**Introducing pre-service citizenship teachers to the design and implementation of focus days to enhance their professional learning**

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**Abstract**

Much attention has been give to the comparative efficacy of a range of approaches to the delivery of citizenship education in England. A recent inspection report (Ofsted 2010) expressed concern about a perceived over-reliance on collapsed timetable days (referred to here as focus days) as one such mode of delivery.

The effectiveness of focus day planning and delivery is considered in this article by scrutinising the purpose(s), activities and outcomes on a post graduate pre-service programme for citizenship teachers in which such activities form a central theme. The motivation and aims behind the inclusion of focus day planning is clarified and the extent to which these aims are met is discussed. The discussion is informed by data collected from teachers with whom the pre-service students liaised regarding the impact of the focus days on the schools where they took place, and their immediate and longer term impact on the student teachers who were involved. Most of the aims were found to be met and student and experienced teachers identified several benefits of the activity.

**Key words**: collapsed timetable Ofsted QTS Standards student teachers

**Introduction**

Various researchers have identified that a range of modes exist for the delivery of Citizenship Education in schools in England (Leighton 2004a; Breslin 2005; Faulks 2006; Ofsted 2006, 2010; Kerr et al 2007; Keating et al 2009, 2010). While attention has regularly been give to the comparative efficacy of discrete (that is, explicit timetabled lessons) and cross-curricular approaches, and to ways in which such approaches might be strengthened, there appears to have been little information with regard to the effectiveness of collapsed time-table days (focus days) in England until the most recent report by the Office for Standards in Education (‘Ofsted’ – the inspectorate of schools in England), based on inspections of citizenship education in schools in England 2006-09, which noted that ‘schools relying heavily on such days were most unlikely to meet National Curriculum requirement’ (Ofsted 2010: 24). This is not a wholesale rejection of focus days as a means of delivering citizenship so much as an expression of concern that some schools deploy them as a sole vehicle rather than as part of a more complete and structured approach, and that those schools which take such a single method approach tend not to meet even the basic requirements of the National Curriculum. Commenting in relation to an earlier Ofsted report, it was noted on a publisher’s website, one which provides a forum for advice and ideas across a range of subjects and which had run and was evaluating a cross-curricular global awareness project, that

[m]any of the pilot schools have organised collapsed timetable days to focus on Global Citizenship issues. In a recent OFSTED Report (Feb 2005) *[sic]* on the teaching of citizenship these activity days are seen as useful when they provide participation and responsible action – but only when they are part of an overall coherent citizenship curriculum. ([www.teachingexpertise.com](http://www.teachingexpertise.com))

This article considers the effectiveness of focus day planning and delivery in relation to the experiences of specialist citizenship education student teachers on a Post Graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) programme, the most common pre-service route for aspiring secondary phase (pupils aged 11-18) teachers in England, where such an activity forms a central strand. Having identified the motivation and aims behind the inclusion of focus day planning in that programme, the article then discusses the extent to which these aims are met. This discussion is illustrated by information about the focus days which have been planned and delivered, their impact on the schools where they took place, and their impact at the time and on the professional development of the PGCE students who were involved.

**Background and rationale**

The planning and delivery of focus days has been a feature of this Citizenship course within an 11-18 full-time PGCE programme since 2003. Its inclusion arose from collaboration between the course leader and the deputy headteacher of an academically successful partnership school which was investigating ways in which to develop pupils other than in relation to their examination performance. A ten day timetable had been designed for the school within which each second Friday (day ten) was to operate without a structured series of lessons but was instead to be allocated to subjects and pastoral groups so that each would be able to work with pupils for a sustained period on topics and skills which were not necessarily included in the National Curriculum but which staff considered to be essential elements of pupils’ learning and development.

PGCE Citizenship students planned and delivered such a day at the school. There was no formal assessment of either the effect of this on pupil learning and engagement or of student teacher development, but there was a general sense of positive outcomes. When feedback on this first student-planned focus day was presented to the school-based curriculum mentors as part of the continuing development programme within the partnership between schools and the university, several other schools expressed interest in working on similar ventures.

