

A large, soft-focus dandelion seed head is the central visual element, set against a light teal background. The seeds are white and delicate, with some appearing to drift away from the head. The stem of the dandelion is visible at the bottom right, extending towards the center.

Teacher Learning Academy

Creating Powerful Learning Experiences:
The Contribution of the
GTC Teacher Learning Academy

Professor David Hopkins

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Creating Powerful Learning Experiences: The Contribution of the GTC Teacher Learning Academy

The teacher's task is not simply to teach, but to create powerful learning experiences for their students. In *Models of Learning – Tools for Teaching*¹ we expressed the idea in this way:

Learning experiences are composed of content, process and social climate. As teachers we create for and with our children opportunities to explore and build important areas of knowledge, develop powerful tools for learning, and live in humanising social conditions.

Our toolbox is the models of teaching, actually models for learning that simultaneously define the nature of the content, the learning strategies, and the arrangements for social interaction that create the learning environments of our students.

Through the selection of appropriate models, content can become conceptual rather than particular, the process can become constructive inquiry instead of passive reception, and the social climate can become expansive not restrictive. Our choices depend on the range of our active teaching repertoire and our efforts to expand it by developing new models and studying those developed by others.

It is the integration of “content, process and social climate” that explains how the learning experience can be organised to make a positive difference to students. The impact is not just on test scores and examination results, but also on the students' capacity to learn. This is the heart of the matter. If the teacher can teach the student how to learn at the same time as assisting them to acquire curriculum content then the twin goals of learning and achievement can be met at the same time. It is this approach to teaching and teacher professionalism that is the focus of the General Teaching Council's (GTC) Teacher Learning Academy (TLA). The Academy offers public and professional recognition for teachers' learning, development and improvement work. It aims to stimulate learning experiences for teachers which are effective for them, their pupils, their schools and for the education service. It seeks to support learning communities, within, and beyond schools, that enrich teaching practice and support innovation.

What is significant about the Teacher Learning Academy initiative is that it is underpinned by a clear and explicit set of principles that are designed to support the approach to teaching and professional development I have just described.

The key principles are as follows:

- accessing the knowledge base;
- interpretation, contextualisation and adaptation of the evidence base;
- transferring and scaffolding knowledge via coaching and other means;
- generating, drawing in and handling the evidence base in classrooms;
- peer to peer supportive scrutiny in a relationship with school self evaluation;
- consciously planning teacher learning and collaboration.

As we strive for a high equity, high excellence education system, it is the continuing professional development (CPD) of teachers that is at the heart of the response. Put simply, unless teachers see their continuing development as an essential part of their professionalism the system will be unable to make the next big step forward in standards of learning and achievement. This is not just an “academic” issue about making teaching more comparable to other great modern professions – it is a highly practical, standards-based issue about how we deliver personalised learning and fulfil the potential of every student. To address this, teachers need continually to be learning from each other, developing their knowledge in their subject area and in pedagogy, and using rich data on pupil progress to individualise teaching styles and strategies. Moreover, schools and teachers need to be seizing this agenda and seeing CPD as a responsibility that extends beyond the strict confines of the school day.

It is for this reason that the key principles and core dimensions of the Teacher Learning Academy are so important. They provide a robust and comprehensive analysis of what constitutes teacher professional skill and the GTC, through the various stages of the academy process, provides a methodology for taking these dimensions to scale. When these competencies become commonplace in our classrooms, then teaching can proudly call itself a profession and the dynamics of classroom practice that I described at the outset will ensure that all students in our schools will have the possibility of reaching their potential.

The Teacher Learning Academy proposes a process of professional development through which participating teachers will acquire the crucial skills they need to personalise the learning of all their students. The process follows the following steps – the six core dimensions of the Teacher Learning Academy:

1. accessing peer support, coaching and/or mentoring;
2. engagement with an appropriate knowledge base;
3. planning of professional learning and change activity (i.e. a teacher learning project);
4. carrying out a change activity (i.e. implementing the teacher learning project);
5. evaluating the impact on practice/own learning;
6. disseminating what has been learned.

The Academy has elaborated these phases in some detail and developed a series of criteria that reflect increasing professional depth at the various stages of recognition. The context for this professional development is the carrying out of a teacher learning and change project and the criteria elaborate the process that apply to the sequence of steps described in the previous paragraph. The proposed approach is a sensible one that teachers involved find helpful in providing robust and helpful scaffolding in which to carry out their professional enquiry.

There are, however, two major impediments in sustaining such an approach to teacher professionalism.

