

Teaching practice and mentoring: maximising group teaching practice

Resource description:

- A report on maximising the use of group teaching practice to support pre-service trainee literacy teachers
- A Powerpoint presentation containing examples of materials developed and used to support the group teaching practice.

Background to the project

The PGCE/PgCE Literacy or ESOL is an SVUK-endorsed course offered by the Institute of Education for teaching Literacy or ESOL in the post-compulsory sector. It is equivalent to the Diploma in Teaching English (Literacy) in the Lifelong Learning Sector or the Diploma in Teaching English (ESOL) in the Lifelong Learning Sector. The qualification supports teachers working towards QTLS status (Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills).

The course was developed for part-time and full-time professionals in the field of adult literacy and ESOL who do not yet have a teaching qualification or a Level 5 subject specialist qualification recognised by SVUK. It is a two-year, part-time course, the first year of which takes place at a partner college (in this case Tower Hamlets College) and the second at the Institute of Education. In addition to taught sessions trainee teachers take part in group teaching practice and attend two placements (one Literacy and one ESOL).

In response to feedback from previous course participants, who asked for more practical sessions, we amended the course model for 2009/10 and devoted the whole course day to group teaching, feedback and planning for the duration of the training classes, thereby putting more emphasis on this practical process and less on whole group input sessions. In doing this we were also able to satisfy requirements to reduce course hours.

The slides referenced throughout the report can be found in the [accompanying presentation](#).

The course model

(Slide 2 – Course structure)

The 30 week course at Tower Hamlets is delivered as follows:

Weeks 1 – 5	Whole group has input relating to Module 1* and teaching methodology.
Weeks 6 – 11	Trainees (and trainers) divide into two groups, one attached to a literacy class, the other to an ESOL class. Trainees participate in group-planning, teaching and feedback followed by further whole group input sessions on Module 1 topics and teaching methodology.
Week 6	Trainers teach demo lessons in training classes.

Weeks 12 – 17	Groups swap. Trainees participate in group-planning, teaching and feedback followed by further whole group input sessions on Module 2** topics and teaching methodology.
Week 12	Trainers teach demo lessons in training classes with second group.
Weeks 17 – 30	Training classes finish and whole group of trainees reconvenes for input sessions on Module 2.

* *Module 1: Planning and enabling learning and assessment in the lifelong learning sector*

** *Module 2: Theories and contexts for language and literacy learning*

While we saw it as our role to guide the planning with each group of trainees (writing schemes of work and outline lesson plans) we also saw the training class experience as an organic process in which trainees could have ideas, make suggestions, create materials and in which learners' needs and wishes could be taken into account.

We felt strongly that teaching strategies and subject-specific knowledge could be taught more effectively in the very real context of the training classes and that the links between theory and practice would be clearer to the trainee teachers.

The literacy group training classes

The Literacy group was an Entry 3 class. Trainees had observed the class teacher before the group training class started and she had prepared an outline scheme for the term. She had planned a series of sessions working on text types and had already taught two lessons on 'informative text'. Although she was happy for us as course leaders to design our own scheme, we decided to follow hers as closely as was possible.

(Slide 3 – First Literacy Training Class Block)

In the second six-week block of lessons we had no pre-written scheme of work. Some learners had expressed the wish to do more work on spelling, so taking their lead, I suggested that we have spelling as our theme. As time went on it became apparent that we needed to broaden this theme; so we decided to include the second theme of 'language'.

(Slide 4 – Second Literacy Training Class Block)

Lesson 6 of second block of group training classes (the last lesson)

I have chosen to describe in detail the planning, teaching and evaluation of the last training class of the second block of teaching, focusing even more specifically on one trainee teacher's lesson.

Planning

Last lessons are difficult to plan. There is no point in starting something new; there is a need to review what had been done and to do something celebratory. The general themes in this block of teaching had been spelling and language. In group discussion we drew a plan showing the rationale for the lesson.

(Slide 5 – Rationale for Lesson Plan)

We decided that the first half of the lesson (one hour) would be based on reviewing some of the spellings learners had met over the previous weeks and on learning techniques for proofreading and correcting their own writing. In the second half of the lesson (1 hour) we decided on a group writing activity in which learners would collaborate to write a story. This could be a creative and enjoyable activity with which to finish.

(Slide 6 – Training Class Planning)

The two trainees who were to teach took the plan away with them after the session in order to write their lesson plans and prepare materials to send back to me by email for comment. To support them, I wrote an outline plan and sent it to them with suggested timings to make sure they understood what we had decided.

(Slide 7 – First Trainee Teacher’s Lesson Plan)

The trainee teachers then emailed me their more detailed plans and their materials for comment.

(Slide 8 – Examples of First Trainee Teacher’s Materials)

The impact of placing greater emphasis on the training class

We were aware that, while generic teaching skills would be integral to planning for and teaching the training classes, the subject-specific knowledge and skills we could cover would depend very much on the content of the teaching. We were concerned that at the end of the training class period, we would lose track of what had been done, that there would be large gaps in trainees’ knowledge and that the two groups would have learnt different things.

Slides 3 and 4 show the extent to which literacy subject-specific knowledge and teaching skills were embedded in the process of planning and teaching the training classes, but the drawbacks to the approach were that one group had taught (and therefore learnt about) text types and the other had taught (and therefore learnt about) spelling and language histories. However, it is clear that these experiences and topics can easily be revisited in the whole group input sessions which reconvene after the training classes have finished and trainee teachers can be invited at this stage to share their knowledge.

The impact has been that trainees have had very practical experience of addressing theoretical frameworks in the training classes and that the subject specifications have, in fact, been shared with learners as well as trainees.

The impact of group teaching practice (planning, delivery, verbal and written feedback)

The best way of assessing the impact of the whole process is to examine feedback and evaluation. A group feedback session takes place immediately after each lesson. In the literacy group we conduct feedback as follows:

- Trainee who has taught reflects and talks about the lesson, identifying what went well, what not so well and why.
- Trainees who have observed (or sometimes helped) talk in turn about the same.
- Trainer feeds back own reflections and sums up discussion.
- Trainee who has taught writes up reflections.
- Trainer completes written observation report/commentary drafted during the observation.

(Slides 9 and 10 – Written feedback / commentary and examples of Self-evaluation and Peer Feedback)

Evaluation of the project

The training class remains a complex enterprise. There are many needs and factors to take into account and balance against each other. The lesson-planning process can be long and drawn out, sometimes difficult and can involve many stages, especially when trainee teachers have very little or no experience of teaching. Trainers need to be aware that it is a time-consuming process if it is to work.

We learnt that the training class is a powerful and rich tool for teaching not only generic teaching skills but also many aspects of subject knowledge.

We learnt that elements of the subject specifications can be adapted and included in lessons for learners and that they too can benefit from them. In other words both trainees' and learners' needs can be met in this way.

We learnt that allocating more time to the training class process meant that it could be a creative experience and could be related more directly to the emerging needs and wishes of learners.

We learnt that there were some topics which we would need to revisit and develop in future whole group input sessions.

We learnt that the trainee teachers valued the training class above all else on the course.

(Slide 11 – Whole Group Evaluation of the Training Classes Experience)

Next steps

The next steps now that the training classes have finished are not only to address the topics for Module 2 of the course, but also to plan and deliver sessions which draw on trainees' practical experience, discuss teaching and learning strategies and theoretical frameworks in more detail and consolidate their learning.

For 2010/2011 there will, no doubt, be some restructuring of the course model, but we will continue to run the training classes in the same way as this year.

Judith Beer and Becky Winstanley

Tower Hamlets College

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