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Gorf, Alison

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Knowing how to move the Skills for Life Agenda forward – a reflection on current PCET teacher training initiatives within Basic Skills.

Linda Eastwood and Alison Gorf – School of Education and Professional Development, University of Huddersfield – contact details a.gorf@hud.ac.uk or l.e.eastwood@hud.ac.uk

INTRODUCTION

The School of Education and Professional Development at the University of Huddersfield has a long history of teacher training originating with the Huddersfield Technical Teacher Training College which was founded in 1947. The original partnership with FE colleges began in 1964 with the development of In-Service courses for teachers in Post- Compulsory Education and training and has developed into a network of partner colleges who from 1966 began to deliver awards at FE institutions across the North of England. In 1974 the Teacher Training College became part of the then Polytechnic of Huddersfield which in 1992 became the University. In 2001 this network became the new Consortium for Post Compulsory Education and Training, launched by David Blunkett, with a mission;

“To work collaboratively to enhance the professional development and effectiveness of staff who facilitate learning in the post school sector of education and training through provision and support of high quality programmes.”

CPCET 20003

The University's current provision is in both Pre and In-Service training for work in the Post Compulsory sector both at the University site and at 32 partner colleges through the Consortium. This paper concentrates on the developments that have taken place within the Pre-Service programme this academic year to address the needs of tutors who wish to teach Adult Basic Skills in line with the new developments from the Government's Skills for Life strategy. It discusses the issues around Pre-Service training and also future developments planned for In-Service training from September 2003.

BACKGROUND TO THE DEVELOPMENTS

The Skills for Life initiatives which came out of the Moser Report highlighted the need for teacher training specific to Basic Skills.

“Initial and in-service professional development for all these teachers will therefore ensure that they have a sound knowledge of the practicalities of literacy, such as teaching spelling, comprehension and the development of writing strategies, and numeracy, such as the latest strategies for estimation, addition and multiplication.”

Skills for Life 2000

The development and launch of the FENTO Subject Specifications at LEVEL 4 for Literacy and Numeracy led to the University becoming involved in consultation with UCET and FENTO about how to best incorporate these specifications within the Pre-Service programme. Discussions at this stage centred around the number of hours that should be added to the initial teacher training programmes and the format of these embedded qualifications.

INTEGRATION WITH THE EXISTING PROGRAMME

It was decided by the University that the existing programme would be mapped against the new standards, which was completed by the course team in July 2002. A large proportion of the personal skills for Literacy were already being covered by the Pathway modules as well as some other aspects of the subject specifications. It was then decided that the best way to offer the additional components that the subject specifications demanded that were not already covered by the programme was to deliver this through an existing module, Developing Personal Skills. This module had previously been one in which students chose two areas from a range of options, either within the University or from external courses such as CLAIT, ECDL, Counselling skills etc., in which they wished to develop personal skills to enhance their roles as teachers.

The Pathway is run as a modular programme and in total there are 9 subject specialist groups based at the University, totalling around 200 full time students per year. Although there is a discrete group for Basic Skills subject specialists there are also student teachers within the English, Learning Difficulties and Disabilities, and Maths subject specialist groups who we felt would benefit from being given access to the subject specifications. Much discussion took place within the Pathway team about this situation and in the end the decision was made to offer the Level 4 options to all students on the Pathway. This was done partly so that no student would be excluded who might wish to teach Basic Skills and also to raise awareness of this important issue to all of our future teachers.

The University were successful in securing a research grant from the National Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy during the summer of 2002 to assist with the development of the materials for the new taught elements of the subject specifications. This development was carried out by both specialist staff from the University and specialists from Consortium partner colleges. This has meant that the materials have been able to draw on a wide range of expertise and have benefited from input from many staff with considerable experience in aspects of Literacy and Numeracy.

DELIVERY PATTERNS

The delivery of the additional components of the subject specifications took place through a series of workshops, held twice weekly throughout the academic year to accommodate variable attendance patterns across the Pathway. Initial attendance at the workshops well exceeded expectations with approximately 80 students attending initially from across the 9 subject specialist groups. Students were made aware from the start of the programme that only those who were teaching Basic Skills would be able to achieve the full Level 4 Literacy or Numeracy accreditation as the award is dependant on fulfilling teaching practice hours and observations requirements but that those students who were not teaching Basic Skills could still use the attendance as work towards their Developing Personal Skills module.

There was some withdrawal by students who felt that it was not appropriate for them to be undertaking the subject specifications at this time but attendance has been in the region of 60 students per week for Literacy and 40 for Numeracy. The students have to put in significant additional hours with their attendance at the workshops and the private study to complete workshop learning materials and in light of the very heavy demands of the Pathway this retention rate is very significant. The Pathway team has commended the dedication of those involved, particularly from those who are not currently teaching Basic Skills as undertaking the workshops may not benefit them directly in terms of increased job prospects, as it will for those who are going into Basic Skills.

EVALUATION

Feedback from the students has shown that they have found the experience of studying for the subject specifications worthwhile in terms of improving their own personal skills but that the level of work required of them in fulfilling the requirements for the Numeracy component have been particularly demanding. For those students who have not been teaching Basic Skills this year there have been very positive comments as to how much it has raised their awareness of this subject area and prompted them to investigate opportunities for teaching Basic Skills in the future.

