The challenge of how to encourage professional behaviours

Professional development is a complex area but the goals are clear – supporting teachers to develop effective practices and transformative beliefs so that learners can thrive and contribute to society.

By Diane Thurston

A key function of defining professional behaviours (PBs) is to inform initial teacher education, professional formation and development for teachers at varying stages of their careers. This is a complex area, with research (Luft, 2010) identifying how professional development is more likely to develop beliefs in new teachers than in experienced practitioners in established teaching.

Within a transformational view of learning and teaching, it is key that teachers begin in their role of empowering learners to develop the skills they need to become better learners and contribute to wider society. The challenge for professional development is to encourage teachers with effective and transformative beliefs so that learners can thrive and contribute to society.

DEFINING PROFESSIONAL BEHAVIOURS

We need to establish agreed PBs which provide a framework to support the development of teaching, learning and assessment practice, but also clearly promote wider professional responsibilities. PBs are central to developing both new and experienced teachers to shape their identities and fulfill their potential.

An effective framework should reflect the diverse learners within our sector and consider learners at entry/transition stages; mature/professional/adult teacher educators and apprentices; HE students from level 4 to postgraduate. PBs should feel relevant and true. They should reflect the appropriate professional behaviours of teachers and advanced practitioners in different settings and teaching different subject specialisations. Managers and leaders must also model PBs.

Capturing inclusive language for PBs can also be a challenge where the language we use varies according to our practice, and our different beliefs and ideas about teaching.

He professionals in the sector will be more comfortable with descriptions of developing independent, autonomous learners or developing higher order thinking skills. Education and skills educators may be used to referring to stretch and challenge to support learners in reaching their potential. Irrespective of these divisions in language and conceptions of the roles of education professionals working with varied learners, we still contend that it’s feasible to create shared PBs to reflect the role of all our education professionals.

Our code of practice (SET, 2016) captures both mandatory and aspirational dimensions, and in our recent work on the Outstanding Teaching, Learning and Assessment (OTLA) project to define PBs, we have identified two dimensions which we feel can apply to the breadth of practitioners. In the section that follows, I have included a selection of these PBs (our top three), which I have broadly categorised within the two dimensions of teaching, learning and assessment (TLA), and wider professional responsibilities.

THE TLA TOP THREE

1. Embrace the dual professional role – Practitioners in the education and skills sector may have extensive vocational experience, knowledge and expertise, but must also develop skills to foster curiosity and develop knowledge, skills and understanding to match the needs of the varied cohort and diverse individuals they teach. For this reason, professional vocational updating and the skill to accommodate diversity are both clearly outlined in our sector’s professional standards (ETF, 2014).

2. Striving for a truly employer-led curriculum – Meaningful contact with employers is a key feature of the sector to ensure that employers have a genuine input into curriculum planning, development and delivery. This is the route to success for learners in their career goals.

3. The student-led practitioner – The student is at the heart of curriculum design, development and review. This does not mean we expect our students to arrive as experts in learning and teaching, but does mean we fully recognise their experience as learners for whom some practice has clearly not been effective (consider the GCSE re-sitter here).

This also reflects the need for teaching professionals to take account of previous learning (the basis of recognition of prior learning), identify starting points and adapt practice to accelerate progress and attainment, but also foster curiosity and develop wider skills.

THE WIDER PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE TOP THREE

1. Reflective and self-critical practitioner – Education professionals should be supported in their continuing development but lead the improvement of their teaching through focused professional development. This will include an open and responsive approach to considering and responding to feedback from colleagues, learners and employers.

2. Collaborate, collaborate, collaborate – Professional educators view themselves as part of an education team who hold high expectations for themselves and their learners, and work together to inspire, motivate and challenge learners of all backgrounds, abilities and dispositions to achieve their full potential. To ensure we achieve the best for our learners, what’s required is an ethos and commitment to collaboration and mutual respect between support staff and teachers; administrators and teachers; and managers and teachers.

3. Education professionals as role models – In our experience this is a PB more commonly used with reference to school teaching professionals. For example, the Teachers’ Standards (DfE, 2011) classes each professional’s expected role and responsibilities and refers to it in the class.

What might I model? It depends on the professional behaviours and values that characterise, and are expected of, your students for their chosen career. As a teacher educator, I might model how to write a lesson plan by sharing my own lesson plan with my trainee teachers and referring to it in the class.

What is important is that you (and your team) identify the professional behaviours and values you need to model and plan your teaching and learning to accommodate diversity within your scheme of work and sessions.

It is important to signpost any modelling of professional behaviour for your students, or they might miss it. For example, “Watch what I do next…” It is also important to explain your professional behaviour and values for the purpose of student learning. One of the most powerful ways students learn is through experience and modelling is based on experiential learning.

References

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DfE (2011) Teachers’ Standards. Read them at go. gl/BfzKzvz


SET (2016) Code of Practice: Find it at go. gl/Fpx3y0

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