

'QED'. Assessing and Profiling Food and Textiles: Students in Initial Teacher Education

Abstract

This paper describes the system of profiling developed at the University of Wales Institute, Cardiff, to chart the progress of students training to teach food and textiles technology in the light of the national standards for the award of qualified teacher status. Analysis of responses from students and mentors suggests that the profile has encouraged reflection on action and helped students to set realistic targets for future development. Areas which still need to be addressed include the reduction of the workload for school staff and the establishment of more objective criteria to define the grades awarded. Some suggestions are offered for future policy on profiling within initial teacher education.

**Dr A Geen and
Robert Hutt**

School of Education,
University of Wales
Institute, Cardiff and
Robert Hutt, Mentor,
Y Pant Comprehensive
School,
Pontyclun, Llantrisant,
South Wales

In a recent edition of *Modus*¹ an account was given of the role of mentors in schools which have entered into partnership with the University of Wales Institute, Cardiff (UWIC) to train student teachers of home economics and technology. Since that time, attention has been paid to two important developments in initial teacher education (ITE). The first is the requirement of central Government that training providers acquire evidence that their students have mastered the knowledge, understanding and skills needed to meet all 76 standards for the award of qualified teacher status (QTS) set out in DfEE circular 4/98 and Welsh Office circular 13/98.² Recent correspondence in *The Times Educational Supplement* suggests that for mentors in certain disciplines, this has been a challenging task.³

The second innovation has been the introduction of the Career Entry Profile (CEP). All trainees are expected, towards the end of their course, to list up to four areas in which they consider they have especial strengths, together with four aspects of teaching in which they believe they will benefit from further practice and tuition. This self-assessment then forms the basis for discussion with their induction tutor about the targets they should meet during their first year of teaching. In completing the profile they must make full reference to the QTS standards.

These requirements point to the need for mentors and college tutors to maintain an efficient system of formative profiling throughout an ITE course. This article describes the practice which has recently been devised at UWIC and reports the views of food and textiles mentors and their students about its value.

Devising a profile

A form of profiling has been utilised for PGCE food and textiles technology students at UWIC since the inception of the course in 1995. The need for change was recognised in 1998 in order to conform with the demands of Welsh Office circular 13/98. At the outset of the planning process the views of mentors were invited, and, as a result of this preliminary consultation, several general principles were established. Firstly, whatever approach was implemented would need to evaluate progress regularly over the entire course and pinpoint, as far as possible, the stage at which mentors considered that each standard had been achieved. Secondly, assessors would be required to provide evidence to justify their judgements. Thirdly, students should be afforded the maximum opportunity to reflect critically upon their teaching and, finally, the profile should be easy to operate, not overwhelm users with paperwork and feed easily into the CEP.

Format of the profile

A profile based upon these criteria and consisting of five documents was duly devised during the autumn of 1998 and piloted from January 1999. The first document was a feedback form which enabled mentors to offer an analysis of a lesson in the manner they felt to be most appropriate. Hence they were free to offer a chronological account or to enter a commentary which adhered to the order of the standards, a summary of which was printed on the back of the sheet. Debriefing could relate to the content of the whole lesson or to only a limited number of standards where a specific area for improvement had been identified and this narrower focus had been agreed with the student.

Whichever mode was employed, the observer was instructed to make reference to the standards and to provide evidence for the conclusions reached. To achieve this end, each standard was identified by its paragraph number in Welsh Office circular 13/98 and mentors were requested to enter these numbers in a column adjacent to their written lesson evaluation to show which of them had been met. At the same time the reasons for making this judgement had to be explicit in their commentary. For instance, if it were claimed that a student had attained the standard of 'providing opportunities to develop pupils' understanding by relating their learning to real and work-related examples' (DfEE and Welsh Office circulars, p.13), some aspect of the lesson would have to be mentioned in order to substantiate this statement (e.g. by showing how the student explained the application of a process to the catering industry).

Moreover, where a number was entered in the 'standards met' column, it had to be qualified by the addition of one of three letters: 'Q' to indicate that the standard had been mastered; 'E' to denote performance at an exceptional level; and 'D' to identify areas in which further development was desirable.

Designation of the appropriate grade would depend upon the judgement of the mentor in the light of the evidence available. Printed at the bottom of this feedback form was a section entitled 'key points for consideration' in which mentors were asked to list the principal questions they wished to put to students to stimulate critical reflection during a feedback session. Discussion based upon these points would culminate in the setting of targets together with appropriate success criteria.

