

TEACHER CULTURE AND THE INDUCTION OF NEWLY QUALIFIED TEACHERS

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Following many years of patchy and inconsistent induction practice (HMI 1998, Carre 1993, Earley 1993, Sidgwick, Mahoney and Hextall 1993, Bolam et al 1995), new arrangements for the induction of newly qualified teachers in England were given legislative authority through DfEE Circular 5/99 (DfEE 1999) and translated into procedural expectations through guidance produced by the Teacher Training Agency (TTA 1999). The stated aim of new statutory arrangements, introduced in England, in September 1999, is that all NQTs should have structured support and training to consolidate and extend the skills learnt in their initial training. This was to be done by building upon the best of existing practice and establishing clear expectations of NQTs, together with a guarantee of the support and guidance needed to meet them (DfEE 1998). We were interested in the extent to which common expectations, drawn up with the explicit intention of delivering high quality induction for all newly qualified teachers (DfEE 1998), translated into high quality practice. We were particularly interested in the ways in which school or teacher cultures might transform common aspirations into very different realities for those on whom the policy impacts, in this case the NQTs and their induction tutors. In other words we wished to explore ways in which an initiative which interacts with the school as a formal organisation emphasising management structures, oversight and accountability and governance, interacts with the school as a workplace community, that is, a social and psychological setting in which teachers construct a sense of practice, of professional efficacy and professional community (McLaughlin 1993).

'Communities' and 'culture' are two key words which emerge from the literature about teacher development and learning. Day (1999) defines culture as about 'people in the organisational setting, characterised by the ways in which values, beliefs, prejudices and behaviour are played out within the micropolitical processes of school life (p78). Nias et al (1989) note the uniqueness of culture in each of their research schools and argue for induction processes which help new staff to become included and socialised into the culture of the school. Communities of practice are defined by Lave and Wenger as 'A set of relations among persons, activity and world, over time and in relation with other and overlapping communities of practice. A community of practice is an intrinsic condition for the existence of knowledge, not least because it provide the interpretive support necessary for making sense of its heritage' (Lave and Wenger 1991, p 98).

A number of writers draw attention to the significance of collaborative cultures either at school or individual teacher level (Fullan 1993, Nias 1989, Hopkins et al 1998, Hargreaves 1994, Tickle 1994, Day 1999) . Hopkins et al talk of teacher development taking place most effectively in schools with a culture of collaboration fostering pedagogic partnerships, which not only counter professional isolation but also contribute to the enhancement of practice. Nias et al describe collaborative staff as both happy and resilient and notes that their collaborative schools exhibit many of the characteristics of healthy organisations, including the capacity to readily adapt to change, although they also suggest that such schools are more responsive to internally generated than to externally imposed change.

Hargreaves' work on teacher cultures provides a particularly useful basis for a framework to help us to account for the different experiences of our sample of NQTs because it articulates particular features of different kinds of teacher culture against which we are able to evaluate specific aspects of NQT experience. He characterises collaborative teacher cultures as, typically, involving working relationships between teachers and their colleagues which tend to be spontaneous, voluntary, development-oriented, pervasive across time and space and unpredictable (Hargreaves 1994, p192). Nias et al identify talk as a key feature of collaborative schools in that the staff spent a great deal of time talking to one another and that their conversations were usually a mixture of chat about themselves and discussion of their teaching (Nias et al, 1989, p79). Hopkins (1990), drawing upon research evidence from work in South Wales, concludes that teachers are better able to implement new ideas within the context of supportive collegial relationships.

Hargreaves contrasts collaboration with a culture of individualism which may take a number of forms: constrained individualism arising from administrative or other situational constraints; strategic individualism as a calculated concentration of effort in response to the daily contingencies of the work environment; and elective individualism as a preferred way of working, a principled choice to work alone, all or some of the time (Hargreaves 1994, p172). Nias (1989) illustrates how buildings can impose situational constraints in describing how a teacher articulates the isolation felt when housed in a separate classroom which mean that the individual completely forgotten and ends up feeling no one cares (Nias et al 1989, p33).

