MENTORING, TEACHING AND PROFESSIONAL TRANSFORMATION

Knowledge and understanding are transformed in unpredictable ways for beginning teachers. Their first steps in teaching children are often a revelation about how other human beings learn, and about how they themselves need to re-frame their own prior knowledge of subjects and concepts to encourage learning in others. The process of learning to teach is itself a new discipline, freighted with professional discourse and practical procedures that they struggle to grasp during the brief, turbulent period of a Postgraduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) year of training.

Breakthroughs in teaching rarely take place in isolation. The struggle with professional understanding happens within social contexts that can sustain the young teacher through new experiences. But each teacher must, as an individual, make the breakthroughs that will transform his or her realisation of what children's learning can be. Such transformations are the subject of this chapter, which also explores the social capital that accrues for inexperienced teachers from their more experienced mentors within the school community; from the professional and inter-personal norms into which they are inducted; and from the networks of personal, professional and community relationships in which they must make their way. Methods of teacher induction attempt to achieve some combination of the necessary conceptual or propositional knowledge (knowing that, or about) together with the procedural or strategic knowledge (knowing how to, or when) and the dispositional knowledge of values and attitudes (knowing whether to, or why) that experienced teachers and professional bodies emphasise as central to classroom effectiveness and whole-school ethos (Billett: 1993; Mason 2000).

The Scottish mentoring programme for beginning teachers offers the continuity of one guaranteed probation year of paid employment that also provides some 30% of non-contact time to engage in a range of staff development activities. It provides a radical alternative to the variability that pertains elsewhere in the UK system (Draper et al., 2004). Our project set out to examine the early professional development of a group of beginning teachers during the probation year in Scottish schools that is now guaranteed to PGCE students graduating from their one-year

course in Faculties of Education in Scottish universities. In particular, it focused on continuities and developments between the mentoring that they receive from university tutors during initial teacher education and the subsequent school-based mentoring arrangements provided by Local Authorities during that probation year.

Our project used two main theories to illuminate the empirical data gained through focus groups, questionnaires and semi-structured interviews: *threshold concepts* as key conceptual gateways to confident progress in professional knowledge and skills (Meyer and Land 2003, 2005); and *social capital*, which is just beginning to be applied in school contexts but still lacks sufficient empirical basis for its heuristic potential (McGonigal, Doherty, Allan et al. 2007). We wanted to explore the intersections between the threshold concepts discerned by beginning primary and secondary teachers (and their tutors) during their one-year pre-service PGCE course, and by their professional mentors during the school session immediately following. These are two linked but distinctive liminal spaces. We also wanted to examine those concepts through the professional contexts and social relationships in which troublesome knowledge emerges, and through the sorts of social capital which can engender and sustain, or else close down, a positive understanding of such transformative experience for beginning teachers. (Brief definitions of social capital terms are included in Appendix A, based on Catts and Ozga: 2005.)

CONTEXT OF RESEARCH

Using an initial cohort of 24 probationer teachers employed in 10 Local Authorities from Highlands and Islands in the far north of Scotland to Dumfries and Galloway on the border with England, and a cohort of 10 primary and secondary mentors from 6 of these authorities, we developed a methodology that included taped focus groups, discourse analysis of resulting transcripts, an on-line questionnaire, and semi-structured interviews of probationer teachers and mentors from their employing authorities (not their current mentors, for reasons of confidentiality). These authorities vary in size and topography, with Dumfries and Galloway and Highland being predominantly rural, and the others mainly urban.

We sought to answer the following key questions, which explore intersecting dimensions of troublesome knowledge and social capital:

What are the key networks of professional support that are available to student and probationer teachers, and by what means are these sustained?

At what points, and by whose induction, do beginning teachers adapt their academic 'subject discourse' to professional discourse, values and sense of identity?

What crucially transformative or integrative 'threshold points' do students and probationer teachers recognise and cross in teaching a range of subjects, within both primary and secondary sectors?

What social value do beginning teachers and their mentors place on such transformative experiences?

To what extent might threshold concepts or troublesome knowledge be used to reconfigure the curriculum in PGCE and probationer years?