The second form summarised strengths and learning needs on a regular basis. Mentors were expected to discuss students' progress with them at the end of each week, taking into account the extent to which lesson targets had been achieved, and to maintain a record of the conversation. Three columns were set out in relation to each of the targets examined: 'no change', 'partly achieved', and 'fully achieved'.

At the request of mentors, a third optional sheet was made available to summarise the outcomes of students' reflection upon a series of lessons or wider educational issues emanating from school experience. Nonetheless, in order to ensure that the standards remained the centre of deliberation, this form was subdivided into six boxes headed:

1. knowledge and understanding
2. planning
3. teaching
4. class management
5. monitoring, assessment, recording and reporting
6. other professional requirements.

The 'standards met' and 'QED' columns were again included together with a space for entering any priorities for development.

Further scope for reflection was provided by means of an obligatory self-evaluation form. All PGCE technology students are expected to analyse in detail a minimum of one lesson every day in accordance with specific criteria, and in the new profiling system a self-assessment document was devised for use at least once a week in any context to be decided by the trainee. The focus of this self-appraisal had to be stated, but it could take different forms, for example, analysis of a specific lesson, thoughts on recent discussions with

the mentor, or a review of practice in the light of formal theory acquired from reading.

Where appropriate, students were asked to refer to the standards and to assess themselves on the 'QED' rating scale. Mentors or tutors then confirmed this judgement by appending their signature.

Finally, use was made of a checklist to facilitate the transfer of information from these forms to a single source which would serve as the definitive document for tracking progress over the course. On this sheet the complete set of standards was listed together with the columns 'D' 'E' and 'Q', into which mentors inserted a date to indicate when they considered that sufficient evidence had been assembled to merit the designation of a specific grade for each standard. In this way it was hoped that development over a period of time could be constantly monitored, and advice and guidance provided where necessary. This checklist was then employed as the principal source for making decisions about the content of the CEP. Items graded as an 'E' or a 'D' were used as the basis for negotiation with the student about her/his areas of strength and priorities for further support during the induction year.

Strengths of the 'QED' system

In order to ascertain views on this system, questionnaires were issued to the 11 students on the course and to their mentors. It is pleasing to report that all the students expressed approval on the grounds that it enabled them to be aware of their progress over the whole course. Nine felt that the 'D' category was valuable in highlighting the skills on which they needed to work. The majority of mentors shared this viewpoint, commenting that the 'QED' columns provided a comprehensive record without the need for their having to write lengthy commentaries.

Nine of the students believed that use of the profile strengthened the formative, reflective aspect of ITE, while 10 of their mentors thought that it provided an excellent focus for dialogue. It was argued that attempts to encourage trainees to practise reflection-on-action could be futile unless they were provided with criteria to guide them in analysis of their performance. The profile, in their opinion, met this requirement and helped to ensure that discussion was always relevant to the competencies which central Government deemed to be essential for the award of QTS.

On the question of manageability, opinion was divided. Five mentors felt that the system was satisfactory in this respect, three were less sure and the remainder considered that it did

impose a heavier workload than its predecessor. Nonetheless, it was appreciated that some form of checklist had to be maintained in order to fulfil the injunction of the DfEE and Welsh Office circulars that ITE courses must involve the assessment of every trainee 'against all the standards specified' (p.6). It is not surprising that little enthusiasm was apparent for the establishment of subject-specific standards for design and technology on the pattern of English, mathematics, science and ICT.

Areas for further attention

Despite these encouraging replies, several critical comments were received which suggest that further thought needs to be given to certain aspects of the profile. Reservations were expressed about the 'exceptional' classification, the award of which was totally dependent upon the subjective judgement of individual mentors. A further concern was that an 'E' could be given at one point in the course, but at a later date, perhaps in another school, a much lower grade would seem to be more applicable. Under these circumstances, a mentor might be reluctant to adjust the original designation, and trainees might be aggrieved if such an alteration were made. Again, it was noted that the allocation of a high grade in the first weeks of a school placement might result in complacency and encourage some students to rest on their laurels.

Assessment of certain of the standards grouped under the heading 'other professional requirements' was deemed to be problematic, since achievement in these areas could not easily be measured on the three-point scale in an evaluation of a food or textiles lesson.