Hargreaves defines a culture of contrived collegiality, of which he is highly critical, as involving administrative regulation, compulsion, an implementation-orientation, a fixed location in time and space and predictability (Hargreaves 1994, p195/6). He suggests that two of its major consequences are inflexibility and inefficiency. Day (1999) is less pessimistic suggesting that 'Despite their limitations, cultures of contrived collegiality may act as a 'bridging' process towards more collaborative cultures in providing added opportunities for development' (Day 1999, p81).

The study

The work on which we draw for this paper, involved case studies of induction practice in ten schools, drawn from two large, but contrasting Local Education Authorities (LEAs), one predominantly rural and one situated in a large conurbation. Schools were selected to include both primary and secondary, a range of school size and different kinds of catchment. Following an initial contact to explain the nature of the project and to secure the school's agreement, interviews were arranged with the teachers involved. Two interviews were conducted, one during the early stages of the induction year and one towards its end. Where schools employed several NQTs, two were interviewed, chosen by the school. The induction tutor for each NQT was also interviewed together with the member of staff with overall responsibility for induction in the school. Field notes were made following each visit and school OFSTED reports were also used to provide contextual information. All interviews were transcribed and returned to respondents for validation.

Individualism and the NQT

While Hargreaves warns of the 'foolishness of presuming that all teacher individualism is iniquitous' (p183) and urges consideration of its potential strengths, our evidence suggests that individualism, particularly on the part of their colleagues, is, at worst, potentially damaging to the NQT's development and, at best, damaging to the longer term interest of the school. Our most compelling example of this is one NQT, working in a small primary school, described by OFSTED as 'with very good arrangements for staff development' for whom the culture of individualism played a part in the difficulties which she encountered and

contributed to her decision to leave the school in the middle of the year. To some extent the individualism in the school was constrained, that is, a consequence of situational and contextual factors.

Because the school was small, Diana (South Park Primary School) felt that she had to manage with little support.

And because you're in such a small school, you see all the other teachers being able to do it and you think to yourself well they can do it, surely I have to do it too.

The headteacher, Beth, confirms that this has to be the expectation in a small school.

She doesn't have other people in the same year group to plan with so a lot of it she has to do on her own, so we've given her some additional time

Moreover, it seemed clear that although Beth welcomed the new arrangements for induction, she did not see a need for the level of support included, unless the NQT had difficulties.

It's much more structured although having said that, I think a lot of it is to do with the fact that our NQT was having huge problems, and that's why we've had to have this very structured programme [...] I think the extent to which you need it is probably in relation to the NQT you have.

Further evidence of the individualistic culture within the school comes from a comment which implies that, prior to the introduction of the new arrangements, Diana's difficulties would not have been noticed at all.

I mean she could have, under the old arrangements, just got to the end of the year and we probably wouldn't be any wiser.

The situational constraints described by Nias, were exemplified in this school by the location of the NQT's classroom in a building separate from the rest of the school. This served to exacerbate the effects of a context where school size clearly limited some opportunities for sharing which would be part of day to day practice in a larger school. Diana is physically isolated from the rest of the school, teaching in a classroom in a separate building.

I'm outside teaching – I'm not even in the school and if I had a problem I couldn't sort of pop next door and say this isn't working or something's going wrong. I felt very out, very isolated out there.

Nias notes that primary teachers, particularly inexperienced ones and newcomers to a particular school, learn most from those of their colleagues who are easily visible or accessible, that is, people who have the same or adjacent teaching areas. (Nias et al 1989, Nias 1989). Diana's physical location denied her access to this key opportunity for support. Moreover, it also limited opportunities for talk, another feature which Nias identifies as key to collaborative cultures.

'Two related features of the collaborative schools were that the staff spent a great deal of time talking to one another, and that their conversations were usually a mixture of chat about themselves and discussion of their teaching' (Nias et al 1989, p79). It was notable that, in Diana's case, not only were opportunities to talk restricted by physical location, but talk within the school was rarely seen as an appropriate learning opportunity for her. Once her

difficulties had been recognised, visits to other schools were arranged as a major means of resolving them.

Even when an opportunity arose for joint planning with the possibility of constructive discussion, it was not taken.

Beth did come in and do a bit of team teaching with me and I thought great this will be great experience, but then she went and did all the planning on her own at home, so I still missed the important bit that I needed.

