

## **Teaching: a Masters level profession – discussions 2009**

The following discussion notes are from the 6 groups who engaged with 'Teaching – a Masters level profession' in the ESCalate colloquium held on June 5<sup>th</sup> 2009. There were 3 discussion sessions; each addressed a specific question. With thanks to all who contributed to this rich resource of thoughts and impressions. If you are looking for a thought-provoking statement or question about Masters for the teaching profession, you are sure to find plenty of ideas here.

### **Discussion 1 – What has Masters got to do with teaching?**

#### **Group 1**

The question raised further questions:

- What are people's perceptions of what teaching is?
- What has teaching got to do with Masters?
- It is an age/generation related issue – younger students want to teach while older students have experience to draw on.
- It's 'upping the anti'/'raising the bar'.
- It's not just about being a job.
- A good teacher develops practice through reflection – this way it is more formalised.
- Students need to understand it's a complex job. Always need to make decisions, informed choices, and reason for doing things.

What is teaching and what does teaching have to do with Masters?

- It's about critical reflection.
- The 'independent thinker' Challenge policy, theory etc.
- Using skills to think, research etc. to be an independent thinker.
- The word 'synthesis' was seen as important – it's more than analysis – it's being original in taking their thinking forward. Questioning the literature rather than merely quoting it. Teaching is more than reaching/achieving the standards. Best mentors have or are on a Masters course. Weaker mentors have no higher qualification.
- Masters is about the link to school improvement, performance management for the ultimate benefit of pupils.

#### **Group 2**

Personal views?

Institutional views?

- An entitlement issue – what about undergraduate students
- Important to consider what being 'professional' entails – 'We aren't just technicians'
- Parallels with health professionals - initial training for doctors – houseman – consultant – therefore a need for CPD for teachers to be embedded as an expectation
- Time will tell – we will have to wait until M level trainees move onwards and upwards
- The 'right' time isn't the same time for everyone – not a blanket approach

- Need to encourage students to believe that they can achieve it and operate with M level thinking
- What is Masters? – Is it just a qualification or a way of looking at the world? – How education works – critical awareness – critical thinking
- Making use of and engaging student teachers in the vast body of research evidence underpinning classroom practice.
- Why not introduce M level opportunity to Headteachers and mentors?
- A need for teachers to be able to account for what they do in the classroom – why they do it and how they do it – ‘theorising your own practice’
- Moves students away from and above the notion of just meeting the standards
- Masters – skills and concept builders

How to engage schools?

- A need to encourage mentors to engage with the student on their ‘collaborative undertaking’ between student, school and university so that they begin to see the benefits to the school of students’ engagement with the M level work (e.g. school focussed enquiries and research)

Should teaching be a Masters level profession?

- A need for policy makers to be prepared for more informed and questioning teachers to be coming into the profession – and therefore for policy to be questioned and changed for the better
- Has teaching become deskilled because of the previous lack of attention to developing criticality in new teachers?
- How do we convince Ofsted about the importance of M level study / thinking?

### Group 3

- Example of practice – the process of teaching that children go through to learn rather than the product
- When you are new to teaching, you are learning the trade
- It depends what the Masters degree is in
- Self-awareness and confidence – know your self as a teacher – cope with complex situations
- Have we got a very narrow perspective of Masters?
- Life-long learning – not just the beginning
- Can we expect students to know what Masters is after only 60 credits?
- Need some practice to critically analyse and create synthesis
- You only can initiate an interest in Masters at ITE level
- Think from the start at a different level – should be how we think
- Process is important, not the product
- Having Masters does not automatically guarantee a good teacher
- Are we disadvantaging those who have different degrees?
- Higher level knowledge – gained through reading
- Recognise the assumptions and values, attitudes that you have – understanding of why you do things, not just acting out
- Need an expectation that you will continue learning
- Training on the cheap?

- Disparity between government view of Masters and university view
- Definition of Masters?
- When should we do Masters level work?
- Having a Masters does not necessarily mean that you will be a good practitioner – good on paper, not necessarily good in classroom

#### **Group 4**

- Teachers should be learners too ... the need for wisdom, values, professionalism, ownership, status, trust in own judgment and intellectual and emotional independence
- 'Reflectiveness', in-depth knowledge and understanding – out of comfort zone.
- Theory and practice versus survival?
- Action research based study – draw on in interview
- Developing a way of thinking – realising possibilities of teaching and learning.
- Interrogating teaching and learning practice.
- European models – Finland – communities of practice, dissemination of practice
- Need to know what Masters requires from student – how can this information be provided? Before programme, staged approach. Course documentation 'research led teaching'.
- All taught at M level with 2 exit points or can opt? – Students feel they are 'failing'?
- Identity versus 60 credits – feeling of moving on from the BA.
- Support – writing workshops? Research? What is it that students need?