Whereas health, safety and disciplinary issues were likely to feature during debriefing, it was rare for reference to be made to the role of school governors or the need to liaise with parents or carers. It is true that some of the legal and professional topics included in the DfEE and Welsh Office circulars were examined in tutorial classes held by the senior mentor, but it was difficult for food and textiles teachers to evaluate a student's knowledge in this field.

Nor was it always possible to assess students against all the standards, since some schools, for reasons beyond their control, did not offer a full range of courses. For example, the circulars state that trainees should 'understand and know how to implement the assessment requirements of current qualifications for pupils aged 14-19' (p.15), but those who were based in schools accommodating the 11-16 age group were unable to gain experience of A' and AS' Level syllabuses or advanced

GNVQ courses in health and social care or hospitality and catering. Moreover, few departments in the survey entered pupils for GCSE examinations in both design and technology and home economics.

Conclusions and recommendations

These responses suggest that certain amendments would be beneficial. In the first instance, it is necessary to reduce the subjective element in the allocation of the 'QED' grades. One partial solution is to provide criteria to define performance at each of these levels. Written descriptions, perhaps incorporating a number of related standards, could be compiled and illustrated by means of sample lesson notes, videos of students' encounters with classes and examples of trainees' marking of pupils' assignments. With support from the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, UWIC, in conjunction with other ITE institutions, is involved in a project to create materials of this nature for its primary ITE courses. It is to be hoped that a similar initiative will be planned with respect to secondary design and technology.

It may again be desirable if higher education institutions operating profiling schemes of this type were to set out clear guidelines so that students who receive a satisfactory grade at an early stage do not subsequently relax their efforts. Course literature has to stress that the award of a grade is intended to help a student gauge his or her progress, is not irrevocable and will not be transferred to the CEP unless there is evidence of consistency in performance.

Assessing achievement in the realm of 'other professional requirements' also demands further attention. Some standards present no difficulty. Most food and textiles teachers, for example, were happy that through observation and personal contact they could form a judgement about students' capacity to 'set a good example to the pupils they teach through their presentation and their personal and professional conduct' (DfEE and Welsh Office circulars, p.16). However, the acquisition of evidence relating to their understanding of teachers' legal liabilities and responsibilities was seen as a more complex task. One approach is to have trainees submit written assignments in which they investigate and reflect upon the application of these areas to the schools they attend.

Furthermore, it was apparent that tutors at universities and colleges need to undertake an inventory of the syllabuses taught at each of their partnership schools and use this information to allocate students in such a way that they gain experience of as many courses

as possible. Staff at UWIC try to ensure that, as far as is practicable, all trainees have at some stage the opportunity to teach food, textiles, child development and catering at least to Key Stage 3 and their main specialism to sixth form level. Experience of GNVQs is also encouraged. By these means it is hoped that they will have the opportunity to assess students' achievements at all phases of secondary education.

Finally, the workload which worried some mentors could be reduced in future years if assessment in relation to designated standards were to be conducted by tutors at the university, especially those which lend themselves to written projects, design briefs and student-led seminars.

With the introduction of the induction year, it is even more important that new entrants to the profession begin their career with a profile which summarises their strengths and leads to the setting of targets which will provide them with an appropriate degree of support. Within the UWIC partnership the need for effective formative profiling has been recognised, and it is hoped that the experiences of mentors reported in this paper will prompt discussion among food and textiles teachers engaged in initial teacher education in other areas of the UK.

References

1. Geen, A. (1999) 'Meeting the Standards for QTS', *Modus*, Vol. 17, No. 6: 174-178
 2. Department for Education and Employment (1998) *Teaching: High Status, High Standards*, circular 4/98, DfEE
 3. Richards, C. (1999) 'Ethical Primary Policy', *The Times Educational Supplement*, 26 November, p.15
- Millett, A. (1999) 'Teacher Training Not Left to Chance', *The Times Educational Supplement*, 3 December, p.16
- Newby, M. (1999) 'Never Mind Tricks, Go for Quality', *The Times Educational Supplement*, 10 December, p.16
- Richards, C. (2000) 'You Don't Have to be a Genius, but ...', *The Times Educational Supplement*, 7 January, p.17
- Welsh Office (1998) *Requirements for Courses of Initial Teacher Training*, circular 13/98, Welsh Office