

MENTORING

WHAT IS IT ALL ABOUT?

In the course of a typical day, I could have met with concerned parents to discuss their offspring's disruptive behaviour, set work for an absent colleague, attended a meeting to discuss performance at key stage 3 and key stage 4 compared with schools similar to my own, and taught five one-hour science lessons across the age and ability range! So why, at the end of all this, do I greet a request from a teacher training establishment to accommodate two students for their first school experience with such enthusiasm?

For the last five years, I have been a subject mentor in a secondary school. I have always felt privileged to be involved in the induction of students into the school environment. After all, the experiences that my colleagues and I provide will shape the way in which prospective teachers view the very demanding and complex profession that they have chosen to join.

It is vital that student teachers have the best possible introduction into the profession. My first priority is to gather a team of like-minded teachers within school, those who have the ability to pass on their skills, to support the students. Often the students have had little experience of schools since they left school themselves and this could be ten or more years ago. (There are now a significant number of mature students.) We have to be organised, flexible, welcoming and understanding. A return to the school environment can be daunting.

It is within my remit to organise a programme of experiences that build a realistic vision of what teaching is about, without putting prospective teachers off. To do this, it is vital to put the school and its intake in context. Many students have downloaded the most recent OfSTED report before they walk through the door. It is up to us to explain how such reports, in conjunction with educational theory and a succession of government initiatives, translate into classroom practice.

It sounds easy if you say it quickly and it is if you really believe that what you do makes a difference to the learning experiences of the pupils in your care. We rarely get the opportunity to tell other adults about our day-to-day routine, why we make certain decisions, choose from a range of teaching styles for delivery; how we discipline children, and how all this creates the ideal learning environment.

To support and coach students with their first classes, to watch them succeed, learn, develop their own style, and complete teaching practices successfully is very fulfilling. To receive letters and phone calls six months or a year or so later, telling of their progress within the profession, make you feel proud to be involved in the very important first stages on the road to that success.

I believe that there are significant rewards for the teachers who become involved in these interactions and that is why a phone call requesting student placements is always good news. You should try it sometime.

Lesley McKenzie, Professional
and Subject Mentor.

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<MENTORING Lesley Mckenzie.doc> Authored by Lesley McKenzie, St. George's High School, Blackpool;
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