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Implications for teaching becoming a “Master’s” led profession; a phenomenographic study of the attitude of Newly Qualified Teachers (NQT’s) towards the Masters in Teaching and Learning (MTL).

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Introduction and Background

Ten years after the general election which brought the last labour government into power, Ed Balls announced the intention of the then governing political party to make teaching a “masters” led profession. The rationale behind this is well documented with educational observers and commentators adding to the discussion in the ensuing four years. Originally, the Masters in Teaching and Learning (MTL) was to be subsidised by the government and in the pilot phase it was available to those working in National Challenge schools (defined as those with sub 30% five A* - C GCSE grades including mathematics and English) and Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) who had completed teacher training from one of the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the north west consortium who was awarded the contract from the Teacher Development Agency (TDA) to deliver the initial pilot. The focus of the content of MTL being driven by critical reflection of work and activities being undertaken by effective classroom practitioners.

However, during the last three years the world has seen a global economic downturn which has had major far reaching implications from the realms of commerce and finance to that of education. The implications in education include the ceasing of payments to those in 16+ education (Educational Maintenance Allowance – or EMA), and the stemming of funding for the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) initiative. Additional to this is the cessation of funding for the MTL programme and removal of its subsidy.

The work being undertaken in this research study is focused on those originally engaged on the MTL programme. It will look at their opinions and thoughts about MTL and the implications its current status has on their thoughts both towards study for a higher degree and for the move towards teaching becoming a “masters” led profession.

“Our aim is that every teacher over time should have the new masters in teaching and learning. It will raise the status of teachers and ensure that they get the recognition that they deserve”.

Ed Balls

Secretary of State for Children, Schools and families

December 2007

Methodology and Research Methods

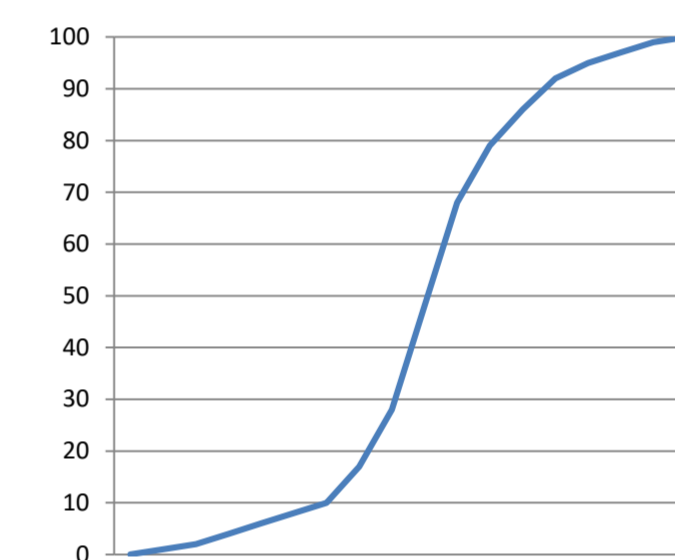
The research methodology adopted for this study is that of phenomenography. In considering the scope of work being undertaken it was determined that this would be a suitable approach as it allows for the maximum variance of responses from the sample cohort whilst maintaining a focus on the outcome. The sample selected for the study were all NQT’s but were selected for the variance in ‘difference’ within that group. The sample size adopted is based on the recommendations of Ashwin and Trigwell (2008). The initial study utilised a sample of twenty (n=20) respondents who were identified by means of an online questionnaire which was followed up by a face to face interview.

As with all such studies, ethical implications were paramount in undertaking the work and this was guided by adhering to the principles of the British Education Research Association (BERA) which are set out in their recommendations for ethical research (2004).



Results and Discussion

Typically, the results of a phenomenographic study are mapped in a hierarchical order from sophisticated to non (or less) sophisticated. If these are mapped then they appear to reflect a cumulative distribution graph of a normal distribution which show level of understanding and synthesis of ideas on the horizontal axis against percentage of the research cohort on the vertical axis – this is no different.



The initial study has shown that there is much more work to undertake into this area as a whole, opinions vary greatly in the cohort sample, both in terms of perceptions of the usefulness and relevance of MTL and the experiences that individuals have had on the programme. All of those in the research sample (100%) unequivocally recognised the usefulness and validity in pursuing study of a higher degree. An above average proportion of respondents (65%) also commented that they saw the value in evidencing work based practice.

A number of the NQTs (20%) reported that they found the rigours of studying for a higher level degree whilst undertaking their NQT year to be beyond their capability due to capacity and workload issues. This was not exclusively the opinion of those who had undertaken undergraduate or postgraduate study prior to achieving QTS.

Another finding of the research showed that expectations to the cohort with regard to what they felt undertaking a “Masters” would entail had a significant variance. Some NQTs (35%) were able to easily articulate accurately what they thought a ‘normal’ masters would entail and the level of commitment it would take. This was in contrast to others who felt that that it was likely to be an extension of the Post Graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) which they had previously undertaken.

Although in its infancy as a piece of research, it is proposed to fully articulate the work undertaken to date by means of an academic paper to explore and fully document the thoughts of NQTs with regard to MTL. This is considered to be timely given the changes to teacher training in the England and Wales (Government White Paper 2010) and the consideration that those entering the profession in the future will still have to pursue a “masters” level qualification of some sort. As MTL is exclusive to England and Wales, the content of the Scottish Chartered Teacher initiative can be viewed for comparison, possibly drawing on interviews with Chartered Teachers to provide comparable data.