Two mixed focus groups of PGCE Primary and Secondary student teachers at the end of their pre-service training were used to clarify issues that had been, or continued to be, problematic for them. Structured around troublesome issues, events and terminology encountered during their pre-service year, as well as such social capital features as networks, norms, trust and reciprocity as they might have met on their course and school placements, these taped discussions furnished some three hours of transcripts. From them we were able to identify possible threshold concepts or troublesome knowledge, interleaved with social capital dimensions of the emotional and relational world of classroom and school, that had impacted upon their student teacher experience. Of course, these were anecdotal and embedded within particular experiences, yet they seemed to resonate for the groups: (in)effective use of language to foster learning and engagement; class management and school discipline issues; lesson planning and pedagogy; the opacity of some the 'benchmark statements' of the Standard for Initial Teacher Education (already achieved, but without students knowing exactly what the statements really meant); social and professional relationships within schools; and a disconcerting lack of correlation between some teachers' seniority and their actual effectiveness in the classroom – all of these still figured as worrying dimensions of their professional lives to come.

Summarised, this furnished a draft of 9 possible threshold concepts, eventually used as a Likert Scale that was a final contribution to the semi-structured interviews for both probationers and mentors, but only after it had undergone refinement through anonymous comment and testing on the electronic network of participants, of which more will be said below.

1. Teaching is about learning, and about structuring/segmenting the content to meet pupils' needs, newly understood.

2. 'Less is more' in the classroom, or can be: it is useless to try to teach too much for children to take in or relate to.

3. Language controls relationships in the classroom, and beginning teachers need to learn how to talk in a way that children listen and respond to.

4. In matters of class management, an individual teacher is most effective when contributing to or helping to sustain community ethos and structures.

5. One comes to understand the place of reflection and careful observation in learning to teach more 'professionally'.

6. One comes to understand one's own role in the mentoring process and what the aim of mentoring is.

7. 'Professionalism' is seen as the freedom to make an informed and considered choice.

8. Taking advice and guidance from others is basically a matter of trust.

9. One comes to understand the point of professional language/jargon with more experience of working with others in schools and communities.

To permit limited ongoing contact with these beginning teachers, while allowing them autonomy to develop new professional relationships with mentors and other colleagues, we designed an online database and questionnaire (which could only be responded to anonymously) and used this to test out the possible threshold concepts already mentioned, and to invite comments on or descriptions of incidents, perceptions or experiences that seemed to match these. This provided us with some key insights to be probed in semi-structured interviews out in schools. It also prompted some of the probationers to keep reflecting on issues that they might otherwise have forgotten or internalised.

Troublesome knowledge on the one year PGCE course had typically involved class management and behaviour, teaching methodologies and assessment issues. To that extent, the experiences were typical of what Berliner (1994) terms the 'novice' stage, but also touching on what Meyer and Land (2003) term 'liminality' and 'mimicry'. Even at this early stage, however, it was clear to some at least of the participants that observing very young children's engagement in their own learning during the pre-service Nursery placement had opened a transformative conceptual gateway concerning the nature of learning and teaching. The online questionnaire gave clear evidence that working with children with additional learning needs can also enable beginning teachers to 'see' them as individuals, and to move through what appears to be an irreversible shift of pedagogic perspective.

The centrality of relationships and communication in classroom learning emerged clearly, and it was here that a social capital focus on the networks, norms, trust and reciprocity that marked their progress towards professional identity provided a useful perspective. A vignette of one young teacher's experience is included in Appendix A. Briefly, we found various kinds of social capital present in the beginning teacher's experience. *Bonding capital* was available, for example,

through Local Authority support systems and identification with fellow probationers and recently qualified teachers: *'knowing they were in the same position last year'*. The more professionally useful *Bridging capital* came from beginning to make links with other professionals, such as the Area Learning Support Network staff: *'it's good when you're looking for a job, they know your skills, it's like having a friend'*. Mentors sometimes began early to position their mentees for future job interviews, giving advice on what questions to expect and experiences to highlight. Thus networks of all kinds are crucial in the Probation year: networks of knowledge, electronic networks with other probationers (used to share ideas and resources) and professional networks, as well as friendships carried forward from the PGCE year, based mainly on their professional tutorial group. Social capital was interleaved with the extended threshold concepts that were developed from our analysis of taped interviews with the beginning teachers and their mentors.