The rationale behind requiring the students to work on planning and delivering focus days is multifaceted. First of all there is an awareness that many schools use such days for at least part of their citizenship provision (Leighton 2004a ; Breslin 2005; Ofsted 2006, 2010; Kerr et al 2007). According to Keating et al (2009) 44% of secondary schools in England use ‘special events’, a category which includes focus days, as part of their citizenship education provision, specifying that ‘cross-curricular delivery and/or collapsed timetable events are often used to complement delivery in specific timeslots.’ (Keating et al, 2009; P 15); it is therefore deemed both rational and beneficial to prepare the students to contribute to and possibly lead these post qualification. Following from this, it was pragmatically recognised that such experience could usefully be emphasised in job applications and interviews, either for schools which have tried to develop their delivery in this way or for those which have not in recognition that their staff might not have the skills or experience required.

Another factor was that planning and delivery of focus days necessitates close collaboration with colleagues; accepting and delegating responsibilities; meeting deadlines; electronic communication, as much of the planning took place while students were on placements which can be over one hundred miles apart (but are usually at least a little closer); detailed planning; consultation and collaboration with experienced – but often not subject specialist – teachers. Such skills are developed through a range of strategies on the PGCE, of which focus day planning is a significant one. As well as concern for the effective development of each cohort of citizenship student teachers, tutors also expressed awareness of the need to develop the subject locally and nationally, and for future secure and valuable placements. Focus day planning is therefore seen as a way in which non-specialist experienced teachers can see how to be more imaginative in their approaches to the subject, and they would also have the benefit of being able to use the student teacher plans for the day and/or the materials developed for it. Further, it is seen as a means of demonstrating the difference of citizenship as a subject – that it is ‘more than just a subject’ – to raise its profile in schools and to create an impact in them. Finally, in recognition of the emphasis placed by various agencies on the Standards for the Award of Qualified Teacher Status (QTS), which all student teachers have to provide evidence of having met in order to gain their teaching qualification, focus days are considered a possible vehicle for evidence of having addressed many of those standards.

It is only by asking the students and the teachers with whom they have worked that it can be discerned whether and to what extent any/all of the objectives had been met, which is the purpose of the research which informs the latter part of this article. It was assumed, and responses validate the assumption, that comments of the utility or otherwise of this activity were in the context of effective development of pupil learning and understanding of citizenship education.

**Process**

The introductory sessions take place early in the course, shortly after students have spent a week in their first placement schools, during a period of serial practice when they are in school for two days then university for three days for each of five consecutive weeks. In the first two years of planning focus days the whole cohort worked together to plan one day but, with the large numbers of student teachers involved (in 2010 the target number for recruitment allocated by the UK government’s Training and Development Agency for Schools was 34), it was found to be more effective for them to work in two groups which each developing a focus day for a different school; the basic structure of preparation and delivery has remained unchanged.

The first university session is with the mentor from the school for whom the day is to be planned; in all but one case this has been a former citizenship student from the course. Students and the visiting mentor spend approximately one hour discussing the realities, fears, concerns, perceptions etc of learning to teach citizenship from the student viewpoint; this takes place in the absence of the subject tutor so that questions can be openly asked and honestly answered. Once the tutor returns, the mentor gives a brief presentation about the school and an outline of the theme set for the focus day which is always decided upon by the school in prior consultation with the university tutor. Students then ask further questions as they break down the task into a coherent series of foci and related activities, organising themselves into small groups to investigate and plan outline activities. They then have two hours in which to arrive at a basic structure for the day which is presented to the mentor and tutor, and to each other. One student is agreed upon to act as liaison with the mentor and to co-ordinate planning, requests for resources etc – usually but not always a student who is placed at the school for their first teaching practice – and the rest of the day is spent on further planning in the light of advice or concerns raised following the initial presentation.

During their first block practice students continue to collaborate and plan for the day as well as carrying out all the other requirements of their programme – subject tasks, observations, planning, teaching, researching and writing a 5000 word assignment, developing subject knowledge and skills, etc – so that they can present the proposed content of the day to the mentor, tutor and each other during university sessions immediately before the winter break. In this way everyone can see how parts work together, what needs to be adjusted or developed, where unnecessary repetition can be removed; they can ensure a range of teaching and learning strategies and that their objectives will be met or reconsidered. This session serves to allow explicit critical feedback from students to each other and from the mentor and tutor, as well as reassuring them that the students are on task to ensure that the school pupils have an appropriate series of learning encounters.

