled difficulties for them as new and inexperienced teachers. There was a sense of the importance of the process but also of a lack of confidence about their ability to be objective about their own performance. Many mentioned the tendency to be over critical especially at this early stage in their careers.

“ You can be too critical of yourself, especially at the time. You need to stand back and look at it more objectively.”

“ To be a reflective practitioner and to develop my teaching skills, self evaluation is essential. However it would be useful to have some support in undertaking this. I’m not sure where to start.”

These views point to the need to develop relationships between probationers and induction supporters which are supportive, respectful, but rigorous in the area of feedback. Probationers are keen to be involved in a professional dialogue and appear to understand their role, but need to feel the environment is safe enough to engage in it genuinely. Feedback is not a neutral issue and therefore needs to be handled professionally if new teachers are to get the most out of the process. This requires honesty, openness and self-confidence, on both sides, to give positive and negative feedback within an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust. Technique alone will not suffice on either side. The written reports on probationers’ performance in class should reflect this honesty in face-to-face interaction which would mean that any written assessments will not come as a surprise to the probationer. Rather, they will sum up the open and honest discussions which have preceded them. Many induction supporters and probationers will feel ill equipped to handle this sensitive area.

Handling Criticism

The personal development literature provides a helpful starting point in understanding the skills required to receive criticism intelligently. It can illuminate the pitfalls involved and offer guidance to the induction supporter and probationer alike.

Passive Acceptance

The attitude of probationers to the process of feedback then will affect the impact on their development and progress. Where people become defensive about their identified weaknesses, they may adopt avoidance strategies to cope with what they see as an attack. They may react

differently based upon their own preferred style of behaviour. The danger for new and inexperienced staff in a relationship, where the assessor has considerable power over future career direction, is that they become passive and accept all criticism whether it is valid or not. Some final students have mentioned the need to conform in their first year and fit in at all costs

*“ We all want jobs at the end of it because it’s a probation year. We have to keep quiet.”
“For me the first year is about conforming to the school ethos.”*

There is much evidence in the literature of the new teacher’s need to fit in with the ethos of the school (Hargreaves and Woods, 1984, Nias et al., 1989). Hayes (2001) describes it as a process of ‘enculturation’ where student teachers assimilate the prevailing values of the new school. His notion of their ‘strategic compliance’ doesn’t sit well with establishment of a relationship based on rights and mutual respect. Indeed the notion of expert and novice is not necessarily helpful in empowering new teachers to expand their levels of understanding about the process of teaching and learning. Tickle (2000, p.75) addresses this issue stating that,

“ These hierarchical career stages stereotype and threaten the complexities of professional characteristics, learning and practice and downgrade the potential contributions that newly qualified teachers might make. They assume that teacher educators and more experienced teachers are somehow superior to those deemed to be novices. “

Experience shows that the skills and talents of the 21st century graduate teacher are often desirable commodities in the rapidly changing world of education, where experienced teachers can feel de-skilled. Varghese (2002) describes the expert / novice mentoring relationship as a “simplistic dichotomy” which no longer applies and argues that the distinction between them is blurred. The probationer teacher and the induction supporter may need to rely on each other in a more symbiotic relationship than previously. They both have skills to share and things to learn. However, in the expert/novice relationship, the probationers may become less confident and less able to evaluate their own work effectively as a result of a relationship which devalues their potential contribution. This passive stance is unhelpful in their professional development.

Avoidance of Responsibility

Inexperienced teachers may, on the other hand, become defensive and start to look for other places to lay what they perceive to be “the blame” when given feedback. It is a natural reaction, in many ways, to defend yourself when criticised and to deflect the negative feedback elsewhere. Many external factors may be cited as excuses for the unsuccessful activity or mistake, but in this scenario the probationer may seek some alternative explanation for a mistake other than their own behaviour. Those with the little confidence in their own ability may find it difficult to accept criticism with an open mind, and may seek to defend their position automatically. The effectiveness of the feedback is diminished in such circumstances because it is not really heard or taken on board.

