



Kim Sanderson: becoming a teacher educator

Harrogate College

My journey to being a teacher educator was not intentional; it evolved as a result of twenty years' experience of teaching and managing a range of curricula in a further education college.

I did not even have aspirations to become a teacher until my late twenties, despite spending a year as a teaching assistant in a French secondary school as part of my undergraduate degree. It happened after I had been working in a management role for a large well-known retailer. I was responsible for running staff development sessions; a standard weekly 30 minutes of top-down dissemination of information from Head Office to staff. I knew there was something lacking in this method of staff training, although at that time I could not articulate what it was. I just knew that to really improve the quality of customer

service and increase sales; the staff needed to be more involved in the process. I could either pay lip service to this or I could do it properly. Thus, I started to create short activities to get staff to talk more about what we were doing. I loved it and wanted to do more of this kind of staff development. I chose the post-16 education sector because I wanted to enhance people's employment skills and my degree in French and Spanish was my starting point for application onto a full time PGCE in 1993. In the early days of my career, I travelled to further education colleges in North Cheshire, York, Bradford and to Harrogate College, where I taught a mixture of French, Spanish, and retail business subjects. This later led to leadership and management roles at Harrogate College in a variety of curriculum areas including business and languages.

In 2009, I was invited to be a mentor for a PGCE student and this was the initial introduction to working as a teacher educator. I really enjoyed working with new teachers and supporting them through the early days of their careers. I loved the enthusiasm that they brought with them. In 2010, I started teaching PTTLS, a level 3 ITE award, and carried out observations of CertEd and PGCE students. I felt supported by fellow teacher educators in my staff room as we discussed standardisation of assessment and the enhancement of feedback to the trainees. These conversations were invaluable to me as a new teacher educator.

Despite this support, I experienced the often reported 'imposter syndrome' and reckoned it was probably just a matter of time before I would be 'found out'. Enrolment onto a master's level study could only enhance my credibility; short CPD updates no longer had sufficient validity if I was going to take this role seriously. As part of the master's study in Professional Development, I became

very interested in a teacher's sense of agency and this inspired me in my work with trainee teachers. Over the last 20 years or so, I have experienced many government funding cuts and my own specialist subject area (languages) disappeared entirely from the offer in my own college. It is easy to feel powerless in these circumstances and I knew that being open to change was crucial for survival if I wanted to stay in the sector. Even though an individual teacher has relatively little control over government policy decisions, they do have control over what happens in their classroom. How a teacher deals with their own students and organises learning activities is totally within their remit. This is an area that I like to discuss with trainee teachers if they express feelings of constraint and negativity towards an aspect of their work. In an ever-changing landscape of government policy and funding drivers, two key attributes for survival are resilience and flexibility.

An interest in developing people is a key reason for being a teacher educator. For me, this has only been possible with opportunities for continuous professional development and supportive colleagues and managers who are interested in developing tutors so that their skills are deployed effectively. **I am proud to continue this culture of learning with trainee teachers** and other newer colleagues who are starting on their journey. Returning to my initial reasons for moving into teaching from a retail background, I think the reasons are the same, that is, we are on a quest to continually improve quality and we can only do this through a shared venture and by offering support to tutors from the earliest stage of their careers.

***Postscript:** Since Kim wrote this profile, she has left and is currently at Leeds Beckett University.*