

# *Revamping Teacher Education*

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I am very grateful to Sir John Daniel and the Commonwealth of Learning for inviting me to talk to you about 'Revamping Teacher Education', one of the themes that we are considering at this conference.

About ten weeks ago, the initial teacher education team at the UK Open University had the results of an independent inspection of our course in Northern Ireland. I am proud to tell you that the course attained the inspection grade of 'Outstanding'. It was the only teacher education course in Northern Ireland to achieve that highest grade, even though some of the other face-to-face courses have been in existence for very many years. I say this not to boast about The Open University's achievements, but to illustrate that – in certain circumstances such as professional learning – Open and Distance Learning is not just as good as other methods, it is better. Sometimes, Open Learning is looked on as second best, some say 'if only we could afford to build more face-to-face institutions we would, but as we cannot we'll just have to suffer Open Universities'. Our experience is that for professional learning at least, the principles of open learning that we have worked at and developed at the Open University have been successful in contexts as different as Albania, Egypt, South Africa and California and with teachers from Iraq. We are not alone; the wider student satisfaction surveys in countries such as The Netherlands, Canada as well as the United Kingdom also show that in many cases Open Learning takes the lead in the way that it is valued by students. I'll return to this point later.

This is a picture of a class that I observed in Bangladesh. I was visiting this riverside school unannounced and fell into conversation with the Head Teacher who told me about the numbers of pupils on roll, the numbers of classes at the school and the number of shifts for each day. My mental calculation worked out that this class should have 50 pupils – as you can see there are just 5. Why is that? Why are the pupils not coming to school? My research and that of my colleagues would suggest that there are four reasons. Poverty is often given as a principal reason, and I am sure that is an element – extra pairs of hands are needed at crucial times such as harvest, and to look after younger siblings at home so that parents can work. But I think this is not the only, nor is it the major reason. Probably more significant is that much of the school curriculum is irrelevant; the assessment regime is one that tests simple recall rather than processes that are useful; and – it must be said – the teaching is often uninspiring and too often teachers use corporal punishment. If we are to revamp teacher education, we need to be very aware of the realities of the current situation, the needs of pupils and the current context of pupils' lives. Before I move on, I want to stress that these points are not confined to Bangladesh or other relatively poor

countries. In the UK too, for example, many 14-19 students also question the relevance of the over-academic curriculum that is on offer and ‘vote with their feet’.

I would like you to consider the ‘cloth’ of the teachers’ school life experience and consequently their professional development needs - and in particular the *warp* of the pupils’ needs and the way they need to be considered, combined with the *weft* of aspects of teacher professional development. Both are important and inter-related and together make the ‘cloth’. The relevance or otherwise of what is taught, the grip of the examination system on *how* that is taught and what is considered important to learn, and the out-of-school life experiences of the pupils all impact on teachers and well as the pupils themselves. Looking in the other direction – Teacher Knowledge & Support; The need for Flexibility of provision; and the requirement to take account of an individual teacher’s particular Local Needs is paramount. In my metaphor, the *warp* and *weft* form the ‘cloth of school-based professional development’. Let’s look first in detail at Professional Knowledge and Support.

Some colleagues and I constructed this model of teacher professional development at the UK Open University a few years ago. The diagram has drawn from our own experience of professional development with teachers as well as reviews of the literature. As you can see, we think that all teachers need to keep in mind and develop their Subject Knowledge, to review and adapt to new classroom pedagogies (Pedagogical Knowledge) and also develop what we have called ‘School Knowledge’ – a knowledge of the way a subject plays out in the school environment and what – as a school subject – is valued. For example, the listening and speaking skills of learning English may be important, but if they are never assessed by the examination system, teachers need to be aware of that. At the centre of the diagram, however, is the Values of the teacher and their personal view of the nature of the subjects that they teach. A teacher will draw on their Subject knowledge, Pedagogical Knowledge and School Knowledge according to the values that they hold and those values have a profound influence on their view of the learner and how to respond to their learning needs.

As important as teacher knowledge is the support that will help a teacher reflect on their practice and enable them to try out new teaching strategies. This is a picture of people at Delhi University who are involved in the MINDS (Mentoring in Delhi Schools) Project. This is a peer-mentoring project where two teachers work together observing each other’s lessons and discussing and developing practice. The MINDS approach is non- hierarchical – experienced and less experienced teachers might work as a mentoring pair but without any implication that the experienced teacher is necessarily coaching the less experienced. The success of the project has been in the extent to which mutual support for changing practice has been possible.

These two teachers from the same school are similarly working in pairs in an English teaching project in Bangladesh called ‘English in Action’. As they work together to try out new teaching strategies they rely on each other for support and fresh ideas. In both Bangladesh and in Delhi, the conversations between the teachers engage other teachers in the school, and so contribute to wider school improvement.

Let’s now consider Flexibility. When people discuss the benefits of Open Learning, they often mention flexibility in terms ‘anytime, anywhere’ learning. Teachers need not leave their lessons for so long, nor need they be away from home or a source of second income that is so necessary in many parts of the world. All of that is true, but it is *not* what I want to stress by considering ‘flexibility’.

