An examination of beginning teacher learning during the induction year

Linda Haggarty (The Open University), Keith Postlethwaite (Exeter University), Kim Diment (Exeter University) and Jean Ellins (The Open University)


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Abstract

Newly qualified teachers of mathematics and science are a precious resource and it important that they are provided with appropriate support and challenge during their first year in post. This study examines the developing thinking and practice of a group of such teachers and the influence of their mentors within the workplace context of the school. We argue that thinking and practice is restricted by the concern to ‘fit in’; by the belief that classroom management should be addressed before teaching can be developed; and by a lack of attention to the development of pedagogical thinking. We conclude that there is an urgent need to change the beliefs and practices of induction mentors and develop their skills in discussing pedagogical ideas.

Background to the study

Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) in England are required to complete an Induction Programme, which is seen as a programme of support providing a link between initial teacher education (ITE) and a career in teaching1. Induction arrangements have been in place since 1999 for students who have completed their initial training programme and gained Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). Induction standards came into effect from 2003, with a revised framework of professional standards from 2007. NQTs are required to meet the ‘core standards’ of this framework by the end of their induction period (TDA, 2007). During this period, NQTs teach in school on a reduced timetable (90% of the teaching load of a classroom teacher) and are provided with structured support and guidance from an induction tutor (TDA, no date).

According to the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA, 2007), this induction programme should help NQTs ‘develop the knowledge and skills gained during initial teacher training’ and provide a ‘framework for continuing professional development’. Further, the programme ‘will help [NQTs] meet the core standards and become an effective teacher’. To support them during induction, the NQT will work with an induction tutor who will:

provide support, review…progress towards meeting the standards, set objectives, and plan and monitor development opportunities

(TDA, 2007, 3)

The importance placed by policy makers on new teachers’ continued learning is clear from the introduction of these formal induction arrangements and from the emphasis by OfSTED (2003) on early career Continuing Personal or Professional Development (CPD). More recently, the government has expressed its intention to make teaching a Masters level profession (DCSF, 2007), with a Masters in Teaching and Learning (MTL) targeted at teachers in the first 5 years of their careers:

…building on ITT and induction. We must ensure that the MTL provides significant additional support to teachers through induction and the early years of their career by providing a better structured approach to their early professional development.

(DCSF, 2008, 13)

The TDA (no date) argue that the benefit for schools of this intention will be ‘the impact on pupil outcomes and the opportunity to enhance the culture of professional learning in the workplace’ (p1). They further argue that in-school coaches will be ‘trained’ so that they have ‘a clear understanding of what constitutes good quality professional learning in the workplace, and the role of the coach in that learning’ (p1)

Implicit in this guidance and in press releases is that NQTs, with the help of their induction tutors (together with those studying for a MTL qualification with the help of their coaches) will be able transfer or at least draw on what has been learnt from ITE into the workplace setting of the school.

Eraut (2004) has shown that transfer, in this case from ITE to the school as a workplace setting, is much more complex than commonly perceived. Typically, he argues, it involves five interrelated stages:

1. the extraction of potentially relevant knowledge from the context(s) of its acquisition and previous use;

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1 Similar schemes, under different regulations, apply in other parts of the United Kingdom
2. understanding the new situation - a process that often depends on informal social learning;
3. recognizing what knowledge and skills are relevant;
4. transforming them to fit the new situation;
5. integrating them with other knowledge and skills in order to think/act/communicate in the new situation.

(Eraut, 2004, 256)

This requires a sophisticated understanding of NQT learning by the induction tutor, and requires significant time spent with the NQT to accomplish it.

However, research on the transition from ITE to induction highlight clear discontinuities in learning (McNally et al. 1994; Furlong and Maynard 1995; Koetsier and Wubbels 1995), and more recently Hobson et al (2007) have drawn attention to the need for induction tutors and mentors to be familiar with what preparation for teaching had been experienced in ITE. In addition, others have drawn attention to the mechanistic and shallow approach to mentoring NQTs (Harrison, 2001) and to the focus on utilitarian purposes: orientation to school settings; curriculum information; organizational arrangements; technical assistance; support with resources; or the assessment of performance (Little, 1990, McIntyre et al. 1994). This focus on the practical and the utilitarian has recently been given renewed emphasis by Dymoke and Harrison (2006), Tickle (2000) and Furlong (2005) who have argued that the standards approach may well have the effect of stultifying professional development by linking NQT induction too closely to school performance management, and by requiring teachers to demonstrate competence at complex tasks rather than recognizing complexity and the need for continuing development in the face of uncertainty about those tasks. In a systematic review of the impact of induction, Totterdell et al. (2004) argued that there is ‘a shortcoming in the corpus of research’ in this area.