This is a result that the Pathway team is particularly pleased with as this was one of the intended outcomes of offering the workshops to all. Several students have commented on how they have been offered and accepted placement work in Literacy and Numeracy teaching which they would not have done without being able to attend the workshops. These comments have been from people teaching both Basic and Key Skills and is a very positive outcome in light of current shortages in some colleges of staff willing and able to support in Numeracy. Final evaluations are currently being undertaken of the delivery, through student evaluations which are part of the University's standard quality assurance procedures and also through the final assessment of the module. The students are required to write a critical and evaluative report outlining how they have developed their own skills through the module and these reflective pieces have been very useful in analysing the students' responses to this new

initiative. This is in addition to a portfolio of evidence of their learning matching the outcomes of the Level 4 subject specifications,

The vast majority of the students have found that the Literacy Subject specifications have enhanced their own skills and understanding greatly. There were some initial comments from earlier on in the Pathway delivery about not seeing the relevance of some of the parts of the subject specifications. In particular the emphasis in Section 2 B (The factors that influence or shape the use of language and literacy) on social factors and historical changes in English drew comments from some students about their lack of relevance to teaching Basic Skills. However the evaluations within the reflective piece have shown that students have found those sections interesting and stimulating and in some cases have used discussions initiated within the workshops in their own teaching.

Section C (Language and literacy learning and development) was perceived by all of the students to be of great value to them as tutors – particularly links that were made with work done in the workshops about ways of learning other languages as adults. Students were asked to evaluate different methods of learning the Urdu alphabet and to relate this to issues around ESOL / EAL teaching.

Another section that drew a lot of response in the evaluations was Section 2 A (Theoretical frameworks that aid understanding of language acquisition, development and use). In particular students commented that this had made them re-evaluate their own grasp of grammatical frameworks and for many this prompted further study and revision. This was seen as one of the most useful parts of the subject specifications in terms of its immediate practical relevance to their work on placement. Some students commented that they would have liked far more taught input on this topic as they could not remember ever have been formally taught grammar.

Within the Personal literacy skills sections (3.1 Speaking and Listening, 3.2 Reading and 3.3 Writing) emphasis was placed within the workshops on meta-cognitive activities that focused the students on analysing their own skills in this area and transferring these skills into teaching strategies for classroom practice. The Pre-Service course attracts mainly graduates who generally have a high level of personal literacy skills and the focus on activities to stimulate their own students' speaking, listening, reading and writing activities was welcomed by the group.

In light of student evaluation of the delivery and content of the subject specification workshops the Pathway team have altered the delivery programme for next year to offer further support in Numeracy for those who need more direct teaching. The majority of students have coped well with the demands of the programme but there have been a small minority who have needed more intensive one to one support and this will be built into future programmes by starting the Numeracy tutorials at an earlier stage.

The Pathway team have also been involved in a research project to evaluate the provision with staff from the NRDC and results of this will disseminated shortly.

In total 32 students at the University have gained the Level 4 accreditation in Literacy and 24 in the Level 4 in Numeracy (most students have gained both – with some opting for only one due to their own teaching placement situation and or personal preference).

DEVELOPMENTS FOR IN-SERVICE PROVISION

The University is planning to offer the Level 4 qualifications as stand-alone continuing professional development qualifications to its In-Service students and staff from other local institutions from September. These will be run as short modules using the same delivery format as we have used this year on the Pre-Service pathway and building on the existing strengths of the programme.

The University currently has a HEFCE funded project to look at the use of Managed Learning Environments within the Consortium and staff from the team have been working with the project team to develop online resources related to the subject specifications to be delivered via Blackboard (the University's managed learning environment). The use of ICT for the delivery of

parts of the subject specifications has also been developed during the year as well as activities concerned with kinaesthetic learning within Numeracy.

THE LSC CAPACITY BUILDING PROJECT

Alongside the developments within the Pre-Service Pathway the University has also been involved with an LSC funded project (through Yorkshire Forward, the Regional Development Agency) to build the capacity of the Basic Skills workforce in Yorkshire and Humberside. The initiative began in September 2002 with exploratory meetings between the local Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs) of Yorkshire and Humberside and the University as to the possibility of training an additional cohort of Basic Skills tutors at the University. Host institutions were also recruited by the LSC for the trainees to be placed with – these cover a wide variety of institutions such as FE colleges, work based learning providers and Learn Direct centres.

After a massive response to the initial advert (2,400 queries resulting in 1,200 applicants) interviewing was carried out in November at both the University and host institutions. The project recruited 57 trainees for Literacy and Numeracy who are based at the University and a further 5 trainees were recruited by Bradford College to train as ESOL tutors. The trainees are paid a £12,000 training salary with the host institutions also being paid £5,000 to provide mentoring support.

These trainees started their placements with their host institutions in January 2003 and their study at the University in Feb 2003 spending one day a week at the University and three days a week at their host – with one day a week for study leave. They will complete the course in Jan 2004. These students are also undertaking the Level 4 qualifications, which has meant that we have used the feedback from the September '02 starters to alter the delivery of their workshops. These students are not yet at a stage where formal evaluations of their learning have been undertaken but these will be ongoing throughout the next six months.

Training has also been held for the mentors who are supporting students at the host institutions, which has been very successful.

WHERE DO WE GO NEXT ?

This year has been one of great change within the Pre-Service Pathway in response to the new subject specifications and has really given us a chance to look at what we as Literacy tutors and as teacher trainers need to know and what we want our students to know. Our stand-alone qualifications will give us a chance to look at the needs of In-Service students and more experienced staff and to evaluate whether there are different needs for these groups as compared with the Pre-Service groups. The developments have stimulated debate about our own knowledge and as such have been a great opportunity for personal development, as well as that of our own students.

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