#### **Group 5**

1. How do we define Masters in practice?  
Link between Masters practice and existing Masters definitions  
Wide range of QAA standards linked to publications
2. PGD 90 credits influence the way we think about teaching so not the practice that has changed but the thinking about it. How do they know what's going on in the classroom – using different sets of lenses? Can't see it in terms of skills in teaching.
3. Impact of PPDs on classroom performance positive  
Evidenced based practitioner  
Chartered teacher after 7 years  
Prejudice against Master because already a good teacher  
More qualifications for things you already had to do
4. Currently teachers have been encouraged to implement, not think
5. Students have different approaches to learning – M level needs to take account of this.
6. Jenny Moon framework for development of thinking 4 stages – 4<sup>th</sup> stage was Masters level stage  
Headteachers would be challenged by teachers who will think and question – they want people to deliver and implement  
Thinking and thought processes versus delivery and skills

## **Group 6**

- More of some skills – higher level is to be critical thinkers
- Conflicts in education – who follows the party line?
- School busy place – not time for discussion / reflection
- A way of thinking – part of professional self
- Reflection / evaluation / analysis of practice
- Masters is a process
- To be 'informed'
- If you can write it and talk it, can you do the basic day to day teaching?

## **Discussion 2 – How would you hope NQTs from your Masters course would say about the value of Masters study for teaching?**

### **Group 1**

1. The research given as an example of NQT ideas about Masters was a very small sample – why did so many not reply? It would be good to find out their reasons? Follow-up non-replies
2. Don't think most students would know/or be best to judge to comment on whether having Masters credits affected job chances? Too soon to tell – might not have so many credits and are not full M level people. There is a feeling that the question here is flawed and going to the wrong person – may be more relevant to headteachers.
3. Can we measure cause and effect of M level in the profession? Are we really concerned about the children? Who are we trying to make it better for? Is it just another government initiative to improve attainment and results?
4. We hope they might say that it is relevant and that they recognise they have a lot to learn.
5. Is M level valued for the sake of its level rather than what it might involve? – is it a false set-up?

### **Group 2**

1. What is the perceived value of M level work for teaching? Students clearly don't see the benefits currently because schools don't see the benefits.

Suggestions for righting the wrongs?

- We need to emphasis the intrinsic value of M level – because the extrinsic value is not yet certain from school reactions
- Indicates that surface learning has been the norm
- We need to make M level study 'integral' to the training process, not an add-on – training versus education
- Build it into their interview practice – talk about their studies and how it has benefited them

What does M level teaching look like?? Can we define this? What impacts in the classroom can we expect?

2. How have we got to this place? What has got in the way? – National Curriculum / accountability culture / 'compliance' culture (Ofsted, SATs, league tables)

Where have the vibrancy, energy, enthusiasm, independence of thought, learning by discovery, teacher autonomy, creativity, risk taking, confidence in one's own judgement, professional dialogue, embracing the unknown gone?

Are these the 'lost words' of education? Where do these feature in the QTS standards?

3. Perhaps M level is actually our best and only hope for changing the current industrial/mechanical view of education and how it should be conducted.

- We need to establish a critical culture in schools (transfer this critical culture from HE) M level might be the bridgehead.
- Haynes manual approach by schools (teacher guides)
- Schools tend to find something that works and stick with it
- How are we going to counter the drive towards compliance and risk taking when we ourselves are being inspected on outcomes?

### **Group 3**

- Have the students experienced Masters level teaching?
- Can we actually separate Masters element from PGCE?
- Could the research have asked non-Masters level students?
- Develop reflection, critical analysis etc.
- Pressured to do the assignments etc.
- Know where to go to inform practice – reading
- Confidence and trust in professional judgement based upon reading – challenge things when they are not right
- Notion of surviving the first year etc.
- Know when to take on board advice – discernment
- Emotional intelligence/self awareness – building on it
- Confidence to admit mistakes
- How does what we have done on the course impact upon practice?
- Exploring concepts in depth

### **Group 4**

- Parallels between responses of TAs, NQTs and new teachers?
- Are we making those with 'M' more competent than those on school based training routes – GTP etc?
- Perceptions of M levelness – are Headteachers all at M level? Perceptions of NQTs of their status.
- Experience of interviewing candidates.
- Inter-provider collaboration suggests that schools perceive value in some providers more than others.
- 18 month PGCE – are Masters characteristics easier to develop over a longer period?
- Research in more depth?
- NCET Maths – Southampton funded research – tracking 10 in detail.
- M level writing – affected by age and maturity
- Affects career progression
- HEI packages to entice
- Tension between recognition of academic work at M level and criteria for recognising excellent practice

What could we expect NQTs to say about Masters?

