

Chapter 9

Change or Transformation?

Liz Browne
Oxford Brookes University, UK

ABSTRACT

This chapter draws on research carried out into a major national project funded by the government in the United Kingdom aimed at transforming teaching and learning in one sector of education known as the Learning and Skills sector. This sector, recognised as suffering from the ‘middle child syndrome’ (DfES: 2006), locates as a optional part of the learner journey between school and work or university and tends to be followed by those pursuing a vocational training pathway. The sector is also renowned for providing new opportunities for adult learners wanting to re-train or gain qualifications required for new career pathways. This chapter explores the discourse of transformation in a programme of Continuous Professional Development for Teachers which adopted an e-portfolio for assessment purposes. The training programme was delivered using a blended learning approach. The research that informs this chapter was collated using electronic investigative tools. These are assessed for their usefulness whilst particular focus is given to evaluating the ambition for transformation as articulated in the programme aims.

BACKGROUND

‘Oh God’, muttered Ford, slumped against a bulkhead and started to count to ten. He was desperately worried that one day sentient life forms would forget how to do this. Only by counting could humans demonstrate their independence of computers. (Douglas Adams- Hitchhiker’s Guide to The Galaxy)

The word transformation appears in education rhetoric with alarming regularity in the national policy agenda for the United Kingdom and specifically in policy documents associated with the reform of the English Education system. This poses a number of questions one of which must relate to the uncritical and widespread use of the term. Interested in exploring the dimensions of a ‘transformed’ sector, and being in a privileged position of delivering a major

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element of the government goals for reform, the author set out to explore the impact and reach of a national programme of Continuous Professional Development. The project under review aimed at transforming teaching and learning in one education sector represents a major dimension of a government reform agenda entitled 'Success for All'. The focus was specifically on goal 4 'Putting Teaching and Learning at the Heart of What We Do' (DfES: 2002).

With a clear directive from government to achieve transformational change, a blended learning programme for training Subject Learning Coaches was written for the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). The aim was to raise the standards of teaching and learning in further education. The training model was one of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for priority subject specialists (priority determined by concern raised during Ofsted Inspections and defined by the DfES (as then named) with a view to extend the workforce development plans for the sector.

In an attempt to achieve transformation the programme was designed around 6 modules of learning:

- **Induction module:** Introduction to subject learning coaching
 - **Module 1:** transformation of self
 - **Module 2:** transformation of subject pedagogy
 - **Module 3:** focus coaching others
 - **Module 4:** transformation in the workplace
 - **Module 5:** transformation of the wider sector.

Two other 'enablers' (supporting mechanisms) were also created:

1. a body of extensive materials and resources for teaching and training prepared in paper and electronic formats

2. the formation of national face to face and electronic networks in 9 regions, on a subject by subject basis, for programme participants to meet and share resources and ideas about teaching and learning.

The Context

The new millennium in the English education system can be identified as a time for increased concern in government circles over the number of learners leaving education with poor levels of functional skills and achievement. Data from school/college leavers in 2000 demonstrated that 42% had gained no more than a level 2 qualification (DfES:2002b). Concern was also developing about UK competitiveness on the international arena in terms of productivity, skilled labour and ability to attract international business (KPMG:2002) leading to major national investment in education predicated on two key goals: social justice and economic prosperity.

The Government response to their perceived problem of underachievement was articulated in the words of 'Success for All' (DfES:2002a) and communicated in the aim to transform teaching and learning. This policy marked a change in focus in its articulation of blame away from the commonly held view that fault laid with the learners, to a perception of failure on the part of staff working in the FE sector. From 2002 a new policy focus became apparent around improving teaching and learning. The tool chosen to do this was staff development. Based on the premise of a proximal principle namely that the closer an intervention is to the perceived need of those being coached, the more influential the change (or transformation) will be, the idea of peer coaching (as a form of staff development) became integral to this aim (Joyce and Showers:1996).

Once the need for a strategy such as that of peer coaching was articulated in DfES policy (DfES:2004) the nomenclature of *Subject Learning Coach* (SLC) was created. This role title, with

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