This is a teacher in Vietnam. I should say that he is probably the best teacher I have ever seen – and in my time I have been privileged to observe a number of very good teachers. As you can see, he is working with the different groups of pupils who are playing a game involving a set of cards and those that are

successful putting their hands on their heads. The children are fully engaged, working hard and enjoying the experience. Significantly, this teacher is doing work in this classroom. His professional development is School Based – and I think this flexibility is central to the success of Open Learning for professional development; the learning takes *place in the work context*. Programmes that remove a teacher from the classroom to a centre for two or three weeks – gives them the ‘training’ - and then says ‘Right, you are trained, now go and apply it in the classroom!’ just don’t work. They are expensive, and they *don’t work*. Much more successful for professional development is activity that requires a teacher - or even better a pair of teachers - to follow a course in their own classroom, try out something new, and then meet up for local teacher cluster meetings to discuss how well it went. It is a very successful model to encourage teacher profession change. I suspect it is similarly successful for other professional contexts such as for nurses or lawyers, but my experience is only with teachers. So what techniques and strategies would enhance this school-based approach?

This picture shows teachers in the Eastern Cape in South Africa taken by my colleague Tom Power who worked on DEEP - Digital Enhanced Education Project. As you see, these teachers have a hand-held device. The picture was taken almost ten years ago and the teacher could carry around with them their course on the device. It was a course in their pocket, safely in their pocket. They could look at classroom ideas on the bus or ‘taxi’ on the way home and, as it was in their pocket, they could become very familiar with it. It was not a suit of desk-top computers locked up in a room where only the Head Teacher had the key. It was available for every day use.

The ideas developed in Eastern Cape have been applied to the large English teaching project in Bangladesh – English in Action. Teachers receive an iPod and a set of battery-powered speakers for their classroom. They similarly have their course in their pocket and – just like their mobile phone (all teachers have a cell phone!) they find it easy to use and charge up – even in very rural areas. The easy access to hearing English spoken, their ability to repeat and so practice pronunciation, and the resources that they can use in their class has transformed their teaching of English. From a position where few pupils spoke English in a lesson at all, now over 25% of the time in lessons are used for pupils speaking and the use of English teacher-to-pupil and pupil-to-pupil is now vastly increased. It is school based, flexible in use and the pedagogical change is supported by their colleague.

Of course iPods are quite expensive.

You probably recognise this tablet computer that was launched here in India a few months ago, which should cost about 35 dollars or 1500 rupees. I have been talking about the coming of the cheap computer for some years, saying that I was waiting for the Chinese to produce one. I was wrong – the prize has gone to India! This cheap access to the ‘course in your pocket’ promoting school-based professional development and backed up by peer-mentoring with locally based teacher support groups will, I believe, transform teacher development.

And finally, what about local needs? How can a teacher professional development programme cater for the particular needs of the individual teacher?

Many of you here will know about the TESSA (Teacher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa) project. Here a consortium of 20 institutions across 12 countries have come together to produce free Open Educational Resources. Following an agreed template, and so a common quality framework, they have worked as a course team to develop a pan-African set of teacher development resources. But then each country has taken these common high quality materials and adapted them for their own local context. There are now materials in French, Arabic and Kiswahili as well as English. Some materials have been adapted to suit

the constraints of a particular national curriculum, and case studies have been adjusted to use names and contexts appropriate to the different countries. So far over 300 000 teachers have engaged with the TESSA materials and the number is set to reach about half million by the end of next year. The materials are local to the needs of teachers but generated to an international level of quality, as is exemplified by the TESSA programme winning the Queen's Award for Higher Education in 2009.

And what about India? With the implementation of the Right to Education Act, it is estimated that about 1.2 million more teachers are needed to fill current vacancies and to achieve the revised teacher-pupil ratio. And if one includes those teachers currently working but untrained, the need grows to millions more teachers in need of professional development. How can it be done? A TESSA-like programme is surely part of the answer. A collaboration of teacher education institutions across India jointly developing and sharing free education resources that all can use, adapt and localise so that teachers can have appropriate targeted professional development tailored to their local particular needs and of a high quality is an approach that should be considered.

Let's return to Bangladesh where teachers have had some school-based target professional development but also to a different school context. This is a picture of pupils at the Under Privileged Children's Programme, know as UCEP. All these are working children who can only come to school for three hours a day as they work to support themselves and their families in trades such as hawking flowers, breaking bricks or even – if they are strong enough- pedalling bike rickshaws. They come to school at about the age of 12 for an accelerated primary course and then highly vocational training in a trade school – and then they are guaranteed a job. Let's look again at the school experience of these pupils. Poverty? Well certainly that, they are working children, but they come to school. Here the attendance is about 95%. The values of the teacher are important; corporal punishment is not used and the teachers visit the families of the children in an associated social role. The teachers are very busy, but still engage with the English in Action resources. Curriculum Relevance – well certainly that too, and just like similar adolescents in the UK they respond well when the school curriculum has a clear relevance to them. Assessment? Well some will follow the School Certificate Examinations – but many see that as not so important as the preparation for life.

So returning to my metaphor – when developing courses for teachers we should consider the realities of the school and so the *warp* of pupils' lives and needs; and also the *weft* of the important aspects of what teachers want for their learning but in a form that is both convenient and highly effective. Together it forms the cloth of Open Learning Professional development.

Thank You.