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**A multinational perspective on aspects of
schooling to which Newly Qualified
Teachers (NQTs) could contribute**

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Abstract

The purpose of this grounded approach study is to provide answers to the research question 'what aspect(s) of schooling could newly qualified teachers contribute to, and why?' Via emails, 22 newly qualified teachers (NQTs) from 10 countries provided answers to the research question. The analysis of the data revealed that NQTs thought attributional, informational and skill and ability based contributions and associated actions and activities could be made to various aspects of schooling. I define attributional contributions as actions and activities in which NQTs engage which are the results of personal qualities/attributes they possess, informational contributions as facts which NQTs share and gain via experience and/or initial teacher education and training, and skill and ability based contributions as school-based activities in which NQTs engage based on personal skills, abilities and interests. Examples of implications of the findings for policy and practice include schools' leadership teams re-examining their views on the use of NQTs and the need to reduce negative human dynamics which prevent NQTs from being recognised and used.

Keywords

NQTs; beginning teachers; international teachers; schools; newly qualified teachers; induction; contributions; attributes; informational; skills; ability; transnational.

Introduction

In teaching, where having experience is admired, newly qualified teachers (NQTs)—those considered 'less experience'—and their potential to contribute to various aspects of schooling can be, and to some extent have been, overlooked and even undervalued. Ulvik and Langørgen (2012) made the point that although NQTs gave fresh ideas or perspectives on various aspects of schooling, these were not utilised in any way. This seeming undervaluing of NQTs is exacerbated by the apparent lack of focus by researchers on their potential to contribute to various aspects of schooling. This is so as the bulk of research on beginning teachers often focuses on problems they encounter and little on their potential contributions and the positives they experience. Resulting from this research focus is a plethora of sources and resources aimed at getting NQTs and their mentors 'safely' through the one-year induction period.

In light of these considerations, the purpose of this grounded approach study is to provide answers to the research question 'what aspect(s) of schooling could newly qualified teachers contribute to, and why?' Via emails, 22 newly qualified teachers (NQTs) from 10 countries provided answers to the research question.

The countries are: Australia, Belize, Canada, Cayman Islands, China, Cyprus, England, Greece, Jamaica and the USA. The analysis of the data was used to ascertain categories under which NQTs' contributions could be grouped, aspects of schooling to which contributions could be made and reasons for NQTs' actions and activities. The importance of my paper rests in the fact that firstly, it presents a broader understanding of aspects of schooling to which NQTs are able to contribute. For example, Ulvik and Langørgen (2012), which I discuss in the literature review,

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focused on an examination of a number of issues from the perspective of NQTs and their mentors in upper Secondary Schools in Norway. My paper expands their idea of the potential contributions that NQTs could make to schooling by exploring the views of 22 NQTs from 10 countries thus allowing the findings to be relatively general. Secondly, my paper aids in filling a literary gap and adds to the supporting literature by presenting a relatively comprehensive list of areas of schooling to which NQTs are able to contribute. Thus it becomes a source of reference for school personnel such as head teachers and mentors of NQTs who may be interested in using NQTs to improve various aspects of schooling. Thirdly, the paper discusses implications of the findings for practice and policy, areas that also may be of interest to school personnel and mentors.

Before I outline the study carried out, I will engage in a succinct initial examination of the literature to introduce readers to the writings and thoughts that are pertinent to the study. The review highlights NQTs' personal qualities or attributes, their skills and ability and the information they possess as central to their contribution to various aspects of schooling. These are succinctly discussed here and elaborated on later in the findings and discussion section of the paper. Given the grounded theory methodology used and explained in the methodology section below, additional literature will be reviewed. This will be based on categories emerging from the data analysis process. This succinct initial literary examination is also used to support the findings presented in this paper.

