

Report from Professional Dialogue Seminar

held at University of Warwick on 28 March 2012

A Professional Dialogue seminar was held at the University of Warwick on Friday 28 March 2012. The seminar was supported by the Institute for Learning (IfL), ACETT (Association of Centres for Excellence in Teacher Training) and the HEI Forum. The Forum is a partnership of the Higher Education Institutions offering initial teacher training (ITT) programmes (further and higher) in the West Midlands area. They are the Universities of Wolverhampton, Warwick, Staffordshire, Worcester and Birmingham City.

The target audience for the seminar was Teacher Educators from the Forum universities and their partnership colleges. Its aim was the sharing of good practice across the West Midlands ITT teams and exchanging ideas on topics of educational interest.

Fergus McKay, Director of WMCETT, opened the seminar and the day was then divided into two workshops, one in the morning on 'Developing writing and thinking skills in ITT programmes' and one in the afternoon on 'Challenging Behaviour: from control to learning'. Each of the workshops started with a presentation from a specialist speaker on the subject and was followed by professional discussion in seminar groups to offer teacher educators the opportunity to share ideas and good practice.

The day was valued by teacher educators in both college and university ITT teams with the main benefits given as: *'Excellent dialogue, ideas and strategies for myself and my trainees'* and *'The combination of input from speakers and the chance to discuss examples from practice gave the opportunity to share practice with others and focus on key issues'*.

This report is a collation of the ideas from the day and is by no means a complete picture of all the interesting and stimulating discussion which took place. It is written to share the key points across the Forum partnership.

Developing writing and thinking skills in ITT programmes

Elaine Goodall, the Manager of the Essential Skills Professional Development Centre and Acting Director of ITT for the University of Warwick Certificate and Diploma in Lifelong Learning Programmes, opened the session on developing writing and thinking skills in ITT programmes. Elaine discussed ideas around the concept of critical thinking. She led the teacher educators through ways to help trainees understand and structure their thinking using a problem-solving framework. Feedback from one participant on what they had gained from this was *'development of critical thinking of learners in an interactive way which empowers the learner. Providing a structure with clear ideas supports the initial process of critical thinking'*.



Elaine then shared ways of helping trainees understand and develop reflective writing skills using the 'text, sentence, word' method to show different kinds of writing. Teacher Educators participated in examples, activities and resources and these were appreciated by participants. One comment on this part of the session was that *'encouraging learners to see a structure using the text/sentence/word approach will make it more inclusive'*

Following the input, teacher educators went into small seminar groups where they shared issues around supporting different types of trainees and the strategies they use in their practice. Discussion in the groups was stimulating and thoughtful with teacher educators talking about the difficulties of supporting less academic trainees to write assignments to the required

level. The teaching practice, subject knowledge and ability of trainees to reflect on their practice post-observation was discussed and generally agreed not to be an issue. Strategies to enable trainees to reflect on different perspectives about learning and communication were explored and shared, with the following given particular mention: using De Bono's 6 hats to show different ways of thinking; a resource by Jenny Moon (on the Jim Crawley site) involving reading different accounts of an incident to explore reflective and non-reflective writing; Kolb – making cards for each stage with prompt questions to encourage structure and speculative thinking; and Joy Amulya's article on reflective practice. A number of activities from their own practice were also shared.

Teacher Educators were intending to use a number of the strategies and activities from the seminar in their own practice. They also mentioned the following points: the importance of inclusivity in activities and encouraging learners to take responsibility for their own learning and skills and reflecting on why some trainees found spoken reflection easier than written reflection and developing strategies to help them with assignment writing.

Challenging Behaviour: from control to learning

The afternoon session was opened by Carl Emery from Manchester University. Carl is a writer and lecturer in social and emotional wellbeing/conflict resolution and his presentation explored the concepts of control, consensus and chaos and how to support trainees to build relationships with their learners.

Carl looked at strategies for building common ground, peer support, group work and role models and discussed the way these could be used in different circumstances. Strategies included sharing common experiences and locations, different ways to work with and manage difficult groups, how to rescue a difficult group and using creative group activities.

His presentation and activities are on the WMCETT website at:
<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/study/cll/othercourses/wmcett/researchprojects/profdialogue2012/>



Discussion in the professional dialogue groups looked at how teacher educators managed the subject of behaviour management within their curriculum and issues around time for this topic. The importance of helping trainees recognise where they are on a sliding scale from control to consensus and the impact this has on their learners was explored. The advantages to trainees of observing a number of different types of groups and consideration of triggers to bad behaviour and strategies for resolving them were also looked at, as was giving trainee teachers the confidence to try out different techniques and share back their experiences openly.

Areas that teacher educators were taking back to their teams for further discussion were around control and relationship-building, including clarifying the idea of control/consensus/chaos and the expected outcomes for these approaches; helping trainees to explore the idea of what constitutes 'control' and whether it is a positive characteristic for effective learning; the importance of creating common ground and building a relationship with learners and using this to create an atmosphere in which people can learn.

The psychology of classroom management was also an area for further thought as were strategies and purposes for effective group work and how it can be used effectively in classroom management. Discussion around the skills needed for group work, what makes it successful and how to incorporate training of this into the curriculum were also areas participants mentioned. The idea that trying something challenging is part of our role as Teacher Educators and it is OK to 'allow' chaos was also being explored.

Resources and activities were welcomed from both the speaker and those shared from seminar discussion. Particular mention was given to: strategies for icebreakers and establishing 'common ground'; Diamond Nine activities; Disperse and share technique for a failing group; challenging behaviour activities; and using peer observations of good group management to share good practice.

The day was very successful and had positive feedback from participants who commented '*excellent day, great professional dialogue*' '*a very reflective CPD event – appropriate length and combination of activities and subject content*' and '*thank you, this was a particularly useful seminar*'.