This may be explained, at least in part, by the impression given by Beth that what might be viewed, in other schools, as a collaborative learning opportunity, was seen in this school, at least by the headteacher, as doing the NQT's job for her.

I think they did an awful lot for her over and above what they would normally do for an NQT. They were, well, they were doing her planning. So that they were sitting with her doing her planning. They were giving her all sorts of resources and materials.

This is not to say that Diana felt totally unsupported. She felt, at the time of our first interview, that she could ask for help if she had particular problems.

If there was a problem I feel that not one of them would turn their back on me. I've got that support, in the sense where if I know I've got a problem, they're willing to help me.

However talk did appear to be a problem-solving activity rather than part of normal school life. It appeared that, for Beth, the size of the school was seen as a reason for individual endeavour, that is, what Hargreaves describes as 'strategic' individualism, a necessary concentration of effort.

The support is perhaps not there as it would have been in a larger school. Yes, you are on your own doing the planning and there is no one else in the year group to share it with, but that's the nature of it, and if the NQT's in a larger school there will be different problems.

This is clearly a very particular case and one from which it would be dangerous to generalise. Nevertheless, it does seem in Stake's terms, to be instrumental rather than intrinsic (Stake 2000, p437) in that it provides us with insights into circumstances which emerge, albeit in different ways, in some of our other sample schools. We can give a number of other, different examples of individualism working to the disadvantage of the NQT.

In another example two NQTs are employed by a school which is going through a phase of transition, in which there are a number of staffing difficulties, caused by a combination of illness and disaffection. While the NQTs speak positively of their first year of teaching, others in the school acknowledge that a lack of collaboration within the school has limited learning opportunities for them. For example, Wendy, an induction tutor, (West Green Primary School) notes that other staff have had minimal involvement in the induction process and adds,

I do think other staff could be sometimes a bit more sympathetic to the needs of an NQT [...] especially people who have worked in a school a long time [...] and can make chance remarks [...] and they will just make the NQT feel quite sort of belittled.

This is confirmed by Margaret (West Green Primary School), the headteacher.

I think it's (involvement of other staff) been very varied. I mean we have got three staff off on long-term sick at the moment, I mean who were struggling themselves, so they weren't really in a position to offer help. And I think that's been quite hard for the NQTs to come into a profession and see three senior people actually leaving it and not very happy.

The NQTs were also sensitive to the situation as Rebecca notes.

But you can't observe supply teachers and you, know, I would have felt like I was imposing to go into a supply teacher. There's been teachers who've had, you know, problems and they've gone off on long term sick because they haven't been happy and then there's David (the other NQT) – and I don't particularly want to go and sit in David's class and I don't particular want him to come and sit in my class either!

This does provide an interesting example of constrained individualism, clearly present in this school as a consequence of particular circumstances which seems to have led to an individualism, for this NQT, that might be described as strategic or even principled rather than constrained. This is with respect to her comment about not wishing to share any observation with her fellow NQT. Her response to this, is in marked contrast to one of our secondary schools where the NQTs in the school have observed each other both as described by Henrietta.

Yes, Sara, the English NQT and I, we've observed each other a couple of times and you know we pop into each other's classes, the NQTs and you know, go along and see each other and how they're doing, which is really nice you know because [...] it's an extra sort of person of authority in the room but it's nice for us as well because we can give each other feedback without it seeming at all threatening or patronising.

These two comments provide an interesting contrast between individualism in one school, which seems to have denied the NQTs an opportunity for both mutual support and learning, and spontaneous collaboration in the second which has clearly benefitted those involved in a variety of ways. It is also interesting to note that, while we cannot claim any evidence of cause and effect, individualism elsewhere in the first school seems to have led to its adoption as a *modus operandi* by the NQTs. In contrast, in the second school, a culture of mutual help and support throughout the school, seems to have been extended by the NQTs to their own professional interactions.

Elsewhere, individualism manifested itself through the unwillingness of some staff to allow the NQT to observe their teaching, even where such an activity had been identified as a potentially valuable learning experience for the NQT as illustrated by Wendy's comment as head of induction (East Green Secondary School).

It's interesting the response you get from staff, some are more comfortable than others about that kind of thing [...] I think younger colleagues are better and more comfortable with being observed.

