

MTPT Project Module 2

Introduction

The Impact Initiative (II) at my school dates back to the first year as PCM prior to my maternity leave. I am currently in my third cohort of NQTs who have worked on the II. The II continued to run during my maternity leave. Interestingly the teacher who covered my role had just returned from maternity leave herself. She also found as I did the engagement with research with NQTs is professionally fulfilling.

Prior to my taking on the role of PCM there was no formalised NQT programme at my school. This was partly due to the circumstances of the time. In the previous years we had a lower turnover of staff which mirrors national trends. The school for many years typically had between 1 to 2 NQTS per year. Therefore, a more one-to-one program was possible. The school also had the funds at the time to employ a consultant to meet with NQTs is on a one-to-one basis. My post coincided with the consultant retiring and a larger number of NQTs recruited. My intention from the beginning was that it was important to empower NQTs with research, rather than it being something that is 'done to' them.

In many respects the parameters of the II were quite simple. This was deliberate as it was there to empower the NQT and not for them to be dictated to. They initially told to look diagnostically at their practice. Would they like to conduct research on something which they feel they need to develop further, in other words weakness or would they like to conduct research on an aspect of a practice that has been identified as a strength? I felt very strongly that in order for research to be meaningful and not tokenist, it was important to integrate research skills and crucially the time to carry out research into the NQT program. Therefore, there were sessions that introduced the Impact Initiative and allowed previous NQTs to model their presentations to inspire the next cohort. There were also sessions on how to formulate a research question. This was important as some of the NQTs had research questions that had sufficient depth for to a dissertation. Some questions may have been difficult to properly evidence and had to be reconsidered. The sessions enabled them to sound their ideas off not just against experienced teachers but other NQTs. Targeted lesson observations were also integrated into the program. This enabled the NQTs to seek out good practice that specifically entwined with their research.

I also held sessions for NQT mentors is to explain the aims of the Impact Initiative. This enabled them to use mentoring sessions more productively in a more targeted manner so that they could feed their specialist input into the NQT's research. This gave the mentor programme a semi structured approach. NQTs could still have the autonomy to use the time to discuss an area of concern without a strict listed 'tick box' approach. The sessions have an undoubtedly cathartic value, where NQTs can talk through issues. I did however want to avoid a scenario where this was their primary purpose, or where NQTs who are thriving feel unchallenged and underdeveloped.

Outcomes

In July, all four NQTs concluding their NQT year presented their findings to our Executive Headteacher. I have summarised the research below –

| NQT | Research Question/theme | Key findings |
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| Chemistry | <p>Effectiveness of Practical Science: Transition to Secondary School</p> <p><i>An investigation of the extent to which practical skills in science are taught in our feeder school and how effective our curriculum deals with transition in this regard.</i></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students made greater progress when units are taught with more practical elements • Practicals could contribute to wider transition through the skills of teamwork and communication, however, what constitutes teamwork needs to be guided by the teacher • Practicals enhance the enjoyment of the subject as evidenced in student's work and student voice. • Teachers would benefit from closer engagement with feeder schools to enhance the transition experience for students. |
| Maths | <p>Graphic Calculator Use in Additional Mathematics</p> <p><i>A study on the use of graphic calculators and their impact on pupil progress and preparation for A Level in a GCSE top set class. (The study came about by chance when the department was sent a box of calculators by the manufacturer on a trial basis.</i></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students found that they were able to access and understand higher level questions • The calculators were of greater value when the lesson incorporates the use of a visualiser. • In order to be used more effectively, they should be used in the lower school. There are some limitations in that they can only be accessed by higher ability students. • There were technical issues around calculator modes. More time would need to be allocated to teach students the relevant functions in order to fully take advantage of the technology. |
| English | <p>Bridging the gap between KS3 and 4 – stretch and challenge</p> <p><i>An investigation of strategies/methods to promote student independence whilst embedding GCSE analytical skills.</i></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The teacher developed the 'analysis wheel' after attending subject specific CPD. This was used in class to plan out analytical questions. The wheel was then used as part of collaborative learning. Students' written responses demonstrated a higher level of understanding and analysis after the use of the wheel than before. • The teacher then went on to use the wheel in a 'facilitator' role, planning the parameters of the lesson carefully to allow time for individual thought and reflection. Responses were of higher quality when the learning was set up in this way rather than with prompts throughout the task. • Student voice suggested that students like the wheel as it helped to organise their ideas coherently, making the writing process quicker and easier. They also felt that it helped them to consider the subject |

