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An exploration of PGCE student teacher views about the value of Masters study during their Initial Teacher Education Programme and Induction Year in England.

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Background

There has been a significant shift in the way Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for beginning teachers has been reconceptualised and repackaged in England. Teachers have moved from having a certain degree of individual choice as to which course they attend, usually based on personal interest and the role they hold in school, to a greater centralised control over CPD linked more closely to the different stages in a teacher's career and which it could be argued, ensures the implementation of central government policy initiatives focused on school improvement. The advent of the new Masters in Teaching and Learning (MTL) qualification continues this agenda. It aims to target both individual and school needs and marks a continued commitment by the government through the Teacher Development Agency (TDA) to ensure that teachers have an entitlement to 'high quality' CPD for the first five years of their careers (DCSF 2008). As a consequence in 2010 newly qualified teachers (NQTs) in the North West (NW) and in challenging schools will have an entitlement to study for the new MTL.

Research Questions

This study conducted in 2008-09 looked at the value primary and secondary PGCE students placed on Masters level study during initial training and as an entitlement in their Induction year.

The study was interested in what value PGCE students placed on the Masters credits already gained and what the perceived benefits of masters study have been (if any) to them as newly qualified teachers. Thus the research explored

What benefits do PGCE students perceive Masters level study to have during their PGCE?

Do students feel a 'Masters' in Education is a worthwhile pursuit in their early careers as teachers?

Methods

During the midpoint of the PGCE programmes a small group of students were interviewed regarding their perceptions of taking M level credits as part of their PGCE. The themes arising from their responses were used to inform the questionnaire, administered at the end of the summer term. This contained six questions both open ended and closed in order to capture views about Masters study on their PGCE and during their induction year. The questionnaire was administered in the last week of the course with a response rate of eighty eight students out of a cohort of one hundred. Students were provided information about the study and invited to participate by completing the questionnaire anonymously.

The data from the interviews were analysed first drawing out broad themes, which were then used to structure an initial analysis of the questionnaire. These themes were compared across all open questions and expanded or merged to form new themes. Then explanations were written for these overriding themes and finally links and theory arising from these were produced in order to develop understanding.

Frame

A grounded theory approach to analysis was adopted by first drawing out broad themes, which were then used to structure an initial analysis of the questionnaire. These themes were compared across all open questions and expanded or merged to form new themes. Then explanations were written for these overriding themes and finally links and theory arising from these were produced in order to develop understanding. The findings and discussion were framed by the influence of Stronach's work on developing a persona as a teacher by 'juggling economies of performance and ecologies of practice' (Stronach 1009:173). Ball's (Bowe, Ball and Gold 1992) policy trajectory was also used in order to make sense of the interplay of policy and practice within the CPD arena.

Research findings

The findings from both the mid term interviews and end of programme questionnaire suggest that PGCE students perceived M level study to provide both benefits and challenges during their PGCE. Many of these were also highlighted as reasons for deciding whether to continue or not with Masters level study in the Induction year. Becoming a 'better teacher' was repeatedly cited as a reason for continuing MA study and this seemed to be related to having a more in depth understanding of facets of learning and teaching as well as some understanding of the place of teacher research and reflective practice. An emerging incentive for continuing Masters accreditation in the induction year was career enhancement. Conversely, 'becoming a better teacher' was also cited as a deterrent for not registering for the MTL or an existing MA programme in the Induction year. This seemed to be strongly linked to real concerns about survival and coping with the 'unknown' demands of the Induction year and a wish to concentrate on perfecting teaching skills. Some felt they did not need a Masters qualification to prove they were a good teacher.

References

Bowe, R., Ball, S.J. and Gold, A. (1992) *Reforming Education and changing schools: case studies in policy sociology*. London: Routledge.

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Stronach, I. (2009) *Globalizing education, educating the local: how method made us mad*. London: Routledge)