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15. The use and development of 'Teachers' TV' to support Initial Teacher Training and in-service teachers' Continuing Professional Development

Jane Dixon: University of Cumbria

Summary

This paper outlines how one university became involved in the development of two programmes for 'Teachers TV' on the role of the mentor in schools. The reasons were both practical, and developmental, with short and long term gains for students and teachers alike. The original idea was to provide up to date video material of student teachers and mentors, tailored to support the initial mentor training courses run by the university as part of in-service teachers' Continuing Professional Development. Following the successful development of the programmes, they are now being used to demonstrate what makes for an effective mentor. The student teachers that took part were enthusiastic about the use of video as a starting point for discussion of their practice with their mentor, as featured in the programmes. The integration of such an approach is now being considered by those developing new QTS (Qualified Teacher Status) courses at the University of Cumbria. At the end of the process, both the students and the mentors felt that they had become more reflective practitioners. The materials have been picked up and used by other Initial Teacher Education providers and have proved valuable in their own context.

Keywords

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) / reflective practitioner/
mentor / tailored TV

Why

There were several reasons why I wanted to work with 'Teachers' TV' to develop programmes on mentoring in schools, including:

- A lack of availability of current video footage of mentors in action needed for teachers attending University of Cumbria Primary Mentor Training courses;
- A desire for such programmes to consider our own contexts, such as rural, small schools. By working with 'Teachers' TV' we hoped to end up with useful programmes that were tailored to our specific needs and were relevant and up to date;
- The desire to encourage teachers who had not previously considered mentoring, that it is valuable both to

the students in terms of support, and the teachers in terms of their own continuing professional development;

- The desire to show would-be students that teachers come from diverse backgrounds, and that it is an inclusive profession; thus supporting the Widening Participation Agenda.

The Process

In June 2006 I contacted the Joint Head of Programmes at Teachers' TV to find out whether they had any programmes on mentors that could be used with our initial mentor training courses. At the time, nothing was evident, and the response was that such a programme did not seem like it would make for good television. The materials I had been using were really quite dated, so I was keen to pursue the issue, and developed a couple of ideas and submitted them. After

quite some time had elapsed, an independent television company was appointed to work on the idea and from this point on things moved quickly. I met with the editor, where we further developed ideas for the programmes, and I took on the task of finding suitable students. Due to financial constraints, the filming schedule was tight, with little margin for error. However, the students, mentors and children were all very enthusiastic, and the completed programmes which aired in September 2007, some fifteen months after the original idea was muted, were relevant and professional.

The role of the author

As well as developing the original idea, my role was to work closely with the television producer, to find students and schools willing to take part, to provide extra resource material, and to help with the final edit.

The filming

The filming of each student was completed in a single day. The student and mentor were briefed before hand and had an idea about what to expect. The television crew were professional and put everyone, including the children, at their ease. They filmed a whole lesson, which was then shown to the student and mentor for discussion. This discussion was also filmed, and formed the main part of the programme. The students were able to see their own 'performance' and comment on how they did. It was interesting to note, that on watching themselves, the students felt they did better than before they had seen the film. This led to a discussion about the value of using video footage to critically evaluate one's own performance, taking steps to improve future practice and becoming a reflective practitioner. The students commented that they felt this was the most useful aspect of the whole process, and that other students would benefit from such an opportunity. Analysis of their teaching, helped boost the students' confidence and

self-esteem. It allowed them to be more objective about their performance, than they would normally be when they relied on 'instinct'.

'Downloadables'

Whilst the television company took the lead in the direction of travel for the programme, they very much gave over ownership to the accompanying 'downloadables' to me. These were any resources that could be added to the 'Teachers' TV' website, including weblinks, case studies, relevant books and journals. I felt that I wanted to use these to encourage more teachers to become mentors. To this end I developed several downloadables including:

- An outline of the television programmes
- Why get involved in mentoring students? – this explored the benefits to schools, teachers and children, of having students in schools
- What skills and attributes does a mentor need?
- What does the role of the mentor involve?
- What students say about mentors – for this I canvassed 300 students and asked them what made for a good mentor. A selection of answers were added to the website
- What to do if a teacher is interested in getting involved

Some issues

Development of ideas – as a professional with a background in education, working with people with a television background, we inevitably came to the project from different perspectives. I wanted to get across the role of the mentor, exploring their skills and qualities and what made them become a mentor initially. The television producers were very much concerned with the visual element and the direction of the programme evolved from the earlier idea. It was through

close dialogue that we ensured the essence of the programmes was not lost, although at times communication was not easy.