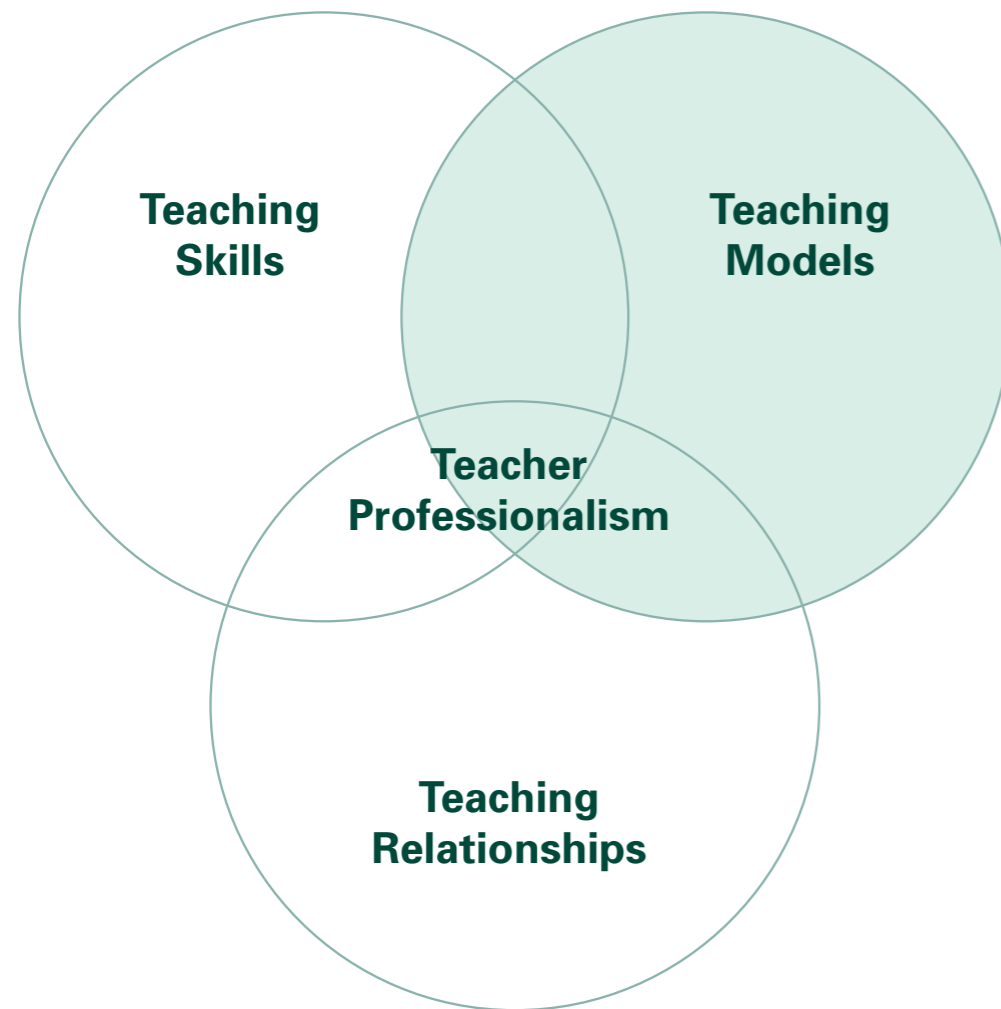
- The first relates to “engagement with an appropriate knowledge base”. In my experience we simply do not have a sufficiently robust and sophisticated language in this country for talking about teaching. Language defines us. If teachers had a more extensive vocabulary of professional practice, they could exercise more control over the learning environments of their students and their own professional development. A key task for those committed to enhancing the learning of pupils, therefore, is to expand the vocabulary of teaching.

- The second relates to “disseminating what has been learned” and the collegial aspects of the Academy stages. Unfortunately the evidence that is available on the effectiveness of the average professional development initiative is far from encouraging. Despite all the effort and resources that have been utilised, the impact of such programmes in terms of improvements in teaching and better learning outcomes for pupils is rather disappointing. The research provides a bleak picture of in-service initiatives that are poorly conceptualised, insensitive to the concerns of individual participants and, perhaps critically, make little effort to help participants relate their learning experiences to their usual workplace conditions.

The focus of the rest of this paper is to highlight the two areas of professional practice where the work of the Academy and its participating teachers can transcend conventional practice and contribute to a transformation of teaching and learning in our nation’s schools.

