

THE PRINCE'S TEACHING INSTITUTE

AUTUMN RESIDENTIAL 2008

SUBJECT PRESENTATIONS PLENARY DISCUSSIONS DELEGATE COMMENTS

SUBJECT PRESENTATIONS

The Residential programme was run with a view to presenting the conclusions of all the delegates' discussions to a panel of educationalists on the final morning. These were:

English:

1. Pupils clearly support the view that the best teachers are those who are knowledgeable, passionate about their subject, and ready to go beyond the specifications of formal exams. To sustain this level of passion and knowledge, teachers need the constant academic enrichment of subject-based CPD courses.
2. There is encouraging evidence that the language of the National Curriculum in English is beginning to sound more like that of the teachers, with talk of enjoyment, challenge, and heritage, rather than competencies and pedagogical abstractions. So it is up to teachers to find the best ways of challenging and inspiring their pupils, whatever their level of ability.
3. Most teachers are attracted into the profession by love of their subject, and that is what they want to communicate to their pupils; but there are so many other demands in the classroom, such as pastoral issues and thematic approaches, that academic stimulus, which should be at the heart of the school, often has to be sought in extra-curricular activity.
4. The PTI Schools Programme was created in response to teachers' expressed wish for a way of celebrating their love of subject and for help in ensuring challenge, rigour and coherence in what they teach. Pedagogy and enthusiasm are important, but teachers are prepared to do the extra work that the Schools Programme entails because they acknowledge the primacy of subject knowledge.

History:

1. To keep their knowledge fresh and up to date, teachers welcome the opportunity to build connections with academic historians. They would like to see more opportunities, besides those offered by PTI, for creating a dynamic relationship between university research and classroom pedagogy, and a stop to the proliferation of 'badged' textbooks produced by Chief Examiners.
2. History teaching is most successful when it stimulates pupils to engage emotionally with individuals and events from the past. This can only be achieved when the curriculum offers diversity and flexibility, as at the new KS3 but yet to be extended to GCSE and A Level where choice is still limited.
3. When History has so much to offer its pupils, it is alarming that schools are squeezing it out at KS3 by adopting alternative curriculum models where the emphasis is on themes or skills. Many pupils now get less than one hour of History a week at KS3, and the subject is given a low priority in curriculum planning. A co-ordinated reappraisal of curriculum content is needed.

PANEL OF SIXTH FORMERS

Panels of Sixth Formers studying English Literature and History were invited to say what was important about their subject and why they were studying it. These were the main points that they made:

English:

1. The fascination of literature lies in the dynamic created between the reader and the writer, and the opportunity to 'climb into other people's skin'.
2. Close analysis of text is necessary for understanding literary techniques, but a wider view of the work as a whole is also needed for full enjoyment; and when a teacher is passionate about a work, this passion is transmitted to the pupils.
3. The study of literature offers ample opportunity for discussion in which pupils are encouraged to feel that their opinions are valued because there are no right answers.
4. The study of literature enhances, and is enhanced by, the study of other subjects such as History, Geography, and Politics.

History:

1. History is not just about 'old dead people'. It engages our emotions and gives us a better understanding of current issues.
2. Syllabus and exam requirements can be frustrating because so much of the interest of History lies in pursuing particular topics beyond the specifications.
3. An inspirational and knowledgeable teacher is essential to hold and engage the pupils' interest.

PLENARY DISCUSSION

Bernice McCabe (BMC)	Chair
Liz Francis (LF)	Director of Teachers' Directorate, Training and Development Agency
Steve Munby (SM)	Chief Executive, National College of School Leadership
Mick Waters (MW)	Director of Curriculum, Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
Isabel Nisbet (IN)	Acting Chief Executive, Ofqual (Office of the Qualifications and Examinations Regulator)

SUMMARY OF MAIN POINTS

BMC: The teachers on this and other PTI courses make it clear that they regard subject enrichment as essential for their professional development. What more can the agencies you represent do to help encourage, support, and deliver academic enrichment of this kind?

LF: We are committed to subjects, which are at the base of all good teaching, and to subject-based Continuous Professional Development (CPD). Pupils most value teachers who are knowledgeable and passionate, and good at communicating; but they don't like teachers being away on courses. So schools must have structures in place which enable teachers to use their CPD effectively. There are times and resources available for it and teachers must press their management to deploy them.