At the same time, however, it is also recognized that the transition from teacher education to the first teaching job can be a dramatic and traumatic one for NQTs. This is often referred to as the ‘reality shock’, and deals with the assimilation of a complex reality which forces itself incessently upon the beginning teacher, day in and day out (Veenman, 1984). The newly qualified teacher not only has to teach during this period but also has to learn to teach within a particular workplace setting and with particular colleagues. Nevertheless, Little (1990) distinguished between emotional support that made NQTs feel comfortable given this ‘reality shock’ and professional support that fostered a principled understanding of teaching. She argued that current practice failed to recognise that mentoring lay, not in easing NQTs entry into teaching, but in helping them confront difficult problems of practice and using their teaching as a site for learning. As a result, participating in a serious mentoring relationship might actually make the first years of teaching more strenuous in the short run while promoting greater rewards for teachers and students in the long run (Feimen-Nemser, 2001, 18).

Theoretical models of teacher learning are essential in guiding research. In the 1980s, the dominant models of teacher learning included apprenticeship (Zeichner 1980; Beyer 1988), and reflective practice (Schön 1983; Zeichner and Liston 1987; Calderhead and Gates 1993). These models are now being challenged, extended and enriched by arguments from Edwards et al (2002) that teacher education should embrace an epistemology “based on the notions of ‘lived uncertainty’ and the ‘collaborative professional’” (p8), by Activity Theory (Engeström 1995; Cole 1996; Engeström et al. 1999; Engeström 2001), and by broader cultural models of learning (Bourdieu 1977; Bourdieu and Passeron 1990; Hodkinson et al. 2004b). These new models direct attention to how learning is constructed within a given context (eg how teachers’ own learning is constructed when they are teaching pupils in their classroom, and how it is constructed when they meet with their induction mentor), and how it is transferred and transformed as the teacher moves between these different contexts.

This emphasis on learning within and across contexts is essential (Peressini et al. 2004): each context determines what learning is possible and what is difficult, and influences what will count as ‘good learning’ (Greene et al. 1996). In addition, the range of contexts across which teachers move offers the promise that powerful learning might be achieved because knowledge grows more complex, and becomes more ‘useful’ through a learner’s participation in different contexts. (Borko and Putnam 1996). There is therefore potential for an expansive transformation which is accomplished when the object and motive of the activity are reconceptualized to embrace a radically wider horizon of possibilities than in the previous mode of the activity. A full cycle of expansive transformation may be understood as a collective journey through the zone of proximal development of the activity (Engestrom, 2001, p137) It is essential to understand these processes of learning and to investigate whether their potential for this powerful learning is being achieved.

As we have argued, the induction tutor is crucial in directing and supporting NQTs, but the school as a workplace is also crucial. Fuller and Unwin (2004) offer the important perspective of workplaces generally as lying somewhere on a continuum between restrictive and expansive learning environments. This idea is further developed in the context of schools and classrooms by Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2005), who define an expansive environment as ‘one that
presents wide-ranging and diverse opportunities to learn, in a culture that values and supports learning’ (p123). They further suggest that:

> teacher learning is best improved through a strategy that increases learning opportunities, and enhances the likelihood that teachers will want to take up those opportunities. This can be done through the construction of more expansive learning environments for teachers.

(Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2005, 110)

According to Billett (2001) such an environment increases the affordances for learning at work and therefore the chances that individuals will want to learn from those affordances. The extent to which the individual chooses to engage with those affordances is also recognized by Billett (2004) who argues that learner participation in workplace practices is dually constituted between workplace affordances and on how an individual chooses to engage with those affordances (p190) – which in turn depends on the individual’s sense of themselves as a teacher: their identity.

What becomes clear from this literature is that what is offered in the induction year is both complex and potentially problematic. It is influenced by conceptions of learning to teach; by the culture of the workplace; by perceptions of the role of the NQT in the workplace; by perceptions of the aims of induction; by the extent to which the induction tutor can support the NQT in drawing on ideas learnt in ITE; on the extent to which the induction tutor moves beyond emotional support to systematic examination of the NQTs teaching and of pupil learning. What is learnt in the induction year by the NQT is influenced by individual engagement; workplace affordances; ways in which previous learning is drawn upon.

Given the existing literature on difficulties associated with induction and the bringing together of this research with more general literature on workplace learning (see, for example, Hodkinson and Hodkinson 2005), together with the development of the MTL it is timely to look again at NQT learning. However, rather than focusing on more general arrangements and support we have chosen to look in greater detail at the thinking and classroom practice of NQTs and the extent to which the affordances of the workplace, together with each NQTs disposition has influenced that learning.

The study

The research question we answer in this paper is: How does induction affect teachers’ thinking, and how does this developing thinking relate to teachers’ practice?