Let us look first at a framework for teaching and learning that can help develop a language for teaching to complement the Teacher Learning Academy’s core dimensions. The framework that is captured in the diagram below, revolves around three aspects of teaching that are often regarded as being contradictory rather than complementary.

Three ways of thinking about Teaching and Teacher Professionalism



Teaching Skills

There is an extensive research literature on teaching effects. Consistently high correlations are achieved between student achievement scores and classroom processes². The literature on teaching effects is replete with cues and tactics necessary for effective teaching. For example, the research on those teaching behaviours most closely associated with student achievement gains comes to the following conclusions:

- *Content coverage.* Students learn more when their teachers cover more material.
- *Time allocated to instruction.* Students learn more when teachers allocate available class time to academic activities.
- *Engaged time.* Students learn more when they are on task for a high proportion of class time.
- *Consistent success.* Students learn more when their success rates (responses to questions, answers to written work at desk) are high.

- *Active teaching.* Students learn more in classes where their teachers spend most of their time actively teaching them rather than having students work on their own without direct teacher supervision.
- *Structuring information.* Students learn more when teachers structure information using such techniques as advance organisers, reviewing objectives, outlining content, signalling transitions between lesson parts, drawing attention to main ideas, and reviewing main ideas. Clarity of presentation and enthusiasm in presenting material, are also associated with achievement gains.
- *Effective questioning.* Students learn more when questions are asked frequently and are relatively easy. Waiting for responses, acknowledging correct answers and working with students who give partial or incorrect answers to give them a chance to improve their answers are all associated with achievement gain.

Teaching Relationships

There are another set of factors that characterise quality teaching; they are less technical and are more related to the teacher's commitment to her students and belief in the power of high expectations. For me, this aspect of teaching lies in the teacher's ability to generate and sustain an authentic relationship with her students. For example, the teacher "who made a difference" is a common topic of conversation following one's admission that "I am a teacher". To many educators a prime indicator of the "effective" school is one in which high proportion of pupils "have a good or 'vital' relationship with one or more teachers". An essential aspect of this is for the teacher to have high expectations of her students. A supportive, rigorous and optimistic learning environment is fundamental for high levels of student achievement.

The influence of expectations is often a subtle one, and is felt within a myriad of classroom interactions. The ways in which the teacher sets tasks, arranges groups, locates the responsibility for learning and provide feedback are all illustrations of how teacher behaviour consistently gives messages and conditions student behaviour. Teacher expectation, behaviour and relationships are all vital contributions to learning. This is what we have referred to elsewhere as the need to establish authentic relationships within the classroom. It implies establishing the classroom as a safe and secure learning environment in which pupils can expect acceptance, respect and even warmth from their teachers, without having to earn these – they are intrinsic rights that are extended to pupils because they are there.

Teaching Models

There is a further and equally strong body of research and practice that suggests that student achievement can be additionally enhanced by the consistent and strategic use of specific teaching models³. There are many powerful models of teaching – each with their own 'syntax', phases and guidelines – that are designed to bring about particular kinds of learning and to help students become more effective learners.

Models of teaching simultaneously define the nature of the content, the learning strategies, and the arrangements for social interaction that create the learning environments of students. For example, in some classrooms students learn models for:

- extracting information and ideas from lectures and presentations;
- memorising information;
- building hypotheses and theories;
- attaining concepts and how to invent them;
- using metaphors to think creatively;
- working effectively with others to initiate and carry out co-operative tasks.

Models of teaching are also models of learning. How teaching is conducted has a large impact on students' abilities to educate themselves. Each model has its own core purpose that relates not only to how to organise teaching, but also to ways of learning. So for example, if in whole class teaching the teacher uses the advance organiser model to structure a presentation, the student can use the same

method as a means of extracting information and ideas from lectures and presentations. When these models and strategies are combined, they have even greater potential for improving student learning.

Thus imagine a classroom where the learning environment contains a variety of models of teaching that are not only intended to accomplish a range of curriculum goals, but are also designed to help students increase their competence as learners.