We'd hope for:

- Stimulation

- Desire to return after gaining experience
- Greater sense of agency and autonomy
- Research skills
- Reflection
- Desire to continue to work with HEI
- Benefit for pupils
- Openness / dialogue
- Making connections – theory and practice
- Being proud of it and not allowing it to disappear in the business of school and NQT year

### **Group 5**

1. Getting the message across to schools – we will see benefit when we see the impact.  
M level research should be generated from school SEF – so school has some ownership and interest in something from school perspective and see the benefits from M level work.  
Ethics – how they would carry out – PG/NQT - or looking at school issues with professional mentors and teasing out in academic way  
A professional discourse with professional mentor about an issue
2. 1<sup>st</sup> degrees and working in another paradigm in MA – big jump – competent in 1<sup>st</sup> degree but struggling in Masters  
A whole range of different aspects to take on board – interpersonal skills – communicators, subject knowledge, educational theory, thinking at M level, writing and argument, research paradigms
3. Space and autonomy needed for schools rather than imposing an M level profession
4. Permission to think and question rather than accept what's there  
Performativity stops NQTs developing an identity where they question
5. M is a tool of the trade – reflective practice through to practical enquiry.  
Have a Masters and then have chartered status and then have to keep updating chartered status.

### **Group 6**

- We would hope they would feel energised / empowered
- They need to understand the relationship between Masters and teaching
- Take the skills and transfer them to the NQT year
- See M level study as of value to themselves – self-development
- Feel engaged – study their own practice
- Are we selling it? / explaining it? / talking of the value of it? We need to make it explicit – do we need to or do they have to realise?
- It is worrying to use school issue for NQT to research – should it not be about the NQT's own personal agenda?

### **Discussion 3 – What is 'Teaching – a Master profession' in your institution – How do you teach it? How do you assess it?**

#### **Group 2**

What is Masters levelness in the context of a PGCE?

It's not necessarily about:

- extended academic writing/essays
- dissertations – research methodology, per se
- mimicking MEd-like approaches

It is about:

- learning with other teachers and engaging
- Criticality spectrum – Have they read it? / Have they understood it? / Have they critiqued it?
- Professional awareness
- Analysing critical incidents in schools
- Reflecting on one's own practice (and that of others)
- Developing solutions to complex educational problems
- Evaluating the effectiveness of different teaching styles / approaches / resources
- Understanding the link between teaching and learning

How to achieve this - teaching?

- It's a different way of structuring learning experiences
- Not about attendance at taught sessions and registers
- We need to model / embody the M level approach for them – and scaffold it so that they can get on board

How to achieve this – assessment?

- Student presentations to the school (partnership enhanced) – (Level 6 presently – could it be done at Level 7 if schools aren't M level trained / aware?)
- Choosing enquiry / research topics which benefit the school
- Organising a conference day to which mentors / schools are invited
- Poster presentations
- Pod casts and video-diaries – difficult to mark
- Learning diaries / log

### **Group 3**

- Do we actually have time for students to truly reflect on the concepts etc. theories?
- Brighton – 40 credits module – school placement is part of it – cohort lecture, action learning sets – some student led, some tutor led – in-depth tasks – report back – presentations, wikis etc. – Approximately 20 writing tasks – tensions of ECM, primary review – academic review on their progress reference to entries – writing tasks
- London Met – Have to apply to do the M level. Similar assignments but assessed at M level
- Canterbury Christ Church – Links into Ma in Education – possibly similar to London Met

### **Group 4**

What is our Masters led teaching? – research informed teaching – guiding students towards certain texts – but trainers need to have time to undertake research – theorising of classroom space.

### Teaching to develop Masters level provision

- Evaluate learning and teaching – research methods
- Discussion of assessment models and progression across assessment criteria – refinement/sophistication of language as grades progress
- Exit points – H and M - decision making point
- Alternative assessments
- Average word limits and word total – 3000, 6000, 2000
- Fairness and moderation – do we mark 'upwards' or assess what has been achieved?

### Group 5

- Freedom within Scottish system – HMI tends to be more supportive than English system
- Plymouth – professional and postgraduate
- Subject priority in secondary PG on the searching and phase poster presentations
- Electronic portfolio, video clips, pod casts – assessment methods to be closer to what they do in practice

### Group 6

#### How do we assess?

- Personalised – they select what they are going to do. Discuss issue with mentor in school 4000 words
- Case studies – children (2) within their placement setting – identify and read about strategies that could be put in place. 4000 words 5 weeks
- Teaching, Learning and Assessment – evidence and rationale – portfolio. Analysis, references
- Understanding module – 6 pieces of work – 1 every 2 weeks emailed to tutors. Synthesis of literature on 3 topics. Early feedback on writing and academic skills – targeted support. Students are practising teachers already
- D grade 'fail' the Masters pathway. May make M level study optional to PG study (Scotland). M level will be a combination of short pieces, longer, extended pieces, presentations; pod casts online engagement – 7-10 minutes in a 48 hour window. May have same assignments but different criteria.
- 2 M level essays – Criteria are limiting – it is difficult for students to show achievement at higher levels in spite of working hard and completing 'good' pieces of work. Marks are 'bunched' at C level, i.e. 50-59%
  - 1- subject study / research in school / pupil progression – systematic enquiry – proposal 10, literature review 10, final part 80
  - 2- action research project – fully engage with research cross curricular themes

#### How do we teach?

- Trial and error
- Specific sessions – research models