The research question was answered by semi-structured interviewing of, and pre-interview and follow-up questionnaires with, beginning teachers about their perceptions of the processes and products of their induction programme. The relationship between teachers’ thinking and their practice was explored through interviews after a lesson they had taught was observed and, where possible, video-recorded. This was done using the method of stimulated recall (Calderhead 1981; Lyle 2003). Following Brown and McIntyre (1992), the NQTs were asked to identify parts of their lesson where they felt things went well. Analysis of the stimulated recall interviews triangulated the insights into teachers’ thinking achieved by the original structured interviews. We also interviewed ‘significant others’ – in this case the beginning teachers’ induction tutor or mentor. This allowed us to develop case studies for each NQT in their particular workplace. NQTs and ‘significant others’ were invited at a later date to check relevant sections of our developing case studies for accuracy and to allow the addition of further comments.

In determining the sample of NQTs to be involved with the project we decided it would be useful to focus, in our case, on secondary teachers of mathematics and science. This would allow us to compare results within each subject and across the subjects (although this is beyond the scope of this paper and the research question we answer here). As teachers and teacher educators of, predominantly, science and mathematics ourselves we felt in a particularly strong position to have an understanding of the nuances of what we would be likely to see and hear. Both are also core subjects in the National Curriculum and in these subjects, there are shortages of teachers. We therefore decided it would be particularly valuable to develop insights into induction in these subjects to inform teacher education and teacher retention.
In all, 15 NQTs agreed to take part in this part of the project and the table below shows their route into teaching:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Traditional PGCE</th>
<th>Flexible PGCE</th>
<th>Part-time PGCE</th>
<th>GTP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mathematics</strong></td>
<td>Gilly Neil Theresa Roger Karen</td>
<td></td>
<td>Trish</td>
<td>Frank Briony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Science</strong></td>
<td>Wendy James Beth Rachel</td>
<td>Lesley Colin</td>
<td></td>
<td>Owen</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Once all data had been gathered for each participant, all the researchers met and agreed on a number of themes which appeared significant across cases. The themes related to issues which were of concern for many NQTs (for example classroom management), issues which we looked at because they related to policy or research literature (for example the Career Entry and Development Profile (CEDP), and the role of the mentor), issues relating to the workplace (for example the particular school and its context), and issues relating to the dispositions or identities of the NQTs.

We now present our findings relating to NQT thinking and to induction mentor support

**NQT thinking**

The NQTs all experienced a well documented ‘reality shock’ (Veenman, 1984) during their first year of teaching and this became apparent most particularly in relation to classroom management concerns and to issues relating to their perceived lack of time and achievement of a satisfactory work-life balance. There was a recognition that as a ‘proper teacher’ they had to take responsibility for their pupils learning, and this was perceived as a different level of responsibility from that experienced as a student teacher taking over someone else’s classes.

The NQTs had behaviour management concerns throughout their induction year whatever the school context, and in many cases this concern persisted into their second year of teaching. Although classes in some schools were described as difficult by the induction mentors as well as the NQTs, this was not always the case and some NQTs on the face of it faced fewer managerial demands than others. Nevertheless, they still perceived themselves as having problems. One, for example, was based in an independent school (Beth) and finding “hardest” was “getting them to be doing what I want them to be doing in the classroom” and another of whom was in a selective grammar school (Bob) where “the kids fire questions at you from all directions and there is no way you can answer them, so you just pretend you haven’t heard them”. Other NQTs teaching in more challenging circumstances faced even greater difficulties.

It seemed that both the NQTs and their mentors had expected classroom management problems to arise in what was perceived to be the ‘tough’ NQT year, and it almost seemed that one in particular felt cheated because he hadn’t suffered. James, in a city Academy, felt that the school had such a strong disciplinary structure that he was not sure if he had learnt enough to cope in any other school:

“I worry about the behaviour management thing, where people say: well if you go to another inner city school, you can’t just go in there all guns blazing, and deadly serious and just shout kids down, because they’ll just walk out or shout back, and nothing will come of it, but here, if they shout back then they’re out of school for a day...”

James

It seems, therefore, that for James at least, it concerned him that he hadn’t had to face problems and therefore hadn’t had the opportunity to learn from working on those problems.

The concern for classroom management from the majority of the NQTs often dominated their thinking and they seemed to see all their teaching through a behaviour management lens (Achinstein and Barrett, 2004). Indeed, for a significant minority, pedagogical decisions were restricted by concerns for behaviour management since more creative teaching approaches were often judged to be too risky for ‘difficult’ classes.

“if their behaviour is good, or ... they’re listening then I will more generally let them take a more active part”.  