Communication – this was sometimes a problem as the deadline given to the television company gave little time for planned collaboration as the project progressed. I would often be teaching when they needed to speak to me, so, on occasion, decisions were taken that, at times, I was unaware of.

Selection of students – once the independent television company was given the contract, the time scale was short. This meant that the number of students to consider was limited. At the time, we had second years of our three year QTS course on placement, and our part time post graduate students doing their first two week block placement. I spent a considerable amount of time trying to match up students and schools. This was difficult for several reasons, including the short notice given and the understandable reluctance of some schools or students to appear on television. On several occasions I had a willing mentor, but their student was not, and vice versa. In the end, the students and mentors chosen worked very well and helped to challenge perceptions. In the rural school we used, the mentor was Jude, a 24 year old teacher, whilst her student was Christabel, a thirty something mother of two, with experience as a classroom assistant. On first meeting the pair, it was tempting to think that Christabel was the teacher. The student from the second school was Emma, who, as a 19 year old might be seen as a more ‘typical’ student, but her role as a part time carer for her mother, also challenges perceptions. Hopefully, as well as challenging teachers’ perceptions as to what a typical student teacher might be, these two students might also encourage larger groups of people who might not normally consider teaching as a career to do so, thus widening participation in higher education.

Limited budget – this not only meant that the filming was done quickly, but also that it had to take place in the North West. I had hoped to be able to film from our London campus, as I felt it might give a different perspective. It would have been interesting to have contrasted our rural school, with a large inner city primary, and to have compared the two mentoring experiences, exploring whether they were indeed different.

The issues that arose were not insurmountable and were far outweighed by the benefits.

The students who took part learned the importance of reflecting on practice and, through the process, felt they had a better understanding of where they were and what they needed to do next to develop as teachers. They reported increased confidence and self-esteem.

Students at the University of Cumbria have two programmes to watch. These show what a good mentor does and also demonstrate what they should be doing as students, such as listening to advice, sharing practice and so forth. We were also given the rough video footage of each lesson the students taught. This is proving useful both on the undergraduate and mentor training courses. Students are being encouraged to make use of other ‘Teachers’ TV’ programmes to support their studies, but are learning to critically evaluate and reflect on what they see.

Potential students can be challenged in their views about what makes for a ‘typical teacher’, and hopefully see that ITE is inclusive and may well be for them.

The mentors felt they had learned a great deal from the filming process. They felt they were more aware of the importance of meeting the individual needs of students, and their role in helping them become

reflective practitioners. Through the use of the video footage to analyse the students' lessons, the mentors were also able to reflect on their own practice.

Continuing Professional Development at University of Cumbria - Teachers on initial mentor training courses as part of their CPD, have relevant and useful tailored television programmes on the role of the mentor that they are using to inform their own practice.

Teachers nationally can gain insight into the role of the mentor and decide if they wish to become involved in student support. They can also get an idea about the diverse nature of students.

The author – I have been able to update and improve the initial mentor training courses I run. I have seen the value to the students of the filming process in helping them become reflective practitioners, and it is something I will look into developing with my undergraduate students. The experience of film making was completely new for me, and really challenged and engaged me at every stage.

Unexpected bonus:

Whilst the programmes aired in September 2007, they have been archived into the video library of 'Teachers' TV' and are available for anyone to download and use. One ITE provider plans to use the programmes with their teachers and left a comment on the website: 'Will be excellent to use with ITT mentors – thanks'. It is encouraging to think it has a nation wide audience. The next step is to look at sharing materials and practice with other ITE providers, thus enriching our courses and programmes even further.

Concluding thoughts

This has been a positive and worthwhile experience and one I would consider again. The process could equally be applied to those wishing to make 'tailored' TV programmes for students in ITE or in schools.

Biography

Jane Dixon is a senior lecturer at the University of Cumbria. She has worked in Higher Education for eight years, having previously taught for fifteen years in primary and Early Years. She was a school mentor for several years, and is currently the co-ordinator for primary mentor training at the University. She teaches on undergraduate and postgraduate courses, with a particular interest in Early Years. She enjoys her work as a link tutor, working closely with schools in and around Cumbria.

References

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www.teachers.tv/video/21791
(Margaret mentors Emma)