EXTENDED THRESHOLD CONCEPTS

The early establishment of classroom 'norms' of behaviour, organisation, and a 'learned effectiveness' within classroom life had, in prospect, seemed particularly troublesome. Learning to confidently walk the social and pedagogical boundaries between firmness, direction and supportive engagement with young learners may well be a threshold concept that eases the pursuit of many other classroom aims. Listening to these beginning teachers' experiences and reflections, we found a validation of the initial troublesome areas identified a year earlier, but a firmer sense of where threshold concepts had begun to alter their awareness of teaching and learning. This led to a more nuanced articulation of the original nine concepts, and the addition of a tenth, as outlined below.

1. Teaching is about learning, both the particular achievements of individual children (often those who have initially presented 'problems' for the beginning teacher) and also the progress made by the class as a whole.

Teaching had come to be seen as being crucially about structuring or segmenting or pacing the subject content appropriately, in order to meet pupils' needs, increasingly with greater relevance. This created a vertical dimension to learning: a sense of depth.

There was in some cases a discovery of what assessment really is, what its forms and purposes are, how it can shape future teaching and learning, and how it can clarify learning purposes and positively affect children's attitudes and awareness. Problems in planning in relation to assessment and how this skill might be developed had been noted in the initial focus groups, but it did not emerge as an ongoing problem within the interviews. Perhaps it might return as an issue at a later stage of teacher development, and what was registering now was their general early

increase in confidence about standards of performance, or about children's potential. The various induction programmes run centrally by Local Authorities would also have focused on both summative assessment at national level and formative assessment techniques for classroom learning.

Whatever was the case, assessment as currently understood seemed to offer a humane dimension to their work, helping them to move beyond a judgemental approach. This concept often involved 'children who make teachers think' and the realisation that this is a better working description than 'difficult' or 'troublesome' children. They had begun to think more deeply about the impact of social and emotional background on such children's learning, and about more responsive and effective ways of teaching them. This new awareness was often combined with the realisation of concept two:

2. The same curriculum can be effectively taught in different ways by different teachers across different stretches of time.

These beginning teachers had realised from experience that it is useless to try to teach too much for children to absorb or retain (a common fault early in the PGCE year). A more confident awareness had emerged of the need to pace the curriculum and to estimate children's understanding over longer stretches of time. They now understood that the rhythm of learning involves peaks and troughs: a horizontal dimension that can offer breadth to the learning, and a more 'relaxed' yet alert sense of how to return to the same learning issues over these longer stretches, varying the teaching slightly each time. This moved significantly beyond the 'one-off lesson' that had featured in PGCE school placements.

A third key conceptual shift was a more confident understanding that:

3. Language creates ethos, atmosphere and positive working relationships in the classroom, and beginning teachers can learn how to talk in a way that children listen and respond to.

This involved a realisation of the impact of tone, pitch, pace, emphasis and volume, varied empathetically according to the age, stage, needs and norms of the children being taught. The part played by modulation, rather than volume, was noted as a breakthrough in classroom communication. Learning to talk in a way for which recent degree studies had not at all prepared the beginning teacher, particularly with very young learners (and which actually sounds 'odd' or 'out of (social) character') was seen as particularly effective in gaining children's attention and trust. The impact extended to, and varied within, different contexts beyond the classroom: corridor, playground, sports field, outside the school gates and into the local community. Issues of dialect, accent and solidarity with the community impinge here. There was a growing awareness that the teacher's language needs to

model for children (and sometimes for parents) helpful patterns of effective thinking and social relationships.

Our probationers were beginning to explore the tensions between Standard English precision in classroom language (with its potential to provide bridging capital to the language of literacy and formal registers of social discourse) and the local dialect of their pupils (with its bonding capital of community identity). Some were teaching in towns where they themselves had gone to school, rendering this negotiation of linguistic identity even more complex. Exploring social class boundaries, and the relationship between one's own emerging professional discourse and a (possible) identification or empathy with the social class background of pupils, seems potentially a site of troublesome knowledge, and perhaps a threshold concept. Sport or other after-school activities provided occasions to reflect less problematically upon these tensions of relationship or identity, since strands of language, emotion, teamwork and trust were intuitively interwoven there.

All of this impacted on issues of class management and discipline, which had concerned these beginning teachers before probation, seeing it mainly as a test of their individual professional success, rather than as a shared community endeavour. Now they revealed a much more confident and committed sense of the crucial effect of the establishment of classroom 'norms' of behaviour, organisation, and learned effectiveness (for both probationer teachers and pupils):

4. In class and behaviour management, an individual teacher is most effective when contributing to and helping to sustain whole-school ethos and structures.