Lesley
However, Lesley was not alone: for example, Karen found that it could be dispiriting if she had prepared materials and "the kids just screw them up and throw them on the floor and you think why did I bother?"; Gilly and Colin both made seating plans to "discourage them [pupils] from talking too much"; Frank was "dissinclined to spend time on more adventurous lessons that might not work" with lower sets.

There was a dominant belief amongst both the NQTs and their induction mentors that the induction year would inevitably be demanding in terms of classroom management and that any development of teaching should be put on hold until classroom management had been dealt with. This could of course be a sound strategy, but there was a risk that doing this might, in itself, contributed to behaviour problems. We therefore became increasingly concerned about the belief that classroom management issues had to be dealt with before any other development could take place, and that in the meantime learning opportunities for pupils would be restricted — often for the whole of the NQT year if not beyond.

"I think the actual teaching aspect doesn’t ... come first. I’ve always felt that you need to make sure your systems are in place. Even if the lessons are a bit naff to begin with but make sure the structures, the behaviour, the seating plans, the Nelling, the collecting books in and giving them out and making sure that the kids know what they’re expected to do, is set in stone. Subsequently, you can go crazy, do cartwheels, do back flips, whatever. You can only do that when you know that your classroom environment is sound, when you know the students know the routine... The main thing you’ve got to do is don’t show off, don’t do great lessons initially..."

Colin and Karen’s induction mentor

Our data also suggested that once the classroom behaviour issue had been addressed, other things seemed not to come to the top of the agenda for NQT/ induction mentor conversations. There did not, for example, seem to be a new focus on promoting learning since it seemed to be considered by all concerned that once classroom management difficulties had then been dealt with then no further regular and systematic support was needed. Regular weekly meetings between NQT and induction mentor therefore tended to tail off once ‘problems’ were considered by both to have been dealt with.

Although classroom management dominated much of the thinking of the majority of our NQTs the support they received in relation to it seemed conceptually limited. Almost all of them attended a course run by the local authority (LA); all attended ‘in house’ sessions in school about ways of managing pupils; many observed other teachers; many were given ‘tips’ by their induction mentor and other teachers about how to handle difficult classes and individuals. Yet there was no evidence that any of them were encouraged to consider their teaching through a lens other than that of classroom management, nor indeed that they try more creative, or ‘risky’, teaching strategies as a way of motivating the pupils. It was also noticeable that although during their ‘training’ year they had received in-class support with difficult classes, this was not available to them as NQTs. In other words, within a matter of weeks they were perceived as having moved from someone needing support in the classroom to someone who needed to show they could deal with problems on their own. Many NQTs therefore stayed at what seemed to us to be a relatively superficial level of understanding about classroom management issues, and conversations with Rachel and her induction mentor demonstrate this clearly. Rachel had observed other teachers who she perceived were managing her difficult class well and had deduced that “I think it's to do with their experience and their status in the school as much as anything else.” In other words, what she had learnt from that observation was that there was not much she could do about the situation. Her induction mentor later reflected on his own support and demonstrates that she would not have been able to learn very much from him either, and that he could only offer her ideas taken directly from his own practice:

"[Rachel] is not a middle-aged man that’s 5’11” with an intimidating stare and a voice that can chill to the bone under certain circumstances... is it her fault that the strategies that I use or would suggest to her for classroom control, don’t work....One size does not fit all, at all."

Rachel’s induction mentor

Thus it seemed that classroom management problems were seen as a rite of passage both by the NQTs and their induction mentors and that getting through those inevitable problems of classroom management determined for the majority of induction mentors whether or not a particular NQT was likely to be a successful teacher. Further it seemed that there was a dominant view that lessons should remain relatively unambitious until management problems had been addressed and that once those problems had been solved there was little need for further regular meetings for induction support.

However, it became clear to us that NQTs had many and varied needs relating to thinking and practice which were therefore left relatively unexamined. In relation to developing her thinking about pedagogical subject knowledge, Beth, for example, had a PhD in chemistry and had been both a researcher and academic before deciding to teach. Her subject knowledge was therefore extensive and she was able to speak confidently and knowledgeably to pupils
and other staff. Her passion for chemistry, and in particular practical work in chemistry, was clear and she was prepared to take risks in her teaching because of this. She talked about wanting to excite pupils: "one of the wonderful things about chemistry is that there are things that you can do that can make their jaws drop." Intriguingly, however, whilst she had an enthusiasm for, essentially, putting on a show for pupils she didn't actually talk about pupil learning. It did not seem that this was explored with her in school and her induction mentor described her as "a very intelligent and perceptive person", adding that their meetings were "almost like peer to peer". Beth therefore brought with her confidence and a clear strength in her subject knowledge, and had impressed her induction mentor with her intelligence and perceptiveness. Yet we have no evidence that she was thinking, nor was being helped to think at any significant level, about the development of pedagogical subject knowledge.