Literature review

As indicated in the foregoing discussion there is a plethora of sources and resources aimed at getting NQTs and their mentors 'safely' through the one-year induction period. There is however little on NQTs' potential to contribute to schooling. The study by Bigger, Blow, and Furey (2006), though not about NQTs and their potential to contribute, but on encouraging the use of evidence to inform practice among teachers early in their careers, sheds some light on the topic. The writers highlight strengths that NQTs take to schools. These are personal qualities such as relationships building, hard work, freshness and enthusiasm, and skills and ability such as planning with particular curriculum expertise. Muijs, Chapman, and Armstrong (2013), quoting a middle manager in their study on the extent to which early career teachers can take on teacher leadership roles, state that NQTs bring personal qualities to leading such as commitment, enthusiasm and intelligence. As will be shown later, it is via the actions and activities that result from personal qualities that NQTs contribute to schooling and it is via using skills and ability such as planning and expertise in the curriculum that they also contribute to schooling.

Specifically addressing the idea of contributions that NQTs made to schools Bigger et al (2006), highlight various extra-curricular activities. This includes a trip to France, a trip to the pantomime and introducing a pen-pal scheme. Muijs et al (2013), speaking of NQTs, highlight that a middle manager stated that NQTs contributed to schooling by offering leadership in organising out-of-school activities, such as trips to businesses and enrichment activities. The place and value of extra-curricular activities in schools is well documented. For example, the study of Mahoney and Cairns (1997) found that, for students who had a weak connection with a school and its values, participating in a single extracurricular activity provides an opportunity for them to create a positive bond with the school.

Another area of schooling that NQTs in Bigger et al.'s (2006) study state they contribute to, is in leading and sharing information in staff development sessions in an area of their expertise. In other words, they were able to contribute information. Adoniou (2015) pointed out that an NQT in her study on the challenges beginning teachers face in schooling contexts highlights the fact her university education gave her more up-to-date approaches which she shares with others in

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the school. It is however likely that the kind of information or knowledge being shared is what Fenstermacher (1994) describes as the ‘formal knowledge of teaching’—that is, knowledge generated by educational researchers and not ‘practical knowledge of teaching’—that is, knowledge generated by teachers as a result of their experience in the classroom. The important thing to note from this succinct initial examination of literature is the fact that NQTs are able to make contributions to various aspects of schooling.

The Study

Methodology

This study set out to ascertain aspects of schooling to which NQTs in a number of countries are able to contribute. In this regard, it was concerned with accessing people’s experience and opinions to aid in making relatively general statements which could be relevant to many countries. In light of this, the research tradition that best suited this research aim was the ‘Grounded Theory Approach’ (Glaser & Strauss 1967 and Glaser 1978). This is so for the main aim of this study was to develop relatively general statements about the research area grounded in the opinion of the participants. Glaser & Strauss (1967) and Glaser (1978) argued that one advantage of applying a grounded approach was that it facilitated the development of theory from the data collected. Milliken (2010) also made the point that a grounded approach is useful when investigating social processes that have attracted little prior research and where previous research is lacking in breadth. Little prior research and previous research lacking in breadth are areas which concern this study and are points raised and used in the foregoing discussion to justify the need for this study. Having said this, this study does not stick slavishly to the procedure advocated by the originators of the Grounded Theory Approach (Glaser & Strauss 1967 and Glaser 1978) but follows their general principles (Robson, 2007). For example, I did not—as required by those who stick closely to grounded theory development in its purest form—extricate from the analysis process, personal thoughts, things I read about the area being investigated, and my thoughts about the main research concern. This position is also supported by LaRossa, (2005) who made the point that the Grounded Theory Approach is designed to be changed, moulded and used appropriately for each individual’s need and there is not a prescribed set of rules to follow.

Participants and ethical concern

Table 1. The table displays the number of NQT participants and countries they represent.

NQTs Countries	Number of NQT participants
1. Australia	1
2. Belize	1
3. Canada	2
4. Cayman Islands	4
5. China	1
6. Cyprus	2
7. England	3
8. Greece	2
9. Jamaica	3

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10. USA	3
Total	22

Using purposeful convenience or opportunity sampling, participants who were friends and colleagues in my 'social network' were invited via email to participate. In the email they were told their names and that of the institutions in which they worked would remain anonymous. This was adhered to, for (as displayed later), they are referred to according to the country they represent. For example, Canada NQT, England NQT and Belize NQT. No mention is made of the institutions in which they were employed. The main ethical concern however, was to ensure that my friends and colleagues did not create responses that conformed to my expectation. To preclude this, I did not engage them in any discussion regarding possible responses to the research question.