The dates for the focus days are agreed between schools and the university before the introductory session. As far as possible these have been on the same day for both groups, ideally on a university subject day in order to minimise disruption to other schools during student placements and to avoid clashing with the professional studies sessions which are delivered to cross-curricular groups on this programme.

A crucially important element in planning has been the use of the university’s virtual learning environment (VLE). This enabled students to share initial plans and to support each others’ progress and development, as well as ensuring that apparent duplications can be avoided while also allowing disparate plans to be given a coherent and unifying overarching structure. As the two groups work separately and on different topics, it has also allowed sharing of ideas and content between the groups so that student teachers build up a body of plans, materials and activities irrespective of the activity in which they will be involved.

The purpose here is not to summarise or analyse the content of the focus days. However, it is of interest to note that topics for the days have been wide ranging, including crime (several times and with a different focus in each), Britishness, diversity, economy, a United Nations General Assembly simulation, the environment, and global communities. The timing of the Britishness day was particularly serendipitous as it took place one week after the publication of “Curriculum Review – Diversity and Citizenship” (Ajegbo et al 2007), often referred to as the Ajegbo Report, which has since led to the inclusion of identity and diversity as a fourth strand to the National Curriculum for Citizenship in England; the complexity and significance of national identity has been much researched and commented upon both internationally (Tan and Hashim, 2009; Sears 2010) and with specific regard to England (Crick, 2008; Murray, 2008). The two student teachers who led the planning and co-ordination of the Britishness day subsequently presented a paper outlining the processes surrounding the planning and delivery to an international conference at Oxford University, and both now teach at schools which have since hosted focus days.

**Structure(s) of the day(s)**

Some days have started with an introductory assembly and some have ended with everyone coming together to share ideas and outcomes. A few have been built around pupils working with the same PGCE students throughout the day, but the more common format has been carousel delivery where pupils stay together and experience four or five sessions and student teachers present one sessions the appropriate number of times. There have been a lot of ICT/power point stimuli as well as bits of paper and sticky-backed plastic activities, with group work around specific tasks being the preferred learning activity. Student teachers understand that they have to enable the development of a range of skills as well as the accumulation of knowledge. Assessment has tended to be either informal or peer assessment on the day, with school teachers following up with more formal formative assessment in line with their planned programmes of study.

The only universally consistent element to each focus day has been that student teachers always have a member of the school teaching staff with them who acts as either a teaching assistance or a semi-passive observer. This gives pupils a sense of security and settlement, not least because some of issues of classroom management can be dealt with by a person known to the pupils and who knows that school’s procedures, which is perceived as beneficial to all concerned. It also means that the aim of supporting the development of citizenship in schools by supporting the development of teachers can be realised. School staff also feed back to the student teachers, either at the end of the day or via the teacher with whom the students liaised throughout the planning, so that the students also have assessment and formative feedback.

No structured follow up procedures have been put in place, nor is there any formal assessment of students’ involvement in or contribution to the day. Rather, they are required to reflect upon the strategies and activities employed, to adapt their own and others’ ideas into elements of their practice during second block placement and – it is hoped but cannot be required or monitored effectively – into their careers as teachers. There is feedback from the mentors and their colleagues, and a tutor is present at each day. Commentary on participation and reflection is required in students’ learning journals and details of the process contribute to their evidence towards the Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) standards which have to be met in order to qualify to teach.

There do not appear to have been many significant difficulties and certainly not any insurmountable problems. Student atrophy from this course has been low in most years (nil for the first three years, averaging at less than 5% over its duration) and the few withdrawals or interruptions which have occurred prior to focus day delivery have been dealt with very effectively by the student teachers. Some reorganising of groups and reassignment of tasks has been required and achieved with the minimum of disruption and no obvious detrimental effect on the day itself. On three occasions there has not been a student placed at the school hosting a focus day, which required more e-mail communication and created some tense moments for the liaising teacher; there is clearly a preference from all concerned that liaison is between a mentor and student at the host school. There have also been two occasions when the student at the school was struggling with either the liaison role or with their own progress; in both cases the tutor spoke with the mentor and student concerned and another student took over the liaison role.