There were examples of NQTs who weren't being challenged to develop their pedagogical thinking and who therefore channeled their energies elsewhere. For example, Gilly as a mathematics teacher did not mention the difficulties of teaching of mathematics in her interviews. But emphasised instead activities outside the classroom. She had become actively involved with girls' football, rounders and sailing club "so there's enough to keep me interested." Presumably she did not recognise or value the challenge of improving her own teaching of mathematics in quite the same way, and had not been helped to do so.

There were also examples of NQTs clearly struggling on their own to develop their thinking and practice who would have benefitted from some support. Colin, for example, had tried to introduce an element of differentiation into his teaching by allowing those who were more advanced in their work to carry on whilst he stopped the rest to explain a concept again. He spoke in his interview about a lesson where half a dozen or so pupils had "really struggled" with long division, whereas the rest of the class had been OK but it made him think "how do I teach this? Maybe I need to re learn how to teach this in a different way?" But with a new seating plan which enabled him to work specifically with that group, whilst the rest of the class got on with something else, he was able to solve the problem. Whilst he recalls that he may have talked to colleagues about "other ways to explain" the topic, the change in seating plan was "something I did myself just because I was sure they were all intelligent enough to get it but thought I hadn't explained it well enough ... so I wanted a second chance." It seemed that Colin was engaged in a significant struggle, and therefore a readiness to learn, about differentiation here and, indeed, with ideas of Mastery Learning (Bloom, 1976) which he seemed to be moving towards. At the same time his mentor, who as we have already reported considered that Colin should focus exclusively on managing the pupils, commented that:

"I think if you're the right personality you'll be a great teacher. And if you're the wrong personality you're always going to struggle ... tragically that's one of those things that just comes with experience, it's not something you can teach an NQT in the first year."

Colin's induction mentor

Given that regular meetings with his induction mentor had also become more infrequent since it had been decided that Colin faced few real problems, we were not convinced that his mentor was therefore likely to be engaging in the pedagogical exchange that could so clearly have taken place.

As teacher educators we were also disappointed by the limited teaching strategies used by the NQTs but we began to see how concerns for classroom management; beliefs held by NQTs and their induction mentors that classroom management should be addressed before teaching approaches were developed; and the limited opportunities to discuss practice at a more than superficial level with induction mentors led to this. However because we had both written and interview data from some of these NQTs from the end of their 'training' year as well as through their NQT year we were able to identify ways in which priorities had developed over time; ways in which 'talking the talk' was often different from 'walking the walk' as far as the use of pedagogical strategies were concerned; and ways in which the school context further shaped what they said and what they did.

At the end of his PGCE programme James, for example, wrote:

'I knew little about the cycle of planning, monitoring, assessment (all the 'behind the scenes' stuff). Doing the course has given me a huge respect for the profession and the individuals that practice it. Thus, it has also given me a sense of pride in what I do, especially given the many challenges.

I find the education literature (e.g. journal literature) fascinating and I have started to link theoretical ideas into what happens in my classroom.'

It became clear, however, when discussing pedagogy with him during his NQT year just how influential the school context was so that, for example, James felt that although the training he had got on practical work was very useful from his PGCE, at his current school they "don't have loads of whizz-bang chemistry kits" so there has not been the opportunity to use much of it. Similarly, he considered that group work and creative lessons have been difficult to continue in the particular school and had largely been abandoned.
However, despite his enthusiasm for teaching chemistry and for theoretical ideas offered during his PGCE year, the lesson observed was actually very narrow in scope and teacher-dominated. It began with question and answer led by him, then pupils working through a worksheet in silence, a demonstration by him of a method for solving the problems, more silent work, an explanation by him of what would be necessary to be working at a particular National Curriculum level, the revision of rules for practical work led by him, further instructions followed by some practical work, then children seated for more instruction, ending with clearing up and a plenary. Any discussion was also led by him.

Interestingly, given what he might have reflected on in relation to the lesson, he seemed to fall into the school culture of concern for strict discipline by criticising the way he had given instructions:

“I know with any class you’ve got to break it down, like you can’t give instructions simply enough, like, especially for practical work, so I think it’s giving simple instructions even though I realised as I was saying it, I should have had them all sitting in absolute attention, silence while I gave the instructions and get them to repeat them back to me or something, ...”

James

So his concern related to dominant thinking within his school setting rather than questioning why he was teaching like this in the first place. In addition, given that he made a general comment about the school culture: “well maybe we should put more onus on the students to take responsibility for themselves”, which was something he had been encouraged to do during his ‘training’ year, he was not able to make links between training ideas, school aspirations and actual classroom practice. Disappointingly, his induction mentor had by this time decided that there was “no longer a need” for weekly meetings.

