

A discussion of the four papers contributed by Lynne Graham-Matheson, Maarten Tas and Sue Forsythe, Sandra Eady and Hazel Crichton and Brian Templeton

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Introduction

Following many discussions over the years about teaching as a Masters profession, and of the contribution made by continuing professional development, it is timely to consider the implications of the MTL programme and the impact or otherwise on more traditional MA Education programmes. The four papers here give some opportunity to do that.

The Four Papers

Masters of the game: teacher educators and the M level PGCE concerns a study of trainee teachers undertaking M level work as part of their PGCE programme. The trainee teachers had been able to engage in deeper critical reflection and evaluation of theory and practice as a result of taking the M level work. There was a tension between PGCE teaching practice and the need to be able to demonstrate the competencies for reaching QTS and the MTL in extending this in promoting a more critical and evaluative approach for beginner teachers. An interesting aspect of this study was that all the participants had said that the changes in the PGCE had affected how they teach.

Strategies to Support PGCE Mathematics and Science Students preparing for Assignments at Masters level considered particular subject specialisms. This work considers how additional work for Masters level was introduced to students and how peer assessment was utilised for assessment with university tutors. Peer assessment was used as a learning activity. This study indicated that trainee teachers studying mathematics and science needed extra support for writing and possibly structured interventions at Masters level.

What are the benefits of Masters accredited CPD: An exploration of Primary Postgraduate student teacher views indicates that trainee teachers see taking part in M level work as a way of making them a better teacher and to have a better understanding of teaching and learning. However some thought it got in the way of becoming a better teacher. The research indicated that the trainee teachers saw undertaking M level work as something that could be beneficial to their future careers in teaching, and also help with being evidence to meet the threshold for additional pay. This study indicated that some newly qualified teachers would appreciate a break from studying.

The New Alliance: Pedagogy and Student Experience in Intercultural Professional Learning gives an insight into a different type of provision that supports a “double diploma” for students; a two year Masters FLE (Français comme Langue Etrangère) and a Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE). The interesting part of the paper is how the students reviewed and adapted to the intricacies of different education systems. One main difference between the cultures in terms of teacher development is that one is much more theory based. The theoretical based model is one where the country assumes that teaching is a Masters level profession. The research compared teaching methodologies and the way in which independence of learning was encouraged or not in the theoretical case. The paper argues for an appropriate balance of theoretical approaches underpinned with practical experience.

It is surprising that some students found difficulty in operating as reflective practitioners as this is the basis of good initial teacher education, although good teachers continue to do this throughout their careers. Mentoring was highlighted as an essential part of the developmental process.

Some of the key issues arising from these papers are:

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- The need for the integration of theory and practice enabling a reflective practitioner approach and the fact that the input of an experienced mentor who will support a developmental process and ensure the “post gradueness” is essential for good provision.
- There is an obvious concern about teaching becoming a Masters level profession and those taking M level work being mentored by teachers who themselves do not have Masters qualifications, and in fact some University education departments who have staff not qualified to this level.
- At initial training level, students who are trying to master the technical aspects of the job of a teacher may find an added complexity in critically evaluating and reflecting on their work and that of the school. However when done well this is a major success for the student and a conceptual leap forward.
- Teaching a group of students on different courses as regards level can be problematic for some staff; this can be addressed by being clear about learning outcomes, which of course will impact on assessment.
- MTL and Masters level work can provide an added intellectualism to PGCE courses which otherwise can appear to be technically based due to the need for students to meet required standards and the limited amount of time spent on theoretical aspects of teaching and learning.
- Through MTL and Masters level work undertaken by trainee teachers and teachers, schools can engage in research projects that can support institutional development.
- Studying to teach through a PGCE programme is already considered a substantial undertaking for trainee teachers and newly qualified teachers find the induction year demanding.
- Masters level work needs to be clearly supportive of improved education practice and add an extra incentive through intellectual rigour and opportunity to research and to improve teaching and learning.
- Some see M level work as an almost compulsory part of teaching, as a

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way of enhancing teaching professionally and making teaching a better regarded profession.

- There are likely to be differences in the way in which trainee teachers of different subjects are able to respond to the different requirements, especially writing at Masters level.

Conclusion

The introduction of Masters level work on PGCE courses has been interesting and resulted in some interesting research being carried out in schools. There are many questions still to be answered as indicated in the key issues. One area is that reflective practitioners are not only developed through M level work; this should be an outcome of initial training as this is an indicator of a good teacher who will continue to work like this throughout their career. Reflective practitioners who go through M level work may have a more in depth conceptual understanding of their work; however, for teaching to be successful all teachers need to be reflective practitioners.

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