Being NQTs or beginning teachers, I considered them 'information-rich'. Guba and Lincoln (1998) state that 'information-rich participants' are able to provide insight into the issue of importance to any study. An examination of the findings in this paper and the responses of the participants will reveal that they provided relevant and unique perspectives on the research issues. This led to the identification of categories under which NQTs contributions could be grouped, aspects of schooling to which contributions could be made, and reasons for their actions and activities.

Data Collection

As indicated in the foregoing discussion emails were sent to participants asking them to respond to the following research question: 'what aspect(s) of schooling could newly qualified teachers contribute to, and why?' They were given four weeks in which to respond in writing. I received a total of 22 responses and their responses to the question were analysed to reveal categories under which NQTs' contributions could be grouped, aspects of schooling to which contributions could be made, and reasons for their actions and activities. This suggests reasonable reliability of the data collection method because a number of participants were asked the same question and all provided relevant responses used to achieve the aim of the study.

Data Analysis

Given the focus of the study, I analysed the responses to the research question using the Nvivo computer software. By reading and rereading the responses and using my own judgment and experience to make sense of the answers, I categorised the responses. Categories were mainly words and phrases which I thought condensed and expressed the essence of the given responses. For example, responses include words and phrases such as energy, drive, enthusiasm, competence, zest, open-mindedness and eager. Based on these, I invented and defined the category 'attributional contributions'. Responses also included phrases such as involvement in extracurricular activities and clubs, fundraising activities, events planning, and demonstrating new approaches or techniques. Based on these, I invented and defined the category 'skill and ability based contributions'. The frequent use of words and phrases such as knowledge, ideas, contemporary ideas, knowledge of the new curriculum in England, subject content knowledge, knowledge of new teaching assessment strategy new teaching methodologies and technology gave rise to the category 'Informational contributions'. These were used to reveal categories under which NQTs contributions could be grouped, aspects of schooling to which contributions could be made and reasons for NQTs actions and activities.

Findings and Discussion

Throughout this section, key findings are italicised for ease of reference. Given the grounded nature of the study— in addition to the initial literature review— other literary sources are

consulted and included.

The analysis of the data points to the fact that NQTs' contributions to various aspects of schooling can be categorised as Attributional, Informational and Skill and Ability based.

Actions, activities and abilities which reflect these categories are ones they purport to possess and engage in. These categories (Attributional, Informational and Skill and Ability based) are used as headings to guide this section of the paper.

Attributional contributions

I define attributional contributions as actions and activities resulting from NQTs' personal attributes. It is by engaging in these actions and activities resulting from personal qualities that they contribute not only to improving own teaching but, more importantly, students' learning and the teaching-learning dynamics occurring in schools, which include lesson planning, implementation and evaluation (Bigger et al 2006). Goldhaber (2006) argues that personal attributes account for 97% of what makes teachers effective. He refers to these as elusive qualities because they are not easily quantified but, nonetheless, indispensable to teacher effectiveness. Strong (2011) reminds us that any discussion of teacher effectiveness must take into account personal attributes or what the writer refers to as the personal or psychological qualities of a teacher. He concludes this based on a number of relatively large-scale studies polling teachers and students' understanding of what constitutes an effective teacher.

In response to the research question, seventeen of twenty-two, i.e. 77% of participants, made reference to personal attributes associated with teachers.

The data analysis reveals possessing these personal qualities as a very important reason for NQTs' actions and activities. This is so because personal qualities act as catalysts for their actions and activities which they use to impact various aspects of schooling. For example, personal qualities, such as being willing and eager, result in NQTs listening to and learning from constructive criticism and using these to improve their own teaching and activities. This includes trying a new teaching method, behaviour management strategy or a new arrangement of the classroom furniture (China NQT and Cayman NQT3).

As a newly qualified teacher, I listen to different comments or even judgement so as to make an improvement on my teaching. I am always willing to learn and try new teaching methods... I think new teachers are willing to spend time on trying different methods of teaching...' (China NQT).

'I think NQTs are more willing to try new things in their classrooms, whether it be a teaching method, behaviour management strategy, or a way of physically arranging the room' (Cayman NQT3).