So whether he liked it or not on an ideological level, he was essentially been drawn into seeing things from the perspective and within the culture of the school. It certainly confirmed Eraut’s view (2004a) that transfer, in this case from ITE to the school as a workplace setting, is much more complex than commonly perceived and further that without (in this case) induction mentor support there was a very great danger that the original thinking would be lost through the process of progressive filtering (Postlethwaite and Haggarty, 2008).

Many NQTs attended at least one course outside school, most often in relation to classroom management. More generally, the amount of external support available varied. There were clearly financial constraints in all the schools and some also identified organisational reasons for not allowing these to take place, but reactions from the NQTs about this limitation varied. Lesley, for example, felt resentful:

“they want you to be all singing all dancing and everything else but not on their time, at their cost, and it’s sort of like, yes but, you’re investing in me to deliver a better ... course, but I don’t think they see it like that, they just see it as you being out of the classroom, so they’re having to pay for ... cover, so that’s costly, and then ... it’s almost like if it’s not an immediate return, it’s like: why have we let you go on it then?”

Lesley

Others found themselves in schools which had found a creative ways of dealing the problem of too few teachers allowed out on courses. Wendy, for example, described a school culture in which staff who had been on INSET come back “really excited” and shared the experience in the staff room. “I think that’s probably the main thing about INSETs that people come re-motivated don’t they”. Interestingly, Training Schools2 did not necessarily fare any better in terms of enabling staff to attend external courses and two NQTs found themselves in such a school with 15 NQTs and as many PGCE students.

“We’ve been told that there’s a course of training the LEA does [but] we can’t go to them... so we’re going to one each, in pairs, and reporting back to each other.”

Colin

2 ‘As centres of excellence for training, Training Schools act as experts in adult learning and the transfer of skills, and provide a venue for high quality professional development’, DCSF, no date, http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/trainingschools/. Accessed April 2009
The focus of support was therefore heavily reliant on internal input, and this no doubt contributed to a very strong sense that NQTs needed to ‘fit in’ to their new school and indeed in some of the schools the view seemed to be that once the NQT ‘fitted in’, induction support could gradually be withdrawn (see below).

“The school picked me and I picked the school because it was a good fit”.  

Wendy

Towards the end of their teacher preparation course, these NQTs had completed the first section of the Career Entry and Development Profile (CEDP) (TTA, 2003). According to the TTA, the purposes of the profile were:

- to help you make constructive connections between the initial training, induction and later stages of your development as a teacher;
- to focus your reflection on your achievements and goals in the earliest stages of your teaching career;
- to guide the processes of reflection and collaborative discussion about your professional development needs which will take place as part of your initial teacher training and induction programmes.  

(TTA, 2003, p6)

We found, in practice, that very little use was made of the CEDP with the exception of Theresa whose mentor had given her feedback on elements of it after observation. For the rest, it seemed that neither the NQTs nor their induction mentors valued it or gave it any attention. A fairly typical response came from Wendy’s induction mentor:

“Wendy came from Bristol schools to here, and I think we have different issues, so to a certain extent the action plan [in the CEDP] became less useful for us. For example a behaviour management issue in Bristol would be dealt differently here. Our expectations of our low ability kids is quite high, so we tend to deal with them differently as well, … They were useful to read”

Wendy’s induction mentor

The sense was that the CEDP was only relevant insofar as schools and NQTs could see that attention to elements from it were consistent with the overall aim of ‘fitting in’. It seemed that often the NQTs professional development was therefore subsumed by contextual practices and goals – and with both the school and the NQT in unspoken agreement about this. It also seems that an opportunity for ensuring continuity between ITE and induction was not as strong as we might have expected, nor as the TDA implied in its use of the Career Entry and Development Profile as a tool to link the two.

The results paint a disappointing picture of NQT developing thinking in the induction year. Classroom management concern dominated thinking to the extent that pedagogical decisions were limited; ideas that NQTs brought with them were neglected, particularly when they did not fit in with existing practices in the school; and there were limited opportunities for consideration of external ideas. Within the school, some NQTs were given their own teaching classrooms but others were not; very few were given opportunities to teach examination classes; and some were given difficult classes because that’s all that was left for them, or because of high staff turnover. Nevertheless, the NQTs remained by and large accepting of the situation and, indeed, all completed their NQT year.

