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## Preparing for the Learning Journey

I work at Bacup and Rawtenstall Grammar School; we are currently applying for training school status as part of our Specialist School bid. We already take on a number of trainee teachers from local universities and having graduated from Manchester University in 2004 with a PGCE in English (with drama), I already have a fairly up to date working knowledge of the relevant training practices. Furthermore, I had very positive experiences in training for my QTS; my mentors provided fantastic role models and tutors, as such I have always been keen to develop my own skills in this capacity. Last year I attended a mentor training meeting at Manchester University, which gave me the key knowledge required; however I feel that in order to successfully fulfil the responsibilities of an ITT mentor, I want to take a more practical approach to preparing myself for this role.

In summary, my reasons for undertaking this work are that I would like to enhance my personal professional development and fulfil a performance management objective. Mentoring trainee teachers effectively will impact positively on students' learning as the ITT's practice improves. Working closely with ITTs should also ensure continual self evaluation of teaching methods and practice as well as enabling a more innovative approach, leading to further improvement of my own teaching of students.

When undertaking any project it is crucial to consider ethical, diversity and equal opportunity issues. In this context, confidentiality and respecting professional codes of conduct are of key importance. As a mentor it will be essential to identify the individual needs of the ITT as well as the students in the classes they teach. If this becomes an issue or challenge, I will enlist the guidance and support of the school SEN coordinator (L. Taylor) or another appropriate professional. It will also be important to think flexibly and prioritise the needs of the student teacher over my own.

## Planning the Learning Journey

### Learning and change focus:

My initial plan was to learn effective strategies and establish good practice in mentoring trainee teachers and potential ITTs with a view to being a mentor next term. However, after talking with Allyson Ingall (local TLA advisor), I decided to refine this to developing effective feedback strategies. I had also considered that a future dimension could be to research the impact of trainee teachers on students; however this is beyond the realms of this stage one learning journey.

### Learning objectives

My learning objectives are as follows:

- To learn effective practice in feedback strategies for mentoring ITTs and potential trainees.
- To learn how to document and present my learning effectively in terms of the requirements of the TLA.
- **P10** Contribute to the professional development of colleagues through coaching and mentoring, demonstrating effective practice, and providing advice and feedback.

### What will your outcomes be and how will you know they have been met?

My expected outcomes therefore are that I will develop a more secure knowledge and understanding of good practice in mentoring, particularly in giving both written and verbal feedback. I should also have the confidence and skills to be a highly effective mentor. I will assess that my learning objectives have been met through gaining feedback from colleagues as well as completing the action plan set out below and through the overall completion of Stage 1 of the TLA.

I plan to present my findings and reflections from the experience to colleagues within the English department at a meeting later in the year.

In the longer term, I aim to guide colleagues through the TLA process and share good practice in mentoring ITTs across the department.

Next term, when I am (hopefully) an ITT mentor, other colleagues with aspirations to develop their mentoring skills will be able to observe my mentoring/feedback sessions (allowing me to model good practice).

## Actions

### What is the timescale for achieving your learning objective(s)?

Monday 8<sup>th</sup> October-Friday 21<sup>st</sup> December 2007

Despite the dates above, the plan is actually a 4-6 week period; however it is dependent on the details of the fortnightly timetable.

Key dates:

<b>Action</b>	<b>Date(s)</b>
Organise timetable for potential ITT & guide them for the day.	11/10/07
Observe lessons of ITT within my class and provide support and feedback.	29/10/07-14/12/07
Meeting to discuss Action Plan (with GLS)	30/10/07
Present stage one experiences so far to staff at an optional after school meeting.	08/11/07
Observe mentor session between ITT and subject mentor.	12/11/07
Provide feedback to ITT about a lesson; be observed by subject mentor and video the session.	26/11/07
Watch video with GLS (coach) and discuss learning outcomes.	04/12/07
Attend meeting with ITTs (run by GLS) about government initiatives in education. (Accessing the knowledge base.) Speak to ITTs about the opportunities of the TLA stage scheme.	05/12/07
Feedback experiences and learning to English department	11/12/07
Final evaluation meeting with coach (GLS) to discuss learning and experiences.	18/12/07