Cardno (2001) describes the challenges in this area - intrapersonal (the engagement of emotions and beliefs) and interpersonal (the participants’ need to interact honestly with one another at both professional and personal levels). The challenges are very real at a human level, for both

participants and should not be underestimated. She identifies the appraisal process as a complex area for which training is essential. The weight given to formative and summative assessment procedures in the Teacher Induction Scheme makes this kind of training an imperative for the Scottish Executive to consider. Probationer teachers' future careers are at stake. Summative decisions made about performance will determine access to the teaching profession. These decisions should be the result of an intelligent mentoring relationship. This is a professional development process rather than an administrative procedure.

Professional Development - An Assertive Response

Assertive handling of criticism involves actually listening to the points made and making a calm assessment of their validity. Seeking more detailed information is a sign of confidence and understanding of the importance of feedback for development. Being open to feedback and willing to learn from it however requires confidence which is unlikely to be fostered if the probationer/ supporter relationship is not based on mutual respect, trust and a recognition of rights.

Goleman (1998) gives good advice to those receiving criticism. They should:

- see it as valuable information rather than a personal attack;
- beware the impulse to be defensive instead of taking responsibility;
- if necessary ask to continue the discussion after time to cool down and absorb the message;
- see it as an opportunity to work together with the critic to solve the issue, not as an adversarial situation.

Straightforward, simple advice on technique is helpful to inexperienced probationers. As with their supporters, the best way to come to any real understanding of how and why it works, is through experiential learning – role play, simulation, interactive sessions on personal development. Rakos (1991) describes assertiveness training in terms of behaviour rehearsal - modelling, coaching, feedback and homework.

Cherniss (2000) points to many areas of human resource development practice which involve training in the competencies associated with emotional intelligence. With colleagues she has produced empirically based guidelines for training to improve emotional competence. Three main areas are identified – preparation for change, training and encouraging, maintaining and evaluating changes in behaviour. Preparation for change emphasises the importance of helping participants to see the need for change and the benefits which will come. It also assesses their readiness for learning and helps set clear goals. In addressing the actual training, she stresses the importance of the relationship between trainer and learner and the way in which it can define how safe and supportive the learning environment is. Technical skill is not deemed to be sufficient, the trainers themselves need to be emotionally intelligent. She therefore advocates careful selection of trainers for this range of skills. The training process should involve models, experiential learning, the chance to practice skills and the opportunity for feedback. Cherniss then argues the case for further involvement with participants following training courses to support learners, through coaching and mentoring, to continue to practice skills and evaluate development.

The attention to a deeper level of learning than technique alone is an interesting parallel, which would model for the participants the kind of process they might replicate in their professional relationships themselves. This process, advocated by Cherniss, mirrors the learning relationship and support required for effective induction. The development of probationers would be better served if this kind of opportunity was part of the preparation of induction supporters *and* probationers.

Summary

The mentoring relationship is an area of concern for final year students about to embark upon their induction year. They are concerned about the approachability of the induction supporter and the quality of the relationship they might have with that person. This in turn has enormous implications for the context within which feedback will be given. Schools have a responsibility to provide feedback and assessment on a number of levels – formal and informal, formative and summative. This article argues that each of these levels is important and the skills of those supporting the whole process cannot be left to chance. It can be concluded that induction supporters and probationer teachers need training to understand the complex set of skills required for the mentoring relationship to be a success.

Strategies exist to minimise the negative effects of criticism and increase the positive impact it can have. This article recommends that opportunities for a detailed exploration of these techniques are made available to probationers and their supporters. However the danger is that technique can become the main preoccupation with those who would wish to handle feedback more effectively. This article argues that while technique is important, an understanding of the importance of self-awareness and empathy is much more influential in the success or failure of feedback. This view was stressed repeatedly by participants in the study. Staff development therefore should focus, first and foremost, on the principles underpinning the nature of the relationship between newly qualified teachers and induction supporters.

On one side the supporter needs to recognise the rights of the probationer to be treated with respect and trust, to be a proactive part of a dialogue and to be given effective feedback in an honest and sensitive way. On the other side the supporter has the right to give constructive feedback, to be listened to and taken account of. On both sides there is a responsibility to meet the requirements of the system to allow the probationer to fulfil the Standard for Full Registration. Regular formal assessments are an important part of the training placement (e.g. formally observed sessions and profile reports) and need to be based on a foundation of effective formative feedback over the course of the year. The best way to achieve this is to help both probationers and their supporters to be aware of and understand the importance of the quality of the relationship, the attitudes and behaviour of those involved and the interpersonal skills required.

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