It should not be assumed, either, that the NQTs were critical and dismissive of the ideas learnt during their ‘training’ and Theresa captured an important point when she said of her PGCE programme that:

“The [sessions] were just really great. It felt like we were always learning, and never felt it was a waste of time going into University, and I didn’t really feel it was a waste of time coming into school either ... I feel I’m particularly looking at questioning. [The tutor] spoke a lot about questioning last year, and so I do feel that I look back at what she told us, and I try and kind of make them think for themselves, or I just try to make them come up with answers. It’s kind of a case of being reminded [about ideas]. It’s not [that] I don’t know it, it’s just that I’ve forgotten because there is so much other stuff to think about, so it’s nice being reminded…”

Theresa

Again, therefore, we return to something which emerged so clearly about the need by the NQTs, which was sometimes but not always recognised by them, of someone in school helping them to draw on ideas which they had already met but which they were struggling to bring into their practice. Neil expressed it slightly differently, but essentially made the same point:

“all through PGCE, all through induction there’s this idea, this emphasis on the … trainee, or the NQT being proactive and making things happen, so what happens then is [the mentor] thinks, well, ‘obviously this person will come to me when they need help’. But if you don’t know what help you need, you don’t know what help to ask for.”
It seems appropriate, therefore, to examine the data we have now relating to the induction mentor in the final section of our results.

The induction mentor

Up to now we have used the term ‘induction mentor’ to present data which relates both to a central member of staff (sometimes but not always called an induction tutor who was usually a relatively senior member of staff) and to a teacher concerned with day-to-day induction support (sometimes but not always called the mentor who was usually but not always a member of the department in which the NQT taught, and usually the Head of that Department). Staff in these posts frequently changed during our 18 month study and although there seemed to be ‘training’ at an LA level for the induction tutor in particular, this rarely extended to the mentor. Consequently, NQTs in our sample were often supported by induction tutors or mentors who were unsure of their own role and of these, a few who had taken on the role in order to gain promotion or because there was no one else available to take on the job. The training which did exist seemed to relate to TDA requirements and organisational procedures and none of our induction tutors talked about, for example, the complexities of learning to teach or the complexities involved in their role in supporting the NQTs. Nevertheless, all our NQTs were offered a carefully structured programme planned by the induction tutor where specialists in the school gave presentations on their role. Such sessions were often timed to meet emerging needs for the NQT. Thus there might be a session on report writing just before an NQT had to carry out the task. Since there was usually more than one NQT in the school such sessions also allowed for, and were often designed for, NQTs to ‘let off steam’ with each other and for there to be liberal amounts of sympathy and support offered. The induction tutor also took responsibility for formal assessment points and formal observation of the NQTs in preparation for those assessments.

However our particular interest was with the thinking and practice of the NQTs, and the identification of possible explanations as to why they thought and acted as they did. We therefore looked at our data carefully in terms of what we knew of the thoughts and actions of the staff involved in the induction process in relation to the specific learning needs (as they perceived them) of the NQTs in our sample.

The induction mentors, broadly speaking, saw their role as one of helping their NQT fit into the school; the provider of support during what they saw as a tough year for the NQTs; and with a focus of concern almost exclusively on classroom management. Not all induction mentors felt the need to provide specific support targeted at their NQT and presumably, therefore, did not identify specific learning needs for their NQTs:

“I don’t think it’s right that just because one’s at a certain stage in one’s training you should have a special induction programme ... adults, graduates, they’re trained, they’re qualified, it would be incredibly patronising if we were any different. No, if you need help you must ask for it”.

Beth’s mentor

The idea of NQTs asking for help was a consistent theme in the data, and only Neil questioned this as an appropriate strategy (see above). It can therefore reasonably be concluded that for many in our sample, both the induction mentor and the NQT accepted from the beginning of the support period that the topic of conversation was likely to be classroom management, and that once this had been perceived to have been addressed there was no other sort of conversation to have.

“We’d check previous week’s targets, set new ones, roll forward any, talk about what’s gone wrong, if I needed any help, we needed to clarify what’s happening, I could ask, but it’s now become a less formal affair, because if there’s a problem I go and see her as soon as we’ve both got free time rather than it being just in the formal mentoring meetings now.”

Wendy

“By the summer term, in general, there is less help sought by NQTs as, by then they’re much more confident with their discipline and all the other things.”

Owen’s induction mentor

However, whilst NQT themselves might have felt more confident, we were less confident than Owen’s induction mentor about Owen’s continued learning needs. During interviews with him in May of the school year, for example, Owen thanked the interviewer for suggesting to him that he might observe teachers in other subjects “that’s a good point, I would love to do that” and for suggesting he might ask for a Learning Support Assistant with a difficult class
It seemed that for the most part induction tutors offered sympathy and support to the NQTs, particularly in relation to classroom management, and offered practical suggestions to help in relation to this. However, we were less confident that induction tutors attended to wider pedagogical issues in their discussions with their NQTs or examined alternative pedagogical strategies form the ones being used in the school.