They were learning to define more precisely for their pupils and themselves the emotional boundaries between firmness, direction and supportive engagement with learning. Similarly now, school disciplinary systems appeared generally supportive to beginners. There was every appearance of them learning confidence in employing discipline strategies effectively and consistently, and discovering how this can assist effective teaching and learning. In marked contrast to the PGCE experience, discipline matters now became more '*mundane*', and part of normal classroom functioning. This in itself may be part of the social capital of teacher-pupil relationships, as trust and awareness build the sort of positive 'bonding' over the course of a consistent year of daily contact which is, of course, impossible to achieve during the brief and varied periods of school experience (in up to five different establishments in the Primary PGCE, and three in the Secondary) during initial training.

Pupils' response (which can be gradual) to the beginning teacher's intentions, and positive whole-class teacher-pupil relationships generally, appear as the keys to conceptual gateways for both parties. It is noteworthy how often breakthroughs are embodied in dealing with more challenging pupils. Learning how to deal with

emotional and behavioural problems more effectively, with an increasing awareness of the complexity of individuals and their backgrounds, seemed to signal threshold experiences for several of our cohort.

5. One realises what makes reflection work, and its importance in learning to teach more insightfully and effectively.

The ideal of 'the reflective practitioner' has been a shaping influence on course design and assessment in initial teacher education during recent times (Banks and Shelton Mayes 2001, Moon 2003). Reflection is often a troublesome concept for beginning teachers, sitting as it does at an unforeseen angle to the sorts of performative and content-based learning of their degree studies. Faculty tutors often struggle, with variable success, to convey the purpose of evaluation of teaching and learning, and of broader reflection on professional progress, and to provide methods or 'targets' that might enable this particular 'benchmark' or 'competence' (the jargon varies) to be understood.

In contrast, we found among the probationers that there was now a more personalised approach to reflection and to where it happened most effectively for individuals, and a new awareness of what aids or sustains it. Possible sources of reflection included careful observation, conversations about classroom incidents, ideas encountered in current or previous reading, and (in one case) journalling continued from ITE models. More formal dialogue with colleagues, electronic and social networks of professional friends, and effective use of thinking time between a mentor's observation of their teaching and receiving feedback upon it were also helpful.

Some interviewees contrasted their earlier PGCE awareness with a newly confident accuracy of classroom observation of other teachers and pupils. Mentors encouraged such opportunities for reflection. Learning to discriminate between effective teaching and a 'merely' authoritative or experienced classroom persona had become possible. Several expressed this in terms of being able to transform or transpose what they had seen others do into the context of their own classroom style or pupil stage, moving on from earlier mimicry.

Apart from critical incidents and colleagues' advice, prompts on key developmental issues can promote and support reflection. Our on-line questionnaire functioned for some probationers in this way. But broadly, there was a realisation that effective teachers are thinking much of the time about effective teaching and learning, and planning for this. Part of any mentor's role is to prompt and support reflection, helping beginners to articulate the significance of this sort of thinking, listening out for areas of puzzlement and giving advice on new or alternative directions. Effectively done, this leads towards a sixth dimension of professional awareness, although not all probationers may be fortunate in moving through it.

6. One comes to understand one's own role in the mentoring process and what the aim of the mentoring process is.

There appeared in some beginning teachers to be a conceptual movement from a basic acceptance of being judged on classroom performance to becoming an active and interactive partner in a developing professional project. This involved a basic trust in the mentoring system, generally enhanced by a layering of networks of support and advice, at varying levels of formality. There was a realisation, achieved through observation, anecdote or the attitude of more experienced colleagues, that success in teaching is subject to many variables but that commitment and a positive outlook are nevertheless sustainable and vital.

Features of positive mentoring, as articulated by mentors and mentees, included planned opportunities for shadowing and observation of colleagues (which in secondary also focused on subjects beyond the probationers' own specialisms), targeted visits to external agencies and special schools to extend their professional knowledge and help them serve the more particular needs of their pupils, and the shadowing of colleagues on the first Parents Evening of the year to reduce predicted anxiety. Both mentors and mentees were largely positive about the support for probationers provided by their local authority, and the needs of the mentors themselves were recognised through the facilitation of area mentor meetings.

Mentors themselves were found to be helpful and supportive, and mentoring offered beginning teachers both social capital and a way of handling troublesome knowledge. Learning to negotiate the complexity of the mentoring relationship, particularly as it is connected with current success and future employment prospects, proved difficult, however, when the mentor was '*too powerful*' or there was a clash of roles, such as in one case where the mentor was also the probationer's line manager, and early problems with classroom discipline made communication and trust difficult.