Experience indicates that, during teaching practice, student teachers should consistently be able to provide evidence of progress in relation to QTS Standards Q1, 2, 10, 14, 15, 18, 25d), 30, 31 in that their expectations and conduct should be consistently high and appropriate, they demonstrate an understanding of a range of factors which affect learning, they know their subject and related curricular requirements, and they can use a variety of techniques to effectively manage learning and behaviour. Many of the other standards can be less frequently identified securely, and focus days enable students to provide evidence towards a significant number of these as indicated in Table A, thus contributing to evidence in regard of 21 of the 33 QTS Standards.

**Table A** Qualified Teacher Standards Addressed by Focus Days

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| QTS Standard and descriptor | Relationship to focus days |
| 4. Communicate effectively with children, young people, colleagues, parents and carers. | Students have to be able to communicate effectively with pupils they have not previously met, with teachers they have not met, and with each other. |
| 5. Recognise and respect the contribution that colleagues, parents and carers can make to the development and well-being of children and young people to raising their levels of attainment. | It is essential to be part of and to recognise the collective contributions and their effects. |
| 6. Having a commitment to collaborative and co-operative working. | Focus days cannot work without extensive and sustained collaboration and co-operation |
| 7.a) Reflect on and improve their practice, and take responsibility for identifying and meeting their developing professional needs. | For many students this is a rare opportunity to work with someone at the same stage of learning to become a teacher, and it identifies for them what is possible to develop and how to approach such development. |
| 8. Have a creative and constructively critical approach towards innovation, being prepared to adapt their practice where benefits and improvements are identified. | The format is itself innovative and presents opportunities for creative teaching and learning. The collaborative nature also provides insights into different ways of approaching a topic and therefore the opportunity to reflect and improve. |
| 9. Act upon advice and feedback and be open to coaching and mentoring. | Advice is given by peers and by several experienced teachers. |
| 17. Know how to use skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT to support their teaching and wider professional activities | These skills are necessary in planning, particularly ICT, beyond the predictable lesson activities of using a whiteboard and presenting on Power Point. |
| 19. Know how to . . . take practical account of diversity and promote equality and inclusion in their teaching. | Given the nature of the majority of partnership schools, for many students a focus day can be their only opportunity to actively engage with particular aspects of differentiation and inclusion. |
| 22.Plan for progression . . . designing effective learning sequences within lessons and across series of lessons . . . | Progression is more immediate as pupils spend five hours in one day on a theme, rather than five hours spread across ten weeks in the case of a two week time table. |
| 23. Design opportunities for learners to develop their literacy, numeracy and ICT skills. | The extent of this varies depending upon learning activities, but there are opportunities to support pupils’ literacy, numeracy and ICT. |
| 25.a) Use a range of teaching strategies and resources . . . taking practical account of diversity and promoting equality and inclusion. | The days always cover a range of strategies and the development of appropriate resources. |
| 25. b) Build on prior knowledge, develop concepts and processes, enable learners to apply new knowledge, understanding and skills and meet learning objectives. | Each session builds on another, and the days are planned with knowledge of their place in each school’s citizenship education programme. |
| 25.c)Adapt their language to suit the learners they teach . . . | Again, the nature of partnership schools means that students experience a wider range of abilities than they might otherwise encounter. |
| 32. Work as a team member and identify opportunities for working with colleagues, sharing the development of good practice with them. | The whole thing depends upon teamwork in both planning and delivery, and groups share between as well as within. |
| 33. Ensure that colleagues working with them are appropriately involved in supporting learning and understand the roles they are expected to fulfil. | The students have to ensure that their peers understand what is happening, roles have to be clear and effectively executed, and the teachers need to understand their role within the day. |

QTS Standards abridged from <http://www.tda.gov.uk/>

**Methodology**

Brief prompt sheets, each comprising seventeen questions, were sent to the teachers who had liaised on the planning of focus day involvement of PGCE students in their schools (8 schools representing 12 focus days, of whom 5 replied, representing 8 focus days). A similar sheet, with thirteen questions, was sent to an unstructured sample of former citizenship PGCE students with whom tutors still had contact (16, of whom 8 responded). Those who were both a liaison teacher and a former PGCE student were asked to complete both sheets and those who had hosted more than one focus day were requested to complete a sheet for each day hosted.

There was an overlap within the sample as some respondents had, at different times, filled both the former student and focus day liaison roles; having been PGCE students on the course and therefore involved in planning and delivering focus days, they had since become teachers of citizenship in schools which provided the opportunity for focus day planning and presentation.