The generally pragmatic approach of support and practical ideas for classroom management seriously limited the consideration of alternatives to thinking and practice. Further, ideas that the NQTs brought with them of broader, theoretical ideas were in danger of being lost: all but one of our NQTs (Neil) was perfectly happy that support from their induction mentor would end after initial ‘problems’ had been sorted out. Our evidence was that very many of the induction mentors either did not value such theoretical ideas anyway, or felt them inappropriate for NQTs.

Reflections

The research question we asked ourselves was ‘How does induction affect teachers’ thinking, and how does this developing thinking relate to teachers’ practice?’

Our results show that amongst our sample of NQTs, their thinking tends to become aligned with dominant views within the school. Ideas which were brought from the ‘training’ year or from their own life and career experiences were generally not drawn upon in conversations with induction mentors and were therefore in danger of being lost. Indeed, ideas of progressive filtering were as relevant for these NQTs as they were for those during ‘training’ in research reported elsewhere (Postlethwaite and Haggarty, 2008). Further, the lens through which thinking was filtered was predominantly that of classroom management and this was supported by induction mentor beliefs about what needed attention first in the induction year. However, even when there was time to broaden out this thinking (which for our participants meant once classroom management was felt to be secure) and begin to draw once again on more general pedagogical ideas, the opportunity was generally not taken to do so. The rare occasions when it happened served to illustrate that extending the NQTs thinking was complex, and required a mutual and sophisticated understanding of identities and understandings. Ideas relating to the complexity involved in transferring learning from one setting to another (Eraut, 2004) were simply not addressed by the induction mentor, and NQTs were simply left to do the best they could do – or chose to do - on their own.

Planning for teaching, classroom practice and lesson evaluations also took place predominantly through a classroom management lens, and with relatively little apparent concern for pupil learning. Pedagogical decisions were often restricted to limit perceived risk, and most induction mentors supported the teaching of relatively unambitious lessons. Teaching strategies also tended to be limited to those already being used in the school since the need to ‘fit in’ was seen as essential by both NQTs and induction mentors. Given that pedagogical discussions with induction mentors tended to tail off during the year, we were therefore concerned that unless the NQT was determined – or an issue happened to be addressed in the school – ideas would be lost relating to broadening out and enhancing this narrow set of approaches.

We were generally disappointed by the quality of the pedagogical support offered by induction mentors. Without doubt, formal induction requirements were in place and timetabled arrangements for taught support sessions and observations were taking place. However when it came to support at individual thinking and teaching at the classroom level the picture was less positive. Even in relation to classroom management, advice and support structures tended to remain at a practical and relatively superficial level and with no encouragement at all to refocus attention away from it. There was a general belief held by the induction mentors and shared by the NQTs that the induction year would be extremely difficult; that the ‘reality shock’ was inevitable and survival the aim; that classroom management concerns would inevitably arise and had to be dealt with before other things could be addressed; but that once addressed, support would only be offered when the NQT identified a problem for which they needed help. Team teaching, for example, was not considered for the provision of practical help although this might have been used as a support strategy during the ‘training’ year only a matter of weeks earlier. Indeed, it seemed that there was a ‘deep end’ approach to the induction year, with only those who survived being judged to fit in as ‘one of us’.

Although we saw examples of expansive school working environments where NQTs were encouraged to share their ideas and join in collaborative and exploratory activities, the overwhelming need to ‘fit in’ inevitably restricted their learning and indeed drew attention to the extent to which the school culture defined the limits of what learning could take place. We also realised that even when there were signs of expansive opportunities at the school level, the induction mentor could act as a powerful filter and turn the environment into a restrictive one for the NQT.
Given that induction aims to help NQTs ‘develop the knowledge and skills gained during initial teacher training’ and provide a ‘framework for continuing professional development’ (TDA, 2007) it is clear from our findings that the aim is not being met. Similarly the aim of MTL ‘building on ITT and induction’ (DCSF, 2008, 13) becomes equally problematic. There is currently virtually no systematic building on what has already been learnt, and we speculate that much work would have to be done to change the existing beliefs of induction mentors before the aim is met. Shared beliefs amongst induction mentors about the need for NQTs to fit in, to focus attention predominantly on classroom management, and to confine discussions to practical advice further suggests that there needs to be a shared framework for richer pedagogical discussions between NQT and induction mentor throughout the whole of the induction period and beyond, and that this should be at the level of classroom thinking and practice.

All the NQTs in our study remained in teaching after the end of our research project, and we recognised their determination to succeed as teachers. Quite a few of them were mentors to ITE students on school placements, and the learned cycle of ways of supporting and challenging new entrants to the profession was therefore in place. A few recognised the need for challenge in whatever career they chose, and we would argue that there is a need to develop pedagogical challenge in the workplace in order to keep them in the profession, and to break existing cycles of thinking and practice.

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