The attributes of being willing and eager are also thought to be attractive and sought after by principals in Australia because principals there love the fact that NQTs with these qualities are open to suggestions and can be moulded and are flexible (Australia NQT). Additionally, participants suggest that these attributes have also led to NQTs taking on tasks that others may not want to, such as addressing the needs of a 'child with a problem'. In addition to being willing and eager, the data analysis also reveals the following: displaying energy, enthusiasm, fresh thinking, zest and drive, as NQTs' personal attributes. These result in action and activities such as: greater effort in lesson preparation and implementation; assessing students in a variety of ways; encouraging others to re-examine the school system; encouraging a healthy attitude towards learning and engaging in various aspects of schooling (USA NQT2, Cyprus NQT2 and

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Greece NQT1). Finally, the analysis also suggests being innovative and creative are also personal qualities associated with NQTs and result in the use of new teaching philosophic ideas in the classroom and achieving lesson objectives in unconventional ways.

As our society develops and advances in education are made, our newest teachers have more innovative ideas available to them in their educator programmes. For example, as someone who has recently completed a programme in Art Education, I was made aware of and interested in the philosophy of TAB (Teaching for Artistic Behaviours) or choice-based art education' (USA NQT1).

The fact that 77% of the participants highlight actions and activities categorised as attributional contributions and resulting from their personal attributes suggests the impact that NQTs' personal qualities have on various aspects of schooling. This conclusion is also supported by literature which highlights the importance and centrality of personal attributes to effective teachers and teaching. For example, Ulvik and Langørgen's (2012) study of NQTs offered the idea of being enthusiastic as an attribute that NQTs thought they possessed. This led to the contribution of new ideas about various aspects of schooling. This is also a point raised by participants in my study. In light of these, the admonition given by Phillips (2002) is important. Speaking specifically of the Canadian K-12 public education context, he emphasises the fact that since research shows that teacher effectiveness which includes personal qualities such as aptitude, commitment and the ability to reflect is important to students' achievement, it is imperative that all who are involved in that sector aid teachers, and I will add NQTs, to develop these and other qualities and this should become a priority.

Informational contributions

Informational contributions are facts available from NQTs, based on knowledge gained via experience and/or initial teacher education and training. The study of Bigger et al (2006) supports this idea for NQTs in their study contributed information via staff-development days and seminars. This was also true of an NQT in the study of Adoniou, 2015. Fourteen of twenty-two, i.e. 64%, of this study's participants made reference to various aspects of informational contributions. *They are of the opinion that they can contribute information regarding relevant research, theory and contemporary educational ideas; new curriculum, curriculum innovations and learning and teaching; subject content and new teaching and assessment and new teaching methodologies and technology.* For example, speaking of knowledge of relevant research, theory and contemporary educational ideas, an NQT stated.

Good question. I would say, I felt like I am abreast of the most up to date research being done in the field...They [NQTs] should be knowledgeable about new findings and practices in their field.' (England NQT2).

The reasons NQTs suggest they could contribute information to schooling is their education and training in new teaching and assessment methods, teaching philosophy and technologies. The kind of informational contributions which could be made by NQTs and highlighted by participants in this study, is what Fenstermacher (1994) describes as the 'formal knowledge of teaching'. This is knowledge gained through courses in initial teacher education programmes. It is not surprising that NQTs would highlight 'formal knowledge of teaching' as an area where they could contribute to schooling, for they are more likely to be up-to-date in this area. However, in my pursuit of thoroughness, I must also highlight the fact that the literature is not silent in pointing out that 'formal knowledge of teaching' seems to be less recognised in school contexts. For example, the works of Schön (1983 and 1987) bring to the fore the idea that professional

educators rarely simply apply theory to their practice. While 'formal knowledge of teaching' does play a part, this is not the sole determinant of teachers' action in any given classroom situation. Additionally, a search of the British Education Index, Australian Education Index and ERIC, reveal over 122 articles with the phrase 'practical knowledge' in titles, and numerous others with the phrase in-texts. This occurrence highlights the importance surrounding teachers' practical knowledge as an area of research and not formal knowledge of teaching.

