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Pursuing excellence: risk, safety and practical wisdom for trainee teachers in the lifelong learning sector



Alison Iredale

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proposes an inductive approach to the professional development of trainee teachers as an alternative to the mainly deductive discourse of regulation, audit and continuous improvement for new teachers in the Lifelong Learning Sector (LLS

Contextual conflicts
“web of competing and complimentary
cultures” (Knight and Saunders 1999)



Initial professional development of trainee teachers in the Lifelong Learning Sector (LLS)

- Experiences
 - the curriculum
 - the classroom
 - the workplace
 - the subject (Bricklayers to Bio-Medical scientists)
- Agents
 - the teacher educator
 - the workplace mentor
 - the organisation
 - regulatory document discourse

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Excellence – an Aristotelian viewpoint



Framed within inductive reasoning

- the context defines the meaning
- the visible manifestation of excellence (the **doing** of excellence) cannot be divorced from **being** excellent
- empiricist (sense experience)
- dependent on resources (back-up)
- Individual responsibility
- Impoverishment

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A worked example

A trainee teacher developing her practice solely in one organisation, which itself operates under a bounded regulatory system, will experience practice that is both funneled and mediated by norms and traditions. She may fall within the double bind of on the one hand not be able use sense experience for reflective deliberation and on the other hand performing without access to resources, either because they were never inherited, not available, or sadly lost in performativity. This may leave her capacity for embodiment of personal values limited and impoverished.

- “ I do think that this was the best observation I have had to date and I am not sure whether it is my increasing knowledge regarding teaching and learning or increased confidence/classroom experience. I think that my classroom management has improved significantly and my presence in the classroom has also, again I think this is because my relationship with the learners and the rapport that I have developed with the students has become much better”. (Carol 2009)

From an Aristotelian perspective we can discern here the relational nature of the striving for, and embodiment of excellence. The resources marshalled here appear to include the development of a repertoire of professional knowledge and practice derived from repeated classroom experiences, increased confidence and frameworks by which to reflect on experience.

“precarious forms of employment” (Allen and Henry 1997:181)

“a risk-fraught system of employment” (Beck 1992:143)

professionalism based on the legitimacy of pedagogical and curricular expertise has been rendered untenable and replaced with a conditional trust. (Avis 2009:245)

The pursuit of practical wisdom



“the particular personalised pattern of practice that every professional requires” (Eraut 1994: 11)

“embedded in and emerging from activity” and “not ‘copies’ of the world to be pondered upon in individual minds”

(Ottesen 2007:33)

- teaching embedded in practitioner research enquiry, rather than as a vehicle of the acquisition of reified knowledge.
- knowledge as distributed, viral, open to all and free from packaging.
- Shared spaces and communities
- Risk-taking in thought and in deed

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