The low response rate was disappointing and serves to render findings less representative than had been anticipated. As this study is intended to be illustrative rather than definitive, it is not rendered invalid by this return. It may be that those who did not respond to the questions could have offered alternative information or contrasting insights. 75% of focus day hosts schools and 50% of pre-service teacher participants did respond, so that there are adequate qualitative data from which to gain some understanding and draw conclusions.

**Host schools/research population**

Host schools are described here as indicative that focus days can be effective in a range of education systems and differing provision. Focus days had been planned and carried out at two grammar schools, one academy, two high schools now (but not when hosting focus days) in the process of becoming academies, two further high schools, one faith comprehensive. All but the two grammar schools are co-educational; all schools are in the state sector and in areas which operate selection at 11.

School A is a highly academic school with outstanding public examination results, including 75% of pupils achieving the top two grades in the national examination for Citizenship Studies intended for 16 year olds (GCSE) which they sit at the age of 15. Their Year 13 (age 18) average point score, indicative of university potential, was in excess of 1070 (the national average for state schools was 757.4. There has been a commitment to citizenship education since 1990, initially with structured cross-curricular provision then with discrete lessons since 2002, as well as a much longer tradition of active involvement in the community. The school has supported citizenship PGCE students since the course started. AS level Citizenship was introduced in 2010 for pupils in years 11 and 12. There are two citizenship specialist teachers.

School B is academically successful school with an average Year 13 score just short of 840. There is no public examination entry for GCSE Citizenship. The school has no citizenship specialists and has developed its citizenship provision into a stand-alone, non-examination subject in KS 3 (age 11-14) and 4 (age 14-16). It has been led by a very enthusiastic ‘convert’ (Leighton 2004a) to the subject, who has been a highly committed and effective mentor as well as very conscious of the limitations of expertise and provision at the school. It has taken Citizenship PGCE students on an irregular basis.

At School C the average Year 13 point score was almost 500. A mainstream high school, it has a large dedicated centre for pupils with significant learning and behaviour issues, There is non-examination Citizenship provision as well as a GCSE full course option, with a department led by a trained specialist and experienced mentor, with one other specialist. The school regularly supports Citizenship PGCE students.

School D pupils achieved a Year 13 average just over 615. A full course GCSE is available within its options, and there is a compulsory KS3 programme. The school has a long-standing tradition of supporting PGCE citizenship students led by a specialist Head of Department and one other specialist.

Provision in School E is led by a specialist supported by two further specialists since 2010. KS3 pupils have fortnightly citizenship lessons, and in KS4 they have an optional Public Services course. There is no sixth form. The school has supported PGCE students in the recent past, but both this and subject provision have been hampered by high levels of staff turnover.

School F is a specialist humanities school which has supported the Citizenship PGCE from its inception, currently with four specialists (one of whom leads the school’s alternative curriculum provision). The Year 13 average score was just under 430. There is a longstanding KS3 programme and, for several years, GCSE Citizenship was offered only as an after school activity. This remains the case for the short course but the full GCSE is now available as a KS4 option, as are AS and A2.

School G also has humanities specialist status and a long-standing involvement in the Citizenship PGCE. There are currently two specialists and one ‘convert’ (Leighton 2004b) mentor, delivering KS3 and 4 Citizenship. Over 30% of pupils have particular learning needs or disabilities. The average Year 13 score is slightly above 610. Following a recent Ofsted inspection, the content and structure of the curriculum are under review.

School H is an academy with one Citizenship specialist working within the Values provision of the school – a combination of Citizenship, RE and PSHEE – and has recently supported PGCE Citizenship students. All pupils follow a core KS3 programme and the GCSE short course in KS4. The Year 13 average just below 530.

**Results and analysis – liaison teachers**

There was general agreement that pupils benefitted from being able to spend concentrated and dedicated time investigating an issue in depth, something which one liaison teacher identified as being raised by pupils, and who went on to comment that the pupils ‘felt the benefit of having an issue presented to them in many different formats’ (Liaison teacher, School F). Another stated that it was highly beneficial for the pupils to have some experiential learning without the concern that their learning would be subject to book-based assessment.