Skill and Ability based contributions

Skill and ability based contributions are actions and activities to which NQTs could be involved based on talents, learned skills and/or personal interests. Twenty of twenty-two, i.e. 90% of the participants, in their response to the research question made reference to various aspects of skill and ability based contributions to schooling. This high number emphasises the importance placed on this area of contributions by participants. *A skill and ability based contribution frequently cited by participants is involvement in extracurricular activities/clubs and technology. Further analysis of responses reveals that participants thought an important reason for NQTs' involvement in these areas is the seeming benefit that students derived from having these encounters and experiences.* For example, Belize NQT made the point that involving students in clubs aid in their social, mental, emotional and physical development. These ideas are supported by literature in which extra-curricular activities in schools have been linked with reducing students' dropout rate between grades 7- 12 especially for students at risk. For example, the study of Mahoney and Cairns (1997) found that—for students who had a weak connection with a school and its values—participating in a single extracurricular activity provides an opportunity for them to create a positive bond with the school. This observation is also supported by Guèvremont, Findlay and Kohen (2014) who state in their study of organised extracurricular activities for Canadian youths, that participation in extracurricular activities, regardless of context, encourage positive youth development. Extracurricular activities are also associated with improving students' learning in the formal classroom setting and in addressing various adolescent issues (Eccles, Barber, Stone and Hunt, 2003).

Another skill and ability based contribution acknowledged by participants is demonstrating new approaches/techniques. This is unsurprising based on the fact that NQTs are fresh out of a teaching course. This means that they have been exposed to the most recent teaching methodologies, classroom management techniques and/or resources (new books and the use of technology) and therefore would be practising these in their new teaching positions.

'First of all, the fact that they are fresh out of a teaching course means that they have been exposed to the most recent teaching methodologies, classroom management techniques and/or resources (new books and the use of technology). This means that this is something that they will be practising in their new teaching positions' (Greece NQT2).

Other ways NQTs said they could contribute is by engaging in student-centred teaching, learning and assessment activities, student support and involvement in school improvement and school systemic changes. Of all these ways in which participants state they could contribute, two seem to dominate responses. These are the ability to contribute student centred-teaching, learning and assessment activities and student support. This is so because responses are replete with reference to students and their active involvement in their own learning. For example, designing teaching episodes with students' interests in mind, learning with students and utilising a variety of assessment methods to meet students' learning needs and styles.

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New teachers could contribute to motivating students, design new materials, make the lesson more student centred rather than traditional, and integrate students into the decision-making process as well' (Cyprus NQT1).

This espoused view by the participants that students' learning needs ought to be the main goal of the teaching-learning dynamic has been the focus of researchers and research literature of recent times which may have influenced the education and training they received. Boxill (2013), while commending teachers and the Ontario Ministry of Education for recognising that a 'one size fits all' teaching and curriculum model is no longer adequate, encourages them to do more to actualise student centred learning in the public school system. This espoused view has also led to the development of new techniques and approaches to encourage students' learning and to enable them to be fully involved in their own learning. The present approach to achieving this, and that which dominates the literature, is referred to as the constructivist approach, where students are encouraged to actively engage in their own learning (Doğru, and Kalender 2007 and Kim 2005) and the teaching technique, differentiated instruction (Minott, 2009) with the fundamental doctrine that the curriculum or lesson content, process, product and classroom environment must be modified or adapted to students' needs, interest and learning styles (Fattig, & Taylor, 2008, van Garderen and Whittaker, 2006 & Levy, 2008).

The other area in which they could contribute is that of engaging in student support activities. The need to offer support to students with various needs have occupied the thinking of researchers over the years and resulted in the implementation of strategies and ways of categorising needs. Among those who address students' needs are school counsellors whose role is to advise and guide students in a number of areas including the development of personal/social competencies. The ability to counsel and guide students is invaluable and integral to schooling. This is reflected in the fact that some teacher education and training programmes offer modules in guidance and counselling to trainees; schools employ individuals to specifically engage in giving advice to students (Harris 2014) and, having a teaching certificate is a mandatory prerequisite for entry to school counsellors' training in all 10 Canadian provinces (Canadian Counsellors and Psychotherapy Association 2012). This is also an area that one participant highlighted where NQTs are able to contribute, based on training in guidance and counselling received via teacher education programmes.

I also think that NQTs could have a great impact on counselling and mentoring students as they can be someone the students relate and look up to' (Cayman NQT1).