Our final comment about individualism would be to note that schools which are seen as successful as judged by OFSTED, by measures of pupil performance and by their status as Beacon Schools can still present a very individualistic environment to an NQT as Nikki (North Green Infant School) notes.

I enjoy the class I am with, the only thing I would say is general support around the school I feel that there's communication it's just that everyone seems to be sort of on their own. And sometimes it feels as if you need a bit of a sense of humour within the school.

Both NQTs in this school, described by the induction tutor and the headteacher as with 'very supportive staff' comment on the lack of interest of other staff although both acknowledge the extremely high quality support provided by their induction tutor. Samantha echoes Nikki.

I wouldn't say involvement, but maybe, an occasional 'how's it going?' or 'how are you getting on?' 'do you need to talk?' you know would be nice but it's not hindering my progress or anything so ... Yes sort of acknowledging that it's our first year of teaching, that would be quite nice.

Although Nikki feels that the lack of interest from other staff has not hindered her progress, it has left her determined to move to a different school as soon as possible. Thus, while this particular manifestation of individualism does not appear to have affected professional development adversely, it does seem to have contributed to the creation of a situation where a highly regarded school will lose a member of staff in whom they have invested significant time and effort.

Structural Collaboration

We have used the term structural collaboration rather than 'contrived collegiality' which is described critically by Hargreaves. Our data supports Day's view that cultures which fall short of fully fledged collaboration, do, nevertheless, offer NQTs opportunities for development and learning which represent a significant improvement on what has gone before. For this reason we have chosen to describe these cultures as 'structural' rather than 'contrived' in that we believe that, rather than being artificial, as suggested by Hargreaves, they represent a significant and, in many cases, potentially permanent positive change in some school's organisational arrangements. While, as we will see later, these structural arrangements seem to fall short of the genuine and spontaneous collaboration which attracts the highest praise from our NQTs, they do seem to have had a major impact on practice in some schools.

In one of our secondary schools, Chris (East Green Secondary School) compares the experience of the NQT this year with that of her predecessor underlining the impact which the new arrangements have had for her and her colleagues.

Within the department they have all thought it's been very controlled compared with what they all went through, because you came here and you started on day one and you were dumped and basically that's what it was. And of course we're all comparing it because we had an NQT the year before who didn't stay in teaching. He left and were all feeling quiet raw at the edges about that [...] we all sort of kept saying 'if we'd had this we'd have kept him another year. He wouldn't have left. It would have worked better.

In addition to recognising the value of the new imposed structures, this comment also provides another example of past individualism leading to a popular and well regarded school losing a potentially valuable member of staff.

Several of our schools alluded to the importance of imposed structures for making sure that other priorities did not lead to NQT needs taking second place. Wendy (West Green Primary

School) was in no doubt that the new arrangements had imposed a structure which was beneficial.

I think as a school we are taking on board the fact that there has to be some proper induction in place. There's a tendency to look after somebody for the first couple of weeks and then after than it's sink or swim.

As an NQT, Rebecca (West Green Primary School) also appreciates the protection that structured arrangements have given to her.

No I am glad in a way that I have had the kind of structured support that I have had otherwise there's a tendency for people to think you're getting on fine and leave you

Both of these comments demonstrate the value of the structural collaboration which results from a requirement to meet regularly to discuss progress and to observe NQTs and give feedback on that observation.

A further example of structural collaboration which goes beyond the procedural entitlements mentioned above, is that of schools making deliberate arrangements to ensure that NQTs have opportunities to work with another teacher as part of their day to day work. This was a particular feature of many of our primary schools as described by Margaret at West Green Primary.

That was intentional, it does mean that they can plan together, it means that support, in a way, support is put in as part of the ongoing classroom work.

Although this could be described as contrived, it has nevertheless contributed significantly to the NQT's largely positive experience and has clearly mitigated the effects of the individualism elsewhere in the school described earlier by Wendy . Similarly, at North Green Infant school, where the NQTs felt a lack of support from staff in general, the fact that Nikki 's progress has not been affected could well be a consequence of the structural collaboration which has been present in the school, mainly in two respects. First, the other NQT, Samantha (North Green Infant School) notes that opportunities to observe other teachers have been plentiful.

Well certainly there have been lots and lots of opportunities to observe other people's lessons.