In such classrooms the students learn models for memorising information, how to attain concepts and how to invent them. They practice building hypotheses and theories and using the tools of science to test them. They learn how to extract information and ideas from lectures and presentations, how to study social issues and how to analyse their own social values. These students also know how to profit from training and how to train themselves in athletics, performing arts, mathematics and social skills. They know how to make their writing and problem solving more lucid and creative. Perhaps most importantly, they know how to take initiative in planning personal study, and they know how to work with others to initiate and carry out co-operative tasks. As students' master information and skills, the result of each learning experience is not only the content they learn but also the greater ability they acquire to approach future learning tasks with confidence and to create increasingly effective learning environments for themselves.¹

The models of teaching are therefore simply tools that teachers can use to create more powerful learning experiences. But such research and strategies should not be regarded as panaceas to be followed slavishly. Research knowledge and the various specifications of teaching can have limitations, especially if they are adopted uncritically. Such knowledge only becomes useful when it is subjected to the discipline of practice through the exercise of the teacher's professional judgement. For, as Lawrence Stenhouse⁴ once argued, such proposals are not to be regarded "as an unqualified recommendation, but rather as a provisional specification claiming no more than to be worth putting to the test of practice.

Such proposals claim to be intelligent rather than correct." It is in this way that the use of "teaching models" form part of an overall strategy for enhancing teacher professionalism.

The three perspectives on high quality teaching are not discrete. It is the practice of fine teachers to combine these elements through a process of reflection to create an individual style. Consequently, it may be that critical systematic reflection is a necessary condition for quality teaching. This is not reflection for reflection's sake, but in order to continue to develop a mastery of one's chosen craft.

It is the discipline of reflection, on evidence of practice and research that is at the heart of the Teacher Learning Academy's core dimensions. The Academy programme acknowledges that there are no ceilings to the performance of quality teachers. Taken together the core dimensions recognise that outstanding teachers take individual and collective responsibility to base their teaching on the best available knowledge and practice and that they then take those ideas and strategies and critically reflect on them through practice in their own and each

other's classrooms. It is through reflection that the teacher harmonises, integrates and transcends the necessary classroom management skills, the acquisition of a repertoire of models of teaching, and the personal aspects of her teaching into a strategy that has meaning for her students. This is the reason why the Academy requires that teachers exemplify their mastery of the dimensions within practical projects that have evident impact on their classrooms their colleagues and their schools. It is this commitment that leads to the second focus of this paper.

The evidence from schools with high levels of student achievement and teacher engagement demonstrates how they build infrastructures for staff development within their day-to-day arrangements⁵. This must involve devoting portions of the school week to staff development activities such as curriculum development and implementation, discussion of teaching approaches, regular observation sessions, and on-site coaching.

The research on staff development identifies a number of key training components which, when used in combination, have much greater power than when they are used alone. The major components of training are:

- presentation of theory or description of skill or strategy;
- modelling or demonstration of skills or models of teaching;
- practice in simulated and classroom settings;
- structured and open-ended feedback (provision of information about performance);
- coaching for application (hands-on, in-classroom assistance with the transfer of skills and strategies to the classroom).

It is also helpful to distinguish between the locations in which these various forms of staff development are best located – either in the "workshop" or the "workplace". The **workshop**, which is equivalent to the best practice on the traditional professional development course, is where teachers gain understanding, see demonstrations of the teaching strategy they may wish to acquire, and have the opportunity to practice them in a non-threatening environment. If the aim is to transfer those skills back into the workplace – the classroom and school – then merely attending the workshop is insufficient. The research evidence is very clear, that skill acquisition and the ability to transfer vertically to a range of situations require 'on-the-job-support'. This implies changes to the **workplace** and the way in which staff development is organised. In particular this means the opportunity for *immediate and sustained practice, collaboration and peer coaching, and studying development and implementation*.

The paradox is that changes to the workplace cannot be achieved without, in most cases, drastic alterations in the ways in which schools are organised. Yet the transfer of teaching skills from professional development sessions to classrooms settings will not occur without them. Consequently, staff development is perhaps the most crucial of the enabling conditions for school improvement.

In terms of contemporary professional development practice, the range of professional development activities necessary for effective school improvement is:

- whole staff in-service days on teaching and learning and school improvement planning as well as "curriculum tours" to share the work done in departments or working groups;
- inter-departmental meetings to discuss teaching strategies;
- workshops run inside the school on teaching

strategies by teachers from the school and collaborating schools, together with some external support;

- partnership teaching and peer coaching;
- the design and execution of collaborative enquiry activities, which are, by their nature, knowledge-generating.

This is a wide range of staff development activity and represents a fairly sophisticated infrastructure for sustained professional development. An important element in all of this is the provision of in-classroom support or "peer coaching". It is the facilitation of peer coaching that enables teachers to extend their repertoire of teaching skills and to transfer them from different classroom settings to others. In particular, peer coaching is helpful when:

- curriculum, teaching and assessment are the content of staff development;
- workshops are designed to develop understanding and skill;
- school-based groups support each other to attain 'transfer of training';
- peer coaching teams are relatively small e.g. 2 – 4;
- the entire staff as well as Heads and Deputies participate in training and practice;
- formative study of student learning is embedded in the process.