One important aspect of the role of the school counsellor and teacher who gives counsel is to guide students on personal/social issues (Campbell and Dahir, 1997 and Foster, Young and Hermann 2005). This may include the need to be familiar with student subculture, which is a facet of their social network. Accomplishing this enables the school counsellor and or teacher who counsels to remain relevant to the young person he or she is to advise. *Reasons for suggesting that NQTs could make the skill and ability based contributions listed and discussed include: youthfulness, interests and expertise of NQTs in areas that usually form the core of extracurricular activities and the opportunity to act as role models for students; the fact that NQTs may have the time to invest in such roles given the fact that they may not have responsibility for their own children; NQTs minds are fresh and they tend to have interesting and excellent ideas and students tend to 'open up' to those who are closer in age and are familiar with such things as new technologies.* What then are the implications of these findings for schooling? The next section of this paper provides answers to this question.

Implications of the findings for practice and policy in schools

Firstly, NQTs have much to contribute to various aspects of schooling, primarily in the teaching learning-dynamics. This paper provides an additional source of reference which highlights specific areas to which they are able to contribute. However—and as indicated in the foregoing discussion—they seem to be an under-utilised group. Ulvik and Langørgen (2012) in their study suggest the busy nature of schools as a probable reason. In such situations, NQTs being utilised is viewed as adding to an already busy school and not as contributing to making life easier for everyone involved. Some Canadian NQTs, however, appreciate being able to have an input in divisional and school-related initiatives and to offer leadership and ‘not just be looked at as people occupying classrooms’ (Cherubini, 2007). However, if they are to be fully utilised, it is imperative that schools’ leadership teams re-examine their views on the use of NQTs and to see them as important resources for improving various aspects of schooling.

Secondly, I can infer from the data presented in this study that NQTs' ability to contribute in the three areas highlighted (Attributional, Informational and Skill and Ability based) may be detrimental to their being able to contribute. This is so because one cannot rule out the influence of negative human dynamics—envy, jealousy, jadedness and the power to engage in subversive activities—which prevent NQTs, the newcomers, from being recognised and used. Having said this, I must quickly point out that the reasons behind their under-utilisation are many, varied and complex, therefore this warrants further investigation if finding a definitive cause is desirable.

Thirdly, the use of NQTs to contribute to various aspects of schooling will not happen consistently without constructing and implementing appropriate policies to not only enable their contributions but protect them from potential abuse. This is important for they are still engaged in 'training' during the induction year, which must be successfully completed, hence their 'training' should be seen as a priority for all involved.

Finally, from a research perspective and as a guide for policies and frameworks developed and/or adapted to enable contributions and protect NQTs, there must be an appropriate and well-argued epistemology. This position should articulate the nature and kind of knowledge that NQTs are able to contribute to various aspects of schooling and that from which schools could benefit.

Conclusion

The overall aim of this study was achieved. This is so because via the main research question—what aspect(s) of schooling could newly qualified teachers contribute to and why?— categories under which NQTs' contributions were grouped, aspects of schooling to which contributions could be made and reasons for NQTs' actions and activities were discussed and highlighted.

The data reveal possessing personal qualities as a very important reason for NQTs' actions and activities. This is so because personal qualities act as catalysts for their actions and activities which they use to impact various aspects of schooling. Participants made reference to various aspects of informational contributions. They are of the opinion that they can contribute information in a variety of areas related to schools. The reasons NQTs suggest they could contribute information to schooling is their education and training.

A skill and ability based contribution frequently cited by participants is involvement in extracurricular activities/clubs and technology. An important reason for NQTs' involvement in these areas is the seeming benefit that students derived from having these encounters and experiences. Other skill and ability based contributions acknowledged include demonstrating

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new approaches/techniques; engaging in student-centred teaching, learning and assessment activities and student support. Reasons for suggesting that NQTs could make these skill and ability based contributions include: youthfulness, interests and expertise of NQTs in areas that usually form the core of extracurricular activities.

Additionally, these findings present a broader understanding of and a relatively comprehensive list of areas of schooling to which NQTs are able to contribute. Thus, this paper becomes a source of reference for school personnel such as head teachers and mentors of NQTs who may be interested in using NQTs to improve various aspects of schooling.

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