Second, the provision of a named induction tutor, which is a clear example of structural rather than spontaneous collaboration, has clearly been extremely beneficial, as Samantha recognises towards the end of the year.

I must admit she's been absolutely marvellous. Lots of, I mean obviously the suggestions from the practical point of view [...] just general, very supportive comments about 'Have you considered maybe you could try this? Generally just being there as well when you really, you know, I mean she's always around if I need to talk to her.

The imperative of regular meetings had also facilitated other examples of structured collaboration, as Bernadette (North Side Secondary School) describes in relation to joint planning which would not otherwise have been normal school practice.

They do some joint planning well certainly with me because that is one of the things which is valuable about meeting once a week because you can do that sort of thing.

We can therefore conclude that structural collaboration operated at two levels, both beneficial to the NQTs involved. First, the need to set up regular reviews with a named induction tutor, and to arrange observations and feedback, has generated a framework for collaboration which has ensured certain entitlements for the NQT and which has been seen as a very positive development by all schools. Second, some schools have made conscious decisions to make specific arrangements to ensure that NQTs work collaboratively with individuals within the school in other ways. This is particularly true of a number of primary schools who have prioritised assigning the NQT to an induction tutor who works with a parallel class, thereby building in a level of collaborative activity which goes beyond statutory requirements. Day's description of contrived collegiality as a 'bridging process' towards more genuine collaboration seems to be confirmed by the comments of our sample. Indeed we would go further than Day, in suggesting that redefining 'contrived' as 'structural' enables us to interpret this form of collaborative experience as positive for all NQTs and as a counter to elements of individualism which manifest themselves in several of our schools.

Spontaneous Collaboration

A notable feature of the schools where NQTs spoke most positively of their year's experience, was a range of references to forms of collaboration which demonstrate some of the features identified by Hargreaves as present in collaborative teacher cultures, namely spontaneity, development-orientation, and unpredictability. In addition, comments were often made about the way in which the whole staff was approachable and supportive, and this whole school involvement was a significant difference between schools where induction had clearly been well organised and successful and those which went beyond this. Henrietta (West Park Secondary School)'s comment is typical.

It's not just teaching staff, but like the lady on reception, she's very supportive, she will come and chat with us informally, and you know it's great. Everyone sort of mixes in here which is great even down to the canteen staff and the site team and we all sort of know each other [...] I have possibly gone on about how brilliant the school is, but it's just the impression you get being here, because even though everybody knows we're NQTs they do, the staff in this school have gone out of their way to sort of involve us and make us their friend.

One example of spontaneous development oriented collaboration is provided by Henrietta in describing the benefits of regular team-teaching.

We team teach quite a lot which is good ... so we bounce off each other, and he will suggest things to me, but I am equally, as well, able to suggest things so that works really well.

Informal conversation is also a feature of spontaneous collaboration which can only arise under particular conditions as noted by Chris (East Green Secondary School). Again these information meetings are spontaneous, development-oriented and ongoing.

We meet in the mornings just because we are both in early and we chat. We probably get most of the useful stuff done at the beginning of the day. ... I think the most important thing I do is just to be somebody there for her to talk to really. ... She's stopped saying can I ask you a stupid question and now she just asks questions.

Mark (West Park Secondary School) also stresses the value of informal spontaneous conversation.

Both of my lot (he is tutor to 2 NQTs) would rather chat [...] I mean humans are like that. With Henrietta, particularly in the drama we chat endlessly in lessons. We're not always teaching, sometimes we are sitting together and observing [...] So I prefer to be as informal as I can.

What is interesting about all the above comments is that the very nature of this kind of collaborative activity, which is clearly valued highly by both NQTs and induction tutors, makes it impossible to legislate for or to provide through formal imposition.

Conclusions

Our evidence underlines the significance of collaborative cultures, at both school and individual teacher level, for the quality of induction practice. It also suggests that the new mandatory induction arrangements have made a significant contribution to the improvement of practice through requiring specific procedures which demand a certain amount of collaborative work. This is, at the very least, between the NQT and the named induction tutor. Our evidence suggests that, even where effective collaborative work is limited largely to the interaction between these two individuals, the NQT is able to have a positive and successful induction experience.

