



Heather Lister: the accidental teacher educator

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My parents always said that I was a ‘born teacher’. Apparently as a child, I would try to teach my dolls things. Nevertheless, I was adamant I did not want to be a traditional teacher who went to school, then to university and straight back to school. As I had always loved languages and communicating with people, I completed a BA (Hons) in Modern Languages and also studied Business at Université Laval, Quebec, Canada. I then worked for ten years in export sales and marketing in the textile industry. In 1990, prior to the creation of the European Single Market, I decided to make a career change and started to teach Business French and German, and thoroughly enjoyed seeing my students progress. Soon afterwards I got a job teaching Modern Languages and Business Studies at Selby College. I taught a wide range of age groups and levels from Adult Education

to 16-18 year olds, BTEC Level 1 to 'A' Levels and so I enrolled on an in-service PGCE with the University of Huddersfield to deepen my understanding of teaching, learning and assessment and to hone my teaching skills.

Like many teacher educators in further education, **my entry into teacher education was very much by chance**. Although my subject specialisms were Modern Languages and Business Studies, I was asked one day if I would be interested in teaching a City and Guilds (C&G) 7307 Stage 1 Introduction to Teaching evening class. I was given a course overview, books by Geoff Petty and by Reece and Walker, and shown the filing cabinet with some resources in. I enjoyed the challenge and 'got by' with a little bit of help from a colleague/mentor who answered a few of my questions, but I was not really guided in how to train future teachers.

I subsequently taught on C&G 7307 Stage 2 and then in 1999 I was asked to join the Certificate of Education/Postgraduate Certificate of Education (Cert Ed/PGCE) team. **I questioned whether I had the subject knowledge, skills, and experience to be a teacher educator** and to teach at higher education (HE) level, but my then line manager assured me that as I was a good teacher, I would be a good teacher educator.

Fortunately, the then Cert Ed/PGCE course leader, Glenys Richardson, pointed me in the right direction in terms of content to be delivered and interpretation of assessment criteria, and helped me assess work, but I did feel rather a fraud. How could I train teachers when I sometimes had bad teaching sessions myself? So, I read more books and discussed teaching and learning issues with colleagues in the hope of gaining some enlightenment in relation to the art of teaching.

My approach to teacher education was pragmatic: I encouraged trainees to discuss their lessons and reflect on their practice. Inspired by a course in ‘advanced practice and creativity’ led by John Beverley, formerly of Huddersfield Technical College, I endeavoured to give trainees practical ideas for activities and a toolkit of skills which they could use in their lessons. It was only later when I did a course at the University of Huddersfield on developing evidence-based teacher education practice, led by Penny Noel, that I was to learn that this approach was called ‘modelling’.

In fact, it was not until I became Centre Manager and regularly attended University of Huddersfield meetings, conferences and undertook a MA in Education and Training that I really began to consider in any depth the nature of teacher education and to critically engage with the literature.

Another key person in my development as a teacher educator has been my colleague, Jane Brooke. Together we have not only shared ideas and good practice but have also undertaken research projects into ways to support our sometimes ‘fragile learners’. Furthermore, our experiences of teaching trainees working in offender learning, together with colleague Ellen Schofield, were also influential in my developing a broader understanding of teaching in what was known as the ‘post-compulsory sector’.

Throughout my career I have continued to teach ‘A’ Level French and German because I think that teaching specific subjects gave me credibility with our trainee teachers. As I have become increasingly aware that teaching is not an exact science or an art, but a juggling act, requiring the insights of a psychologist and the virtuosity of a jazz player. I still often feel a fraud trying to train teachers to face the

challenges of the classroom as well as the demands of their senior managers and of Ofsted.