**Resources including sources of support and challenge**

- ITT to be timetabled to take some of my classes/lessons in order to practice providing feedback to trainee
- GAA (mentor of ITT) to provide feedback of my mentoring comments/written feedback sheets
- JED (HoD) to schedule an opportunity to provide feedback to colleagues about findings from and opportunities of the TLA.
- Book video recorder for 26/11/07

**Other knowledge bases and sources of support I will access:**

- QTS standards
- Meetings with coach (GLS-see key dates)
- Allyson Ingall (local TLA advisor)
- Other colleagues as appropriate

**Progress review**

Review my written observation sheets of the ITTs lessons.

Meetings with coach (GLS) as above (see key dates); particularly watching the video of my mentor session (04/11/07) and the final evaluation meeting (18/12/07).

### **Sharing of learning and progress with others - plan with key dates**

I will give a presentation to colleagues at an after school meeting (08/11/07), with a speaker from TLA (Allyson Ingall) who will refer to my plan, about my learning and experiences with the TLA and Stage One.

Feedback to department in English meeting (date tba: Spring Term 2008) about:

1. TLA structures, procedures and benefits to professional/personal development
2. Learning from developing mentoring feedback skills; giving guidance on how colleagues can assist ITTs who take their classes.

Follow up: plan to brief whole school teaching staff on opportunities/procedures of TLA stages (March INSET)

### **Evaluation - plan with timings and actions**

See key dates; particularly 04/12/07 and 18/12/07

I will evaluate my learning and progress through a testimony from colleagues during discussion (G. Ashworth, L. Taylor, G. Spokes)

The video meeting with GLS will probably provide one of the most valuable sessions for reflection and learning. Furthermore GLS and I have scheduled a final meeting to evaluate the whole process, including this finished document.

## On the learning journey:

**What has been the influence/impact of the knowledge base?**

**What has been the impact of the support (formal and informal) received?**

**How have you evaluated the impact on both yourself and your pupils?**

The first major impact of the knowledge base was in refining my focus through a discussion with Allyson Ingall. My plan to develop mentoring skills as a whole was too broad and narrowing my attention to feedback strategies allowed me to reconsider my action plan more carefully in a way that was most valuable to my learning and to have an impact on trainees.

In an early meeting with Gill (28/10/07) in which we discussed my action plan, she was able to suggest additional methods which would enable me to reflect, evaluate and learn from the experience, making it a more enriching experience. She suggested that I video record a session in which I would give feedback to a trainee whose lesson I had previously observed; we would then watch the recording back and discuss the process, outcomes and implications for my practice. The suggestion in itself is evidence of the positive impact of accessing a knowledge base and formal support which I may not ordinarily have considered or have the means to access in the day to day setting of teaching.

The filming session itself was useful as it provided me with the ideal environment to formally feedback my observations on a recently observed lesson. I was aware of the potential difficulties in structure as I fed back and noted that it was an area I wanted to seek assistance with (and did so later). I was unsure whether to strictly follow the observation proforma, or be more flexible and discuss targets and developments as they arose. Later discussions with Gaynor (ITT mentor) and Gill (coach) confirmed that I should treat the sessions more as dialogues than feed backs; where there is more mutual responsibility and I am guiding and following the trainee's needs rather than leading the sessions.

As I gave my advice, I was able to reflect on my own teaching strategies and considered my teaching practice. One particular area of my teaching which has developed through observation of and discussion with the trainee is strategies to engage reticent A Level students in whole class discussion and debate. This is an area Claire (trainee) and I both addressed in our planning and evaluation of lessons and due to this focus and planning to directly address this issue, there has been a marked improvement in the degree of whole class debate, from which all of the students in the class are benefiting. (This was reached through a range of activities designed to raise expectation and push the students' comfort zone of response gradually.)

In the session in which we viewed the recorded mentor session, I was able to observe my feedback techniques in detail; I was particularly interested to note aspects of my conduct I would not normally consider, for example my body language and speech patterns. The impact of these on the trainee was very telling. My body language was warm and open, which helped to establish a positive environment which was very useful to the feedback session. However, as soon as I viewed the conversation I was also immediately aware that I was not involving the trainee enough in her own evaluation. I did begin by asking

her a series of questions and listened attentively, but then as I went through my own observational notes I spoke continually rather than stopping to ask her questions about her thought processes or any ideas she had to address the issues for improvement.