Liaison teachers also commented that ‘the credibility of the subject area has increased, a whole day event bring the department some credibility’ (Liaison Teacher, School E). It was generally reported that established staff in each school viewed the days positively. The PGCE students were seen to conduct themselves as good citizens as well as good teachers, always competent and courteous. Teacher supervising groups were consistently positive about the workshops which they supported and pupils were reported to confirm this view by enjoying the day. On one workshop-based day, the artefacts created by the pupils were perceived as one way in which teaching staff not otherwise involved could find further confirmation of a successful day. One response stated that ‘Other staff loved it! Some excellent practice was shared and some ideas have been incorporated into schemes of work.’ (Liaison Teacher, School D)

Some liaison teachers showed awareness of possible benefits to PGCE students, with one noting that

PGCE students enjoy the collaborative nature of the day and working in/seeing a new school. It also gives them and their host school a reminded about the practical nature of Citizenship, and how different ways of teaching, can create a different outcome, as opposed to the didactic teaching that we can fall into. (Liaison Teacher, School F)

It is the opportunities for collaboration which mentors emphasise, along with the benefits for student teachers of encountering a third school. In particular, as the schools introduce the students as citizenship experts from the university, they are recognised as ‘a professional rather than the student teacher and the stigma which is often attached’ (Liaison Teacher, School B), while the pupils were considered often to be more engaged when things are presented in different formats and by different people.

It was generally the case that staff who would have normally been teaching the year group involved accompanied their classes to sessions. This could sometimes be as many as 30 teachers during the day across all classes, while some schools found it more convenient to keep to a small and specific group – usually form teachers. In all cases it was noted that established staff were used to implement school behaviour policy.

Schools found the day beneficial for other, more pragmatic, reasons. One teacher offered the observation that having PGCE students in from the university make a focus day much easier to organise than tying to co-ordinate nine separate organisations and associated individuals. The latter was seen as significantly more work and effort, as well as harbouring potentially problems with regard to both the quality and cost of speakers and other practitioners: the school felt secure in its expectations of PGCE specialists. At the same time, liaising with the students and the university were not seen as problem free, with students not always as quick to communicate with schools as some liaison teachers would have liked.

Many of the schools have integrated the student-planned activities into their schemes of work. None has adopted the focus day approach across the whole curriculum but some have collaborated on such days with other subjects. All teacher responses indicate that the benefits to them and to their pupils far outweigh any disadvantages, with one response to my questions concluding with ‘[n]o drawbacks, . . . It was a thoroughly successful and enriching day’ (Liaison Teacher, School B).

**Results and analysis – student teachers**

The aspect of focus days most regularly identified as a benefit by student teachers was the opportunity to be involved in collaborative practice, closely followed by the development of subject knowledge. For some students the experience of collaboration in schools had been either to lead or to follow, rarely had it been to work in jointly in preparation and delivery. The academic backgrounds of Citizenship PGCE students is highly diverse (Leighton 2004b) and their opportunities to teach their subject on placement heavily dependent upon mentoring and school curriculum (Leighton 2004b) so that there inevitably gaps in their subject knowledge and opportunities to address these in practice can be limited. For many, but not all, focus days provide one such opportunity.

Those students who led or co-ordinated the planning found this a both a benefit and a drawback. While enjoying the opportunity to organise and to accept responsibility, they felt that the additional demands on their time and efforts were considerable – a situation exacerbated by a lack of authority over those of their peers who were not meeting deadlines or not seeming to be fully committed. One student teacher, whose first post was as subject leader for citizenship, perceived a longer term benefit to having to ensure that everyone did as agreed by the required dates in that skills and strategies were developed which were ‘useful when I arrived at my full time employment for dealing with difficult members of staff.’

Another benefit identified by the students was that of experiencing a different type of school. Most of the partnership schools operate within a selective system, and not all students have the opportunity to work with pupils whom that system identifies as academically more able. Those students who then work on a focus day in a grammar school thus gain some experience of such an environment and in supporting those pupils’ learning. For some it was also an opportunity to spend time in an environment where their subject was clearly valued. Some students did not get the experience of working in a different school or a different type of school, so that such benefits were unevenly distributed.

Other benefits were perhaps more personal and specific, such as having prepared and delivered a whole-school assembly and developing a close professional relationship with a particular colleague; boosted confidence. One self-aware student observed that

I find it difficult to work as part of a team, as I like to have things done my way! This was not possible in this instance as there were many other people involved in the running of the day.