How mentors create and sustain trust, or embody professionalism for others, is a critical area and one which involves developing a mutually respectful relationship which moves beyond the level of assessor and assessed. Mentors felt this was often achieved through a growing appreciation that the mentoring partnership brought about learning for both parties. Recognising and valuing the talents and skills which new teachers brought into the school helped to validate them as professionals and to enhance their trust in the mentoring process. Mentors recognised that trust came through an openness to sharing vulnerabilities as well as professional strengths, and that emotional support was indeed intrinsic to mentoring.

7. 'Professionalism' comes to be seen as attaining the confidence and 'earning' the freedom to make an informed and considered choice about how the curriculum might most effectively be paced and taught by an individual teacher with the group of learners for whom s/he is most closely responsible.

This is a complex area of professional learning, and, as originally articulated on the Likert scale, it was the threshold concept that gave rise to widest range of responses. Effective mentoring can model this combination of flexibility and responsibility, but because the mentor's role here includes a gate-keeping responsibility for professional progress that will impact on both the mentee and his or her future colleagues, it remains a troublesome threshold. From our interviews, it was clear that beginning teachers come to understand the point of professional language/jargon with more experience of working with others in schools and communities. There may have been some cases of early over-confidence here: they were surer about what the benchmark statements were meant to mean, but not perhaps of the extent of the implications of their meaning.

Many changes take place in professional confidence and self-awareness during the Probation year. Learning to define 'professionalism' in a way that is complex, personal and consonant with experience of teaching and children may be a threshold concept for some. We certainly found a changed attitude to, and confidence with the Benchmark statements in the Standard for Initial Teacher Education completed at the end of the PGCE year, and in the Standard for Full Registration completed in two stages during Probation.

What was clear was the role of relationships in teaching: the eighth threshold. Learning to trust the judgement of school colleagues, and being trusted by them, again signalled a social reciprocity that clearly meant a great deal to our probationers.

8. Relationships matter in teaching and learning: recognising the social dimensions of professional life can make a major difference to a teacher's individual effectiveness in the classroom

Taking advice and guidance seriously from others is basically a matter of trust in their judgement. The mentoring system, as well as the basic magnanimity that other teachers had shown towards these beginners in terms of time, attention and advice (particularly their 'stage partners' in primaries, working with children at about the same level of attainment) provided grounds for such trust. There can be negative as well as positive dimensions of teacher networks, however, especially where there is a lack of active bridging and linking to wider social and professional experience. There was some evidence of the 'dark side' of bonding, where negativity and distrust of leadership initiatives led to a culture of public compliance and private complaint. Occasionally, staffroom cynicism and weariness of a much

altered and continually demanding professional role provided probationers with depressing models of what teachers might become.

What were the true rewards of teaching, whether over the longer or shorter term? Some of our questions probed the 'reciprocity' that is one marker of social capital. Rewards for the beginning teacher were expressed as coming from successful teaching ('*like opening a door*'), recognition or affirmative feedback from colleagues and pupils, parental trust in the work they were doing, and respect from the community (expressed as sustaining '*the good name of the school*'). Beginners probably see these things with greater clarity and keener appreciation. Reciprocity and generosity clearly matter in the creation of satisfying professional development: making a contribution and appreciating its recognition within the community was a source of satisfaction to all concerned.

Varieties and layering of networks can support the beginning teacher: we found that electronic, social, professional and familial networks can all help extend the range of professional life beyond the narrower negativity and cliquishness that they occasionally encountered. Some considered the effect of their social and personal networks to be more positive than the sometimes constrained or contrived Local Authority networks of probationers, although there was some benefit recognised in these.

There was clear evidence of the beginning teacher's place in the local community, carrying professional norms beyond the classroom and in some sense acting as '*a role model*' for pupils and their parents. This is recognised in the ninth, perhaps most surprising, concept.