SM: School leaders also need to be passionate and engaged, no less than teachers. Their professionalism is similarly important. There is therefore a need to grow the culture in which subject-based CPD will flourish, as the institution will tend to prevail over the individual. You teachers must try out what you've learned here, reflect on it, talk with colleagues, and keep your eyes open for new ideas.

Liz Hutchinson: All the new initiatives increase the work load for teachers and that reduces the time for such things.

Martin Roberts: Too much curricular responsibility is in the hands of Deputy Heads who are more interested in grades than in subjects.

Delegate: Only insistence will achieve dedicated subject time.

Mike Maddison (Senior History HMI): I suggest you go back to your Heads and argue your case; get passion and enthusiasm into the discussion at Head of Department meetings.

LF: School leaders should be maintaining a dialogue with teachers about their CPD. Furthermore, the discussion of assessment doesn't make much sense except in the context of subjects.

SM: Regulation is not the answer. The heavy concentration on accountability has had a damaging effect on what is taught; but the important thing for teachers is to learn how to 'manage the boss', to get them to understand your concerns and priorities.

MW: We have to avoid polarising autonomy and regulation, and look for common ground in between. Curricular decisions cannot but be affected by the accountability framework. All subjects are under intense pressure from other agendas, such as Health and Sustainability. So traditional subjects must show what impact they can have on pupils' lives

IN: Comments on Assessment tend to be negative, because it is contrasted with pupils' aspirations and 'going beyond the curriculum'. But really they should all go together, because inspired pupils are likely to do better in exams and inspired teachers should be part of the assessment process. I am trying to find space for this to happen. The professionalism shown in the curricular debate needs to be replicated in the debate about assessment. It is important, even if difficult, to raise our sights from issues of targets to issues of quality.

BMC: At this course we have been talking about teaching and empowering teaching and the importance of subjects as the means to effective learning. But when we look at the language used in official departmental documents, we do not get the same sense of priorities at all.

MW: The curriculum Big Picture diagram (which was originally intended for internal discussion, not as a prescription) may not seem to give subjects a very high priority, but they are more prominent in our thinking than may appear.

Delegate: It is naïve to suggest that the Big Picture document isn't prescriptive, as it obviously looks like what schools will be accountable to.

Oliver Blond: The people who should be having discussions with Ministers are the practitioners, not the theorists.

MW: The teachers' voice was heard in every subject area at the nine regional conferences that were organized.

OB: How is it then that the document doesn't reflect what teachers think?

Delegate: It still comes across as putting greater emphasis on skills and themes. In my experience such cross-curricular work detracts from specialist teaching and creates superficial knowledge.

Delegate: We must still have the courage to do the difficult things like making History compulsory and reading *Paradise Lost*.

DELEGATE COMMENTS

The response of delegates to the Residential was extremely positive. **All** delegates agreed (88% of them strongly) with the statement “I found attending the Summer School a valuable experience”, 96% of delegates agreed (58% of them strongly) that within six months this approach would be having an impact on their pupils and 87% of delegates agreed (56% of them strongly) that as a result of the course they would have new skills and confidence to be better teachers.

Here is a selection of comments made by delegates at the event:

“This is the hardest CPD event and yet the most rewarding event I have ever attended.”

“This is the first subject-specific course I have attended in 31 years of teaching. Most CPD activities I attend are pedagogy/exam board related or responses to QCA directives. How inspiring these days have been.”

“I have regained a love of my subject through this course and I am thankful for the new challenging outlook that you have facilitated. (My kids will thank you).”

“There will be more literature in my long-term plans. We will teach whole texts rather than extracts. We will promote independent reading across the whole school.”

“This residential was an excellent way of sharing good practice and I now want to study more history to be a well-informed teacher for my pupils.”

“It has reviewed my vigour for literature and that inspiration will be shared with members of my department and the pupils.”

“This has massively shifted my perspective on the importance of my subject. I'd forgotten why English was my passion; I've rediscovered these reasons and this will make a positive difference to my teaching.”

“It was so stimulating to meet with so many academics or authors who rarely seem to travel away from Cambridge or London without maps or oxygen.”

“The course content was faultless; building up both knowledge and ideas that I can't wait to implement on my return to school.”

“It is so distinctive and different to the leaden CPD available at LEA and school level.”

“It has reaffirmed my core values. I feel refreshed, confident and more secure in my ability, looking at positive issues rather than negatives.”

“I have had to keep pinching myself – that I am actually here taking part in all these activities.”