Learning to Teach: Defining the Challenge

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Overview

- Identifying some variables in learning to teach

- Stage models for learning to teach

- Classroom ecology and individual interactions

- Conclusions

Identifying Some Variables in Learning to Teach (1)

- Personal biographies of student and mentor, values, educational beliefs, experiences . . .
- Personal biographies of pupils
- Route taken within initial teacher training
- Aspiration to school improvement
- Social and economic context of the pupil population

Identifying Some Variables (1) cont'd/. . .

- Characteristics of professional discourse between teachers, teaching assistants and students
- Individual interactions between mentor and student – and the quality of these
- School development plans
- Approach taken to theorizing and the development of educational beliefs

Identifying Some Variables in Learning to Teach (2)

- Acknowledging variation in approaches to theory and its role in initial teacher education
- Public and private theories
- The importance of theory "without it [student teachers] they will become prisoners of their early school experience, perhaps the competent teachers of today, almost certainly the ossified teachers of tomorrow." (Eraut 1994 p.71)
- The challenge of the school context – professional discourse, the nature of teaching, applying theoretical ideas in rich ways

Identifying Some Variables in Learning to Teach (3)
The link between initial teacher education and school improvement

- Do all schools recognise the link between initial teacher education and school improvement?
- OFSTED 2003/4 annual report
- OFSTED 1997 report on Schools in Special Measures
- 'Reflective Action Planning' (Frost et al 2000)

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Personal and Professional Biography

- "The personal beliefs and images that preservice candidates bring to programs of teacher education usually remain inflexible" (Kagan 1992)

- The process of learning to teach is intensely personal and complex (Calderhead 1993, Calderhead and Shorrock 1997)

Taking Stock

The title of this conference is 'Preparing Students to work in schools facing challenging circumstances: evidence from research and practice'. I want to argue that because there are so many variables in learning to teach, and the play between these variables is both complex and unique, any situation in which a student is placed could for any one of a large number of reasons be seen as challenging.

Preparing students to work in schools facing challenging circumstances is as much about recognising the interplay of the variables as it is about understanding the nature of schools in challenging circumstances.

Example 1

Stage Models of Learning to Teach

Fuller (1969)

1. Students' self-identity is with pupils
2. Focus on survival
3. Teaching as performance
4. Focus on pupils and meeting needs

Example 2

Berliner (1988)

1. Novice – knowing each element of a classroom task
2. Advanced beginner – know similarities and differences across teaching contexts
3. Competent teacher – making choices
4. Proficient teacher – predict events
5. Expert teaching – performance is seemingly effortless

Example 3

Furlong and Maynard (1995)

1. Early idealism
2. Personal survival
3. Dealing with difficulties
4. Hitting a plateau
5. Moving on

The problem with Stage Models

1. Stage models underplay the breadth of variables.

2. Stage models assume that learning to teach is, at least in the broad sense, a movement through a pre-defined process.

3. Stage models may underestimate the complexity of learning to teach.

4. Stage models may be a misconception of learning to teach and may confuse individuals' understanding of learning to teach.

Classrooms as Complex environments and Learning to Teach
### A Doylian analysis

- Classrooms are naturalistic and have attributes of multidimensionality, simultaneity and unpredictability.

- Naturalistic classrooms mean that it is difficult to provide recipes for the improvement of teacher effectiveness.

- Classroom behaviour is determined by the response to the characteristics of particular settings.

- The critical importance of the social world of the classroom in determining the behaviour of all participants.
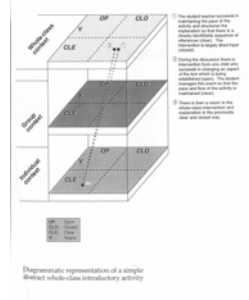
Doyle (1977)

Illustrating Multidimensionality
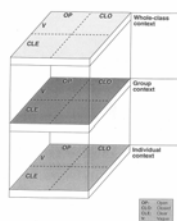
Illustrating Multidimensionality

Some Conclusions

The challenge of learning to teach is recognising how the student teacher behaves in each individual complex classroom environment.

The challenge of mentoring is posing the right questions which emerge from that complex classroom environment.

It is for the sector to recognise that learning to teach is perhaps challenging in different ways in all classroom environments.

It is for the education service to understand the true potential of initial teacher education for school improvement.

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