

Profiles of 12 further education based teacher educators



John Aston: teacher educator – who would have believed it?

East Riding College, East Yorkshire.

The majority of my working life has been intertwined with education and real evidence of transformational learning of one sort or another. I left school at fifteen (1969) and entered the world of work as an apprentice motor vehicle (MV) engineer. My working week was a combination of work and attendance at Barnsley Technical College. My technical education set the scene for a successful working life as a MV technician, welder, foreman, teacher and, finally, as a teacher educator.

Let me be frank – I was working long hours and was not particularly well paid as a MV technician, so I thought I would have a go at being a teacher and enjoy the long holidays and better pay.

‘How hard can it be?’ I asked myself. My first port of call was the then Huddersfield Polytechnic (now the University) and an interview for their pre-service Certificate in Education (FE) at their Holly Bank campus. I was accepted and all I had to do was to give up my job and become a full-time student. I did it but what a leap of faith it was when I look back.

In September 1988 I started the CertEd and once things had settled down, I knew teaching was for me. I loved studying and saw the relevance of putting the theory into practice. If I can look for an analogy, I would say it is akin to music playing in my head, the enjoyment and fulfilment of enjoying doing what I do. And to this day that music plays even stronger in my role as a teacher educator. **My role as a teacher educator is a selfless role**, it is not about me, but rather it is about my trainees, many of whom have taken the same leap of faith as I did, who look at me and think: ‘give me a good lesson!’, ‘Give me the pedagogical skills and knowledge to be able to teach properly’. And that is my ethos, simple as that. I have travelled the same road as my trainees and appreciate their anxieties, which allows me to steady their nerves so that they continue with their teaching career with growing confidence.

I loved everything about my time on the CertEd course and, on reflection, it was real evidence of a transformational learning experience if ever there was one. It changed my life and has given me an exciting and interesting career. Education offered me a third chance. It was while I was in my classes at Holly Bank that I knew I wanted to be a teacher educator. Mike Cook, Malcolm Hepworth and David Neve, then teacher educators at the Polytechnic, still influence my teaching and learning strategies to this day.

In July 1989 I gained a full-time position at Scarborough Technical College (as it was then). I quickly settled down into learning how to deliver worthwhile and meaningful lessons. As the years went by, I must have been doing something right as I was asked if I would like to become part of the teacher training team at Yorkshire Coast College (YCC), as it is now called. “Of course”, was my reply, “and thanks.” So that is how it all started. I worked with Jonathan Tummons, who was also new to the role of teacher educator, so we were as ‘green’ as each other. However, we complemented each other and developed a team work approach which was probably the best thing for both of us. We were supported mainly by the University of Huddersfield. We also settled into a self-supporting system that was really a community of practice that gave me the real presence and feel of being a teacher educator. I completed a BA (Hons) Education and Training (1998), and then enrolled on the MEd (2005) with the University of Huddersfield. I became Centre Manager at YCC and in 2006 I moved to East Riding College as Curriculum Leader in Education and Teacher Training, where I worked in partnership with Jane Chadwick without whom the centre would not be thriving as it is today.

My role as a teacher educator has been such a privilege where I still have that same belief in education as a transformative experience as when I first started at Holly Bank in 1988. What a story and what a journey I have had, and I would not change a thing. But what is important to me is this question: have I made a difference? If I have, then it is in very large measure down to the University of Huddersfield and the real transformational learning I experienced both on my CertEd and subsequent development by the team at the University.

Postscript *Since John wrote his profile, he has retired as a full-time teacher at East Riding College and now works as a teacher educator at the University of Huddersfield on a part-time basis.*