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| | | <p>material on a deeper level. Students also liked that the wheel made access to other people's ideas easier and gave structure to class discussion.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The wheel is a generic resource that the NQT continues to use in other units. |
| English | <p>Assessment and Creativity in KS3 English</p> <p><i>A study of methods to imbed independent learning skills in KS3 leading to better quality extended writing in KS4.</i></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The teacher found the use of anacronyms across the school was widespread and detracted from a higher level engagement with texts. • Whilst the use of anacronyms provided structure to responses it leads to an overdependency on the teacher and poorer quality responses from higher ability candidates in particular. • This approach is limiting to higher ability candidates in particular. The teacher references recent exam board reports which notes that the use of anacronyms can be a 'strait jacket' to higher ability students and stifles free thought. • The teacher experimented with taking the text out of the key question ie instead of <i>Why might Dickens describe Scrooge as "hard and sharp as flint"?</i> students were asked <i>You are an object. Why are you that object? You are now a liquid. Why are you that liquid.</i> • The teacher found that by teaching through metaphor and removing the text from the question, students were able to respond at a higher level and with greater creativity and individual thought. • Students then took their responses and reapplied them to the text. The result was a much greater level of comprehension and higher order thinking as evidenced in their work. Student voice also attested that students felt that this method made the work more accessible and enhanced their confidence in their ability to answer questions independently. |

Two NQTs from the local school we partnered also produced presentations that were delivered separately at their schools.

Reflections and going forward

In June of this year all NQTs presented to the executive Headteacher. It was felt anecdotally that the standard of research had been raised year on year. NQTs were increasingly challenging themselves and engaging with research on a deeper level.

It is important to me that the II is sustainable – that it is not merely a tokenistic element to passing the NQT year. Having spoken to all previous NQTs they have reported that they continue to use their research and crucially the resources they created arising from it, in their practice. Some also commented that they feel confident in applying for promotional positions, knowing that they had prior experience of action research. Presenting the initiative to the executive head gave the NQTs a meaningful platform and profile in school. Going forward, I will work closely with subject mentors so that the research can be better shared with the NQTs departments, possibly integrating with the DIPs.

Working with the NQTs has also been refreshing for my own practice. It has ‘reminded’ me of the value of research and enhancing my networks in the process. For experienced teachers, time is often a substantive barrier in accessing research. However, I have found that this is not entirely insurmountable. Membership of the Chartered College of Teaching provides access to the work of other teachers through the *Impact* publication. Articles are typically a 10-15 minute read. I have found the app TeacherTapp excellent to access Blinklist style pedagogical research. I have also made this a focus of my CPD, attending conferences at London City Hall and the SUPER network in Cambridge. I have ventured into the world of Twitter, which I think has great further potential for research and networking.

The NQT programme has a 20-25% time allocation towards the Impact Initiative. This feels about right from both my perspective and feedback from the NQTs. There was great feedback on the set up of the initiative – setting parameters of research, research ethics and substantiating/evidencing an outcome. In future, I would like to sync this further with mentor training as part of a wider strategy to engage and incentivise mentorship.

Although the standard of research NQTs have applied to their practice has been good, I would like to widen their access to academic and school based research. This year, all trainees will have access to the database of the Chartered College of Teaching through membership paid for as part of their NQT training here. As a member of the Chartered College myself, I have been interested for some time in ways I could engage with the College further with my school and as an individual. I approached my headteacher to discuss this and we are now in discussions with the College to be a Regional Hub. I am also looking to write a piece for *Impact*, the College’s journal, discussing the role of research in empowering and improving the practice of NQTs.