9. There is a realisation that teaching and learning take place in 'communities' that overlap and affect each other, positively and negatively: home, school and locality can assist or hinder each other's efforts for children

Feedback from parents can be a revelation both about children and about oneself. Parents often validated the beginning teachers' effectiveness, to their surprise and delight. There was evidence of conceptual breakthroughs and social capital combining to impact upon beginning teachers' awareness through Parents Evenings, parental observation of classroom teaching, and parental presence at school concerts and seasonal celebrations. Teacher participation in extra-curricular or sports activity also seemed to offer a rich source of social capital, with a positive effect on classroom learning for some pupils, or on class management skills for beginning teachers. Indeed, coming to appreciate the balance of intellectual, emotional, physical and team learning within the school curriculum seemed to have made a breakthrough for several probationers. Within this nexus of effects, we wondered whether social capital's 'trust' might best be seen within school contexts as an alignment of social capital and threshold concepts. The questions of what it

means to trust pupils, and of how trust is gained and lost, seemed worthy of further consideration.

The impact of whole-school social, celebratory, creative and sporting events appeared to symbolise for beginning teachers the worth of their individual efforts in teaching and learning. Social capital dimensions of networks, reciprocity and positive bonding and bridging capital seemed to have an influence here. The teacher's place within the communities of school and locality was realised more forcefully on such occasions, with a heightened awareness of the social norms of dress, speech, and behaviour expected by parents and colleagues.

10. There emerges an energising sense of 'owning' or 'earning' a professional identity, confidently and realistically understood

This involved integration of many particular classroom insights or experiences encountered during the probation year. It was often evidenced by reference to a positive skill in the efficient orchestration of a range of educational factors, and it seems likely that the memory and competence of this period will rarely be lost thereafter. To that extent, this was a transformative awareness, although doubtless it might be tested by challenging pupils or fragmented schools or communities in a professional career. It was clearly felt by probationers to mark a transition, at least for this stage of development, and it was recognised as such by mentors and other colleagues as well as themselves.

USING THRESHOLD CONCEPTS IN TEACHER EDUCATION

One would note initially that there is probably a chronological element to crossing some of these thresholds. Clearly, concepts 5, 9 and 10 can only emerge over time. This may in itself be useful in clarifying for beginners the trajectory of their understandings of a teacher's work. It might also enable a continuity or progression from PGCE to Probation in terms of thresholds. Some of these thresholds may be crossed in the pre-service year (for example, 3) but most will not.

Our original ordering of 9 possible threshold concepts reflected the formulation of professionalism in the General Teaching Council for Scotland's Standard for Initial Teacher Education (GTCS 2006): *Professional knowledge and understanding, Professional skills and abilities,* and *Professional values and personal commitment*. These are then articulated into 22 benchmark statements and 10 transferable skills (GTC ref). This is a reduction from the almost 50 'teaching competences' that the benchmarks sought to replace, but are still complex for beginners to comprehend. It may be that the 10 threshold concepts here could help student teachers to conceptualise the distinct emphases of the above formulation, especially of the third element, which both university tutors and student teachers

12

find difficult to discuss or assess on a confidently evidential basis, since the initial school experience is so fragmented in the PGCE year. Threshold concepts might therefore assist in developing student teachers' confidence about their progression through the teacher education experience, and its often puzzling jargon.

Other questions emerge from this formulation of our evidence. To what extent do these concepts need to be varied for university and school mentors? What other thresholds emerge from the experience of mentoring within different professional contexts? The mentoring needs of newly seconded university tutors has also emerged as a significant issue. The whole process of networks, including the use of electronic networks, in promoting reflective learning and teaching seems important to explore. The relative effectiveness of various mentoring practices and structures across local authorities also require closer attention.

Overall, however, there is clear evidence that the quality of the Probation experience has been remarkably enhanced by the new arrangements, compared with the formerly unstructured and variable experience of too many young teachers. Schools and classrooms too have been rejuvenated by the energy and positive qualities of almost all the teachers we have been fortunate to interview. What emerges is a clearer understanding of the rewards or reciprocity that teachers expect from and give to others (colleagues, children, community). It is here that the social capital perspective that ran alongside our focus on threshold concepts has proved helpful.