It is no accident that I have chosen to focus on teaching strategies and staff development as the two key aspects of the Teacher Learning Academy's approach to professional development. It is the deliberate use of a range of teaching and learning strategies rich in meta-cognitive content that will most effectively raise standards of learning and achievement. These teaching and learning strategies are however not "free-floating", but embedded in the schemes of work and curriculum content that teachers use

to structure their lessons. They also have the potential to be shared between schools and be available for wider dissemination. This of course is the link with the staff development arrangements the school has established, that support the emphasis on high expectations, the careful attention to consistency of teaching and the discussion of pedagogy that pervades the culture of effective schools.

There is an interesting parallel here with the experience of school improvement in Japan, where the dominant form of in-service training is the lesson study. In lesson study, groups of teachers meet regularly over relatively long periods of time (ranging from several months to a year) to work on the design, implementation, testing, and improvement of one or several “research lessons”. Stigler and Hibbert⁶ maintain that the premise behind lesson study is simple:

If you want to improve teaching, the most effective place to do so is in the context of a classroom lesson. If you start with lessons, the problem of how to apply research findings in the classroom disappears. The improvements are devised within the classroom in the first place. The challenge now becomes that of identifying the kinds of changes that will improve student learning in the classroom and, once the changes are identified, of sharing this knowledge with other teachers who face similar problems, or share similar goals, in the classroom.

It is the focus on improving teaching within the context of the curriculum, using a methodology of collaborative enquiry into student learning that provides the basis for the problem solving approach to teaching adopted by Japanese teachers. The further implication is that it is this form of teaching that explains the higher levels of performance of Japanese students.

The learning focus is the key to authentic school improvement. It is the ability to focus on enhancing student learning, whilst building the capacity for sustaining learning throughout the school that is the strategic aim of the Teaching Learning Academy. The links between effective teaching and the constellation of staff development activities just described make the structural link between the classroom behaviour of teachers, professional development and enhanced levels of student achievement clear and achievable.

In concluding, it is important to remember that powerful teaching and learning occurs in powerful schools. As Lawrence Downey once put it: “A school teaches in three ways, by what it teaches, by how it teaches and by the kind of place it is.” In these schools all improvement and development efforts are focussed on learning and teaching. Clear goals or targets for student learning are set, and teaching strategies based on research and good practice, are utilised. Conditions are also created in these schools where teachers have time to talk to each other about teaching and to work together towards improving it. In such educational environments the quick fix response to target setting has been eschewed in favour of a more reflective and iterative approach to change that unswervingly focuses on the learning of students. These schools are becoming more effective over time because they are progressively adapting their organisations and classroom practices to support student learning and teacher development. This is why the Teacher Learning Academy’s core dimensions and the programmes to which they relate have such an important role. Their purpose is to expand the vocabulary of teaching and learning and the range of purposeful professional learning opportunities so that all teachers in all schools have the skills to create powerful learning experiences for all their students.

1. See further and quote from Joyce, B., Calhoun, E. and Hopkins, D. (2002) *Models of Learning – Tools for Teaching* (2nd edn), Buckingham: Open University Press, page 7.
2. See Brophy, J. and Good T. (1986) *Teacher behaviour and student achievement*, in Wittrock M (Ed.) *Handbook of Research on Teaching* (3rd edn), New York: Macmillan; and Creemers, B. (1994) *The Effective Classroom*. London: Cassell. The list on page 8 is from Brophy, J. (1983) *Classroom organisation and management*. *The Elementary School Journal*, 82, p. 266-285.
3. See further and quotes from Joyce, B. and Weil M. (1996). *Models of Teaching* (5th edn) Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall; Joyce, B., Calhoun, E. and Hopkins, D. (2002) *Models of Learning – Tools for Teaching* (2nd edn), Buckingham: Open University Press.
4. Stenhouse, L. (1975) *An Introduction to Curriculum Research and Development*. London: Heinemann Educational Books.
5. This discussion is based on the insights in Joyce, B.R. and Showers, B. (1995) *Student Achievement through Staff Development* (2nd edn) White Plains, NY: Longman and Joyce, B.R., Calhoun, E.F. and Hopkins, D. (1999) *The New Structure of School Improvement*, Buckingham: Open University Press.
6. See Stigler, J. and Hibbert, J. (1999) *The Teaching Gap*. New York: Free Press (quote from page 111)



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