Examining the trainee's body language also highlighted the effect of my different techniques. When I posed questions and made affirmative and encouraging noises as she spoke, she was far more engaged, leaning forward and looking up. When I spoke in blocks, giving my observations, she increasingly sat back and at times even looked down. This analysis made me deeply aware of my duty to inspire the individual trainee and give them ownership and confidence in their own abilities, rather than expounding my own! Indeed watching the film allowed me to evaluate my feedback skills much more acutely and my learning in that half an hour was marked, as commented by Gill (my coach).

I also learnt a great deal from Gill's mentoring of my feedback strategies, which served as a model for my own practice. I noticed that instead of telling me what I could do to improve my technique (what I was doing in the feedback session with the trainee), she asked me what I thought would be appropriate in this instance. I realized that just as I was being encouraged to do, it is necessary to engage in practices which enable the trainee to be more self aware.

A further learning point which arose from this meeting and discussion was the crucial need to personalise feedback approaches for each individual trainee or colleague. This arose from a conversation about my excellent relationship with the trainee, which did mask some of my cruder feedback strategies. Furthermore, as previously mentioned we discussed the need to give each individual ownership of their lesson and teaching as this would enable them to develop their confidence in their teaching style and thus be more beneficial.

### **How did you address any ethical issues which you identified in your plan?**

In early observations in particular I ensured I was continually aware of the needs of the trainee; for example giving them time in lessons to 'find their feet' and allowing them to make the mistakes and engage in the trial and error which is necessary in order to learn more effective teaching methods.

### **How did you address diversity/equality of opportunity issues?**

I ensured that I brought issues of inclusion and ability levels to the attention of the trainee and was able to offer guidance on how she may address these within her planning. I made sure the trainee was aware of the importance of these issues and began to equip her to deal with any should they arise; this partly consisted of ensuring she understood the role of the ITT coordinator (LT) who also happens to be the SENco.

**What did *you* learn when you shared your learning with others and what influence have you had on the practice of others?**

The first formal opportunity to share my learning journey with colleagues was the meeting which Allyson Ingall attended where staff came to discover more about the TLA stage system. This experience led to me refining my focus as when it came to actually explaining what my learning journey was to be, I found it too wide reaching for an initial project and in the time scale.

After this initial meeting I have had several informal discussions with colleagues in different departments who are interested in undertaking a learning journey of their own. Discussing the process in this way allowed me to reflect further on my own work and this was extremely valuable.

Through the sharing of my learning in the meeting with Gill, in which I engaged in self evaluation and reviewed my findings, I am now more aware of my own practice as well as that of others and enjoyed working with Claire to highlight her strengths and areas for development. We openly shared and discussed her good practice, much of which she was unaware. What I learnt from the video session has led me to plan to undergo some peer coaching using video recordings so we can develop peer and self awareness of good practice and tune my own teaching methodology. Initially I will work with Gill to gain an understanding of the process and we will develop our practice accordingly. Also, I now feel motivated to continue my learning journey with a stage two in the TLA around this area.

One of the most worthwhile instances of sharing my learning with others was when I shared my project objectives and plan with the trainee herself. This was not an activity I planned especially but it enabled an open dialogue about the value of my written feedback in particular. Claire explained that she felt very encouraged by my written notes and that it gave her tangible targets to improve upon.

As I have already outlined in some detail, I learnt a great deal in my meetings with my coach. The opportunities to reflect and evaluate on the process were invaluable. It made me appreciate the formal time sometimes required in order to develop a particular learning focus or skill. The time set aside has been one of the most important factors in the success of my learning journey and when discussing potential action plans of other colleagues I have suggested this as a really beneficial activity, whether it is with other members of the same department or a colleague who is more experienced.

The overall impact on my learning and practice has been much larger than I anticipated; it has affected my teaching, my relationships with A Level students, my mode of address with colleagues and principally it has heightened my effective use of different feedback strategies with trainees.