

Trainee Teachers As Practitioner Researchers

Outline

Background

This paper reports key findings from a Teaching Agency funded project investigating whether new technologies can help to develop literacy skills for SEN learners (Crook, 2008), and engage disaffected learners through using Web 2.0 technologies to encourage pupils to be explorers, communicators and producers of knowledge. The project, led by Nottingham Trent University (NTU), involved six trainee teachers on a one-year full-time Post-graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) course and one trainee teacher from the Graduate Teacher Programme at NTU working with 'expert' teachers in core subjects (English, maths and science). Five secondary schools were involved in the project.

The project was intended to enhance trainee teachers' experience of successful technology-based practice within core subjects while exposing them to excellent teaching with technologies, and encourage reflective and collaborative practice. The project provided opportunity for 'expert' teachers to develop practice in using new technologies in their subject to identify, through research with the trainee teachers, whether this increased engagement and raised literacy levels.

There is an increasing focus on teachers becoming engaged with research. This project provided an opportunity for trainee teachers and qualified teachers to work together as participants in active practitioner-based research.

The paper will focus on the trainee teachers' experiences of being involved with the project, their learning and developing pedagogy, how the project was embedded into course assessment and how this is being shared across the programme and beyond NTU. It will also examine how the teacher trainees were able to develop leadership skills, plan for the effective use of technology in core subjects and work collaboratively with expert teachers to engage and secure progression. Thus changing student experiences of higher education in terms of their course and evolving the identities of the trainee teachers into researchers.

Methods

The research represents a small scale case study (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998) using a mixed methods approach (Gorard and Taylor, 2004). The research followed the pattern of a small-scale evaluative case study (Bassegy, 1999) with a view to improving practice. The approach was both interpretivist and evaluative. Having taken this approach, the research included data derived from a number of sources to add rigour to the work through methodological triangulation (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007).

The schools involved in the project were identified from those involved in Partnership with NTU. Each school selected was asked to name an appropriate teacher from one of their core subjects to be involved in the project. Trainees were identified from those placed in each of the schools taking part in the project for their school experience, who were taking the Information Technology strand of the PGCE.

This range of data collection methods included:

- Interviews with trainee teachers using both open and closed questions.
- Interviews with expert teachers involved in the project at each of the 5 schools.
- Observations of the project in progress in each school.
- Analysis of data on literacy levels for the pupils who were part of the project.

Findings

An analysis of the data indicates that the trainee teachers benefited in a number of ways through engagement with this project. The main aspect that emerged from the data was the benefits to the trainee teachers of working collaboratively with an 'expert' teacher. While this process has been part of teacher training for many years the additional benefit to the trainees from involvement in this project centred around working with teachers outside their own discipline, ie within a core subject discipline. The trainees identified a range of benefits including professional discourse with core teachers, decision making around which group of pupils to work with and why, the benefits to the pupils, the joint preparation of the lesson plans and resources for the project, reflecting with an expert teacher, and evaluating the progress of pupils in literacy and engagement which had not previously been a focus for them. Additional benefits included learning how to use a new/emerging technology within the classroom and identifying how to measure the impact on pupils thus developing a sense of 'researcher'.

Conclusions

Early conclusions from this research in terms of changing student experiences of higher education and evolving identities of students include the increased confidence of the trainee teachers as researcher, the impact the project has had on their developing professional identity, the development of their leadership skills, their increased confidence in using new technologies in the classroom and their confidence in raising ambition with learners in their own classrooms, drawing on expert knowledge and enthusiasm.

References

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