That said, we have some evidence to suggest that lack of support from other staff may affect the NQT's disposition to continue working in that particular school. Thus, while the induction process has been successful for the NQT, and it could therefore be concluded that the new statutory arrangements have served their purpose, they have failed to ensure an experience sufficiently positive to keep the NQT in post beyond a year. We make this point with considerable caution, as our evidence is from a single instance which could well have alternative explanations, but we raise it as an issue worthy of further thought. Nias' description of collaborative teachers as happy and resilient, implying that those without access to such cultures are less likely to be so, seems to be endorsed by this single case.

We have used the terms structural and spontaneous collaboration to distinguish between two ways in which collaborative working seemed to emerge from our data. The first refers to collaborative activity which arises from organisational procedures either related directly to the requirements of the new mandatory arrangements, or to conscious school-level decisions about ways of working. Examples of this kind of activity include regular meetings between NQT and induction tutor, as required by Circular 5/99 and deliberate placement of primary NQTs with an induction tutor who has a parallel class. While they are not inconsistent with the teacher culture which Hargreaves describes as 'contrived collegiality' we have used the term structured collaboration to indicate a more positive and fruitful way of working than is implied by Hargreaves' (1994) category. Our examples share some of the characteristics which Hopkins et al (1998) describe as pedagogic partnerships in that, not only do they help dispel feelings of professional isolation, but they also help to enhance practice. Our evidence suggests that this, albeit procedural and externally imposed collaboration, has led to significant improvements in the arrangements made for the support of NQTs.

Although we have evidence of positive and developmental experiences from NQTs whose support seems most appropriately characterised as structurally collaborative, the strongest comments in relation to professional growth, personal satisfaction, ongoing development and enjoyment come from those NQTs who have been working in cultures which display the characteristics which Hargreaves describes as collaborative. Because, for us, the key

distinguishing features of these environments compared to others appears to be their spontaneity and their capacity to generate collaborative situations in unpredictable and unplanned ways, we have describe this kind of context of providing spontaneous collaboration. One way in which this spontaneity seems to manifest itself is in the involvement of the majority if not all staff in the school. More significant for us, is the nature of this collaboration, with its emphasis upon the informal, the unplanned and the opportunist. We have feedback from some teachers in these schools which suggests a degree of cynicism about the value of the new arrangements, reflecting Nias' comment that collaborative schools may not be receptive to externally imposed change. Nevertheless the confidence within the schools and the teachers is also consistent with Nias' perception of collaborative schools as self-confident and as organisations where change is continual and endemic. The outcome however seems to have been not, as Nias suggested, that the schools'and teachers' capacity to deal with external initiatives was limited as a consequence of ongoing involvement in self-adjustment, but that they were well-placed to simply absorb this particular innovation into their existing day to day practice because minimal further change was needed.

We therefore conclude that it is possible to place the kinds of cultures in which NQTs work on a continuum with highly individualistic teacher cultures at one extreme and spontaneous collaboration at the other. At the extreme, the individualist culture is not able to provide for the needs of the NQT. This does not necessarily mean that the NQT will fail although we have one example where the teachers were unable provide the support needed to generate the improvements which they felt were necessary. We have examples of NQTs who have survived the year, but survival, rather than professional development is the description of at least one working in a highly individualistic culture. Others have been able to develop during the year but have been frustrated in relation to certain specific identified needs because individualism among some staff has denied them access to particular development activities.

At the other extreme, spontaneous collaboration exposes the NQT to ongoing support and development through unplanned, unpredictable but developmental activity in which professional discussion is probably the most powerful development tool. The new induction arrangements in England have marginal impact at these two extremes, in the first case because they are not able to guarantee induction practice capable of fostering an appropriate level of development in the NQT. In the second case, they are largely redundant, partly because the school in which this kind of culture is found is likely to have a highly developed professional development culture already, and partly because the kinds of activity which are most significant, go beyond the demands of the statutory requirements. Between these two extremes however, we have been able to give a range of examples of what we have called structural collaboration in which the new requirements do appear to have made a significant difference. We are thus left with an interesting paradox. While centralised and statutory demands seem to have been successful in raising the standard of induction practice, the characteristics which take induction practice beyond the satisfactory and into the realms of excellence are, by their nature, not amenable to statute or external mandate.

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