> True professionalism depends on a continued commitment to hold up knowledge to public collaborative scrutiny. It also depends on the commitment to create and maintain those spaces within professional life where critical discourse can flourish. (Furlong, Barton et al. 2000: 27)

This view would reflect our hopes for the current Scottish system, as evidenced by the experience of both mentors and mentees. Social capital's emphasis on the collaborative role of networks, norms, trust and reciprocity is responsive to the values and emotional commitment that young teachers bring to their new profession. But teaching, despite its reliance on partnerships, is also, and always, an individual pursuit of positive learning in others. To that extent the place of threshold concepts is vital, and frequently troubling, for beginning teachers, and we need to balance social insights with conceptual ones, and the sense of belonging to a professional community with the energising sense of new horizons that threshold concept theory can reveal. Mentoring can help them to walk with a certain balance (if not yet complete poise) along the unmarked borderlines and liminal spaces they must learn to negotiate if they are to be of lasting service to their pupils and school communities. Threshold concepts are encountered and crossed individually, but their fullest realisation often depends upon the insights and empathy of those who accompany us on the professional journey towards them.

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APPENDIX A

Social Capital in Teachers' Early Professional Development

Social Capital is understood to be a resource that may help in *bonding* fragmented social life. It may also support the *bridging* of communities to their external environments, and the *linking* of people to formal structures and agencies. It is important to distinguish between these different forms of social capital, and to appreciate that social capital may open or limit opportunities.

BONDING Social Capital is characterised by strong bonds among group members: this variety of SC can help people to 'get by'. It is valuable in building a sense of shared identity and security. Families and school staffs may create strong bonds, and these may have supportive or restrictive effects. Bonding social capital may affect different groups in a school in different ways, or be produced in undesirable locations, for example in gangs;

BRIDGING Social Capital is a resource that helps people to build relationships with a wider, more varied set of people than those in the immediate family or school environment, for example between students and employers, or teachers and community workers. Bridging SC helps people to 'get on' and not just 'get by'. Bridging SC is understood as important in helping employment and career advancement;

LINKING Social Capital enables connections between people across differences in status, for example links between parents of children attending the same school, but from different backgrounds, or between their children. It may help teachers link with parents or children from different social, religious or ethnic backgrounds from their own. Linking social capital connects individuals and agencies or services that they would not otherwise access easily. Linking social capital may help people 'get around'.'

The key words in social capital are *Networks, Norms, Trust* and *Forms of Reciprocity***.** The above definitions were developed for the Schools and Social Capital Network of the Applied Educational Research Scheme [aers.org.uk].

Social Capital in the Probation Year: A Vignette

David has a PGCE in Primary Education and is more than midway through his probation year, teaching seven year olds in a Scottish denominational primary school. He experiences *Bonding SC* with parents in the local community (near where he grew up) and with pupils through taking a football team and through his earlier drama involvement with the school's Christmas show. He has a sense of identity with a colleague who teaches another class at the same age/stage: she has helped him plan and pace the curriculum more confidently. A fellow Probationer whose initial training was through a 4 year BEd course co-teaches with him, and they have developed a cohesive team approach to decision-making and class management.

Bridging SC has come from discussions with a social worker and two members of the Area Learning Support team concerning three of David's pupils. The Head and Depute of the school have introduced him to the 'wider picture' of Local Authority policies and personalities. His very helpful

mentor has facilitated observation of experienced colleagues at other school stages, as well as a visit to a nearby primary school to look at their new mathematics resources. She also arranged for David to take drama lessons across the upper stages.

Linking SC has come from engaging with Local Authority advisory staff at monthly meetings for primary and secondary probationer teachers, and from membership of a school planning group on workload (as young teacher representative). As a member of his local church, David has met teachers of other faiths through an ecumenical group.

Networks both social and professional have sustained him in his work. Socially, his girlfriend (also a trainee teacher) and her mother (a teacher in a different authority) have provided a sounding board for ideas, while his father (who does not work in education) provides a sense of perspective. Professional networks include his Early Stages school colleagues and other probationers within local authority schools. Blending social and professional dimensions is the network of five friends from his education tutor group at university, who continue to meet monthly. David now has a surer sense of the *norms* of classroom interaction and of relationships with both parents and children. He has made himself familiar with expectations in local authority policy documents, and has attended two staff development courses on current issues. *Trust* has developed strongly with his pupils through a consistent, firm but good-humoured approach to classroom management. The relationship with his mentor is clearly based on trust in her advice, maturity and sense of vision. Rewards and *reciprocity* come from David's desire to make a difference in children's lives and be a 'cornerstone' for their futures. That his pupils and their parents respect his work means a great deal to him, and he has a growing awareness of providing an example of professional values and commitment within the wider community. He also believes that as a new teacher he can offer a 'fresh perspective' and new approaches even to experienced colleagues, and thus repay to some extent the efforts made by them on his behalf.

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