The main disadvantages identified revolved around the perennial issue that ‘as with everything on the PGCE the only drawback was lack of time’. Communication with the schools and between students varied in quality and punctuality, which had an effect on planning and resourcing, and the perceived ‘extra’ work was considered by some to be a burden – even if they felt the process and the day to have been worthwhile. Many students were aware of the limitations placed on their planning by not knowing their prospective pupils and not having a clear idea of their prior learning and understanding.

Since qualifying, all the students have used the materials from their focus days in their teaching. Most have been involved in planning and delivering similar activities, often cross-curricular in the way which Ratcliffe (2005) advocates, and all have adapted the plans and materials they and their colleagues produced so that these now form schemes of work and learning activities.

**Conclusions and implications**

The reasons for requiring student teachers to work on focus days were:

1. to prepare the students to contribute to and possibly lead such days;
2. it is relevant to job applications for schools which either aspire to or do use such days;
3. planning and delivery demands collaboration, delegation, meeting deadlines, electronic communication, detailed planning; working with non-specialist teachers;
4. the need to develop the subject locally and nationally;
5. for future secure and valuable placements;
6. non-specialist experienced teachers could see how to be more imaginative, and would be able to use the plans and materials;
7. they are a means of demonstrating the difference of citizenship as a subject, to raise its profile in schools and to create an impact in them;
8. for student teachers they are a vehicle for evidence of having addressed many of the QTS standards.

Responses indicate the extent to which these were achieved, and whether there were any unintended consequences:

1. once qualified, most of the students continue to contribute to focus days and only one stated no involvement in planning these;
2. nobody mentioned the relevance or otherwise to job applications;
3. the skills predicted were identified;
4. schools have been able to use materials to develop the subject;
5. the quality of support offered by the schools to PGCE students and in developing the subject continues in the main to be excellent. One school is currently in special measures and the subject leader in another has recently retired.
6. feedback suggests that non-specialists teachers have found the subject easier to access and develop following their involvement in focus day delivery;
7. impact, difference and profile were all positively commented upon;
8. no respondent expressly identified any QTS Standards. The comments offered showed an awareness of addressing all of the expected Standards, although Q22 and Q25c) were more challenging.

This suggests that the stated aims of focus day planning as part of the 11-18 PGCE Citizenship course are largely met. Even though evidence of addressing Q22 and Q25c) adequately was hard to locate, these are Standards which should be addressed in classroom practice and the lack of secure evidence towards these is not an indicator of a failed activity. Overall, it is possible to note with some confidence that the Ofsted concern over pupils’ ‘[n]egative attitudes derived from dull teaching, uniformity of approach and insufficient scope for students to work in any depth.’ (Ofsted 2010:12) can be combated to some extent and on a number of levels through wider adoption of a focus day strategy.

While these findings would suggest that there is significant value to the use of focus days in both PGCE programmes and in school curricula for Citizenship Education, such a conclusion has to be contextualised. The student teacher participants in this study were all subject specialists, as were all but one of the liaison teachers, and all focus days were delivered within a structured programme in each school. There are no findings to suggest that the utility of focus days when conducted by people with such expertise can be compared with those delivered by non-specialists, or that one-off days have the value of planned programmes.

There are many models for the delivery of citizenship education. The final report of the Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study (Keating et al, 2010), based on data collected and analysed over nine years from 43,410 pupils, 3,212 teachers and 690 schools, firmly concludes that the most important elements in sustained effectiveness in citizenship education were ‘deliver[y] in a discrete slot in the timetable of over 45 minutes per week (and) develop[ment] by the teachers who are delivering the citizenship curriculum rather than the school’s coordinator for Personal, Social, and Health Education’ (Keating et al 2010, p65) . However, some schools do not have such specialists in post while other opportunities are present through which the experience of citizenship education can be enhanced for pupils. The findings of Keating et al (2010) echo the perception of Breslin (2005) among others, that effective and successful citizenship education is dependent upon ‘a clear core Citizenship programme that addresses the key themes of National Curriculum Citizenship, a recognisable, appropriately qualified and resourced citizenship ‘team’ of subject specialists, a range of activities across the school and in the community.’ (Breslin 2005: 310) The focus days considered in this study were in place to augment rather than replace such provision.

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