

Worshipful Company of Educators

Education Committee

Discussion Evening 6 June 2018

'Risk-takers and Rebels: the qualities of an accomplished teacher'

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This was the intriguing opening image of the evening's presentation to which Professor Bamford said she would return later. Twenty years ago almost to the day she completed her doctoral research on the qualities of accomplished teachers. She wanted to understand what makes a great teacher and so she followed a group of 22 accomplished teachers for two and a half years, observing them in the classroom and also finding out what they did in their spare time. She also pointed out that she had titled her talk 'Risk-taker and Rebels' *'to capture a more disruptive view of what it means to be a wonderful teacher'* and wondered whether it would be easier to attract people to become teachers if it were viewed as a disruptive profession *'where risk-taking and rebellion is encouraged rather than stifled'*.

The audience was then asked to discuss with a partner a great teacher they had experienced and the effect they had. Feedback showed that these individual teachers who had an important influence were people who could instil a love of learning and who demonstrated an infectious enthusiasm for their subject. Anne then shared her memories of very good and great teachers who had taught her. Her first example was her Year 2 teacher who loved reading and enabled her class to love stories: this particular teacher sported red polished toenails which Anne would admire as she sat on the floor as the teacher read stories, hence the slide shown at the start of the presentation. She went on to describe other great teachers she had experienced as a pupil, all of whom believed in the potential of each child, who brought subjects to life and believed in learning through experience.

Returning to her research, she identified some of the key influencing factors that made great teachers. It appeared that early childhood experiences seemed to be significant in influencing people to become

teachers: they enjoyed making things, games of make-believe and many had negative experiences of school. Many were 'difficult' or rebellious at school. Interestingly, most of them had stolen items from a teacher's stockroom. Their particular route into teaching did not seem to be significant or the subject they had studied at university. Class of degree was not as important as might have been thought with teachers who achieved a 2ii degree or equivalent being the most accomplished. Those teachers also remained longest in the profession. The most accomplished teachers were also very active at the weekend, being involved in sport, travel or other pursuits, and were also always on the lookout for resources that they could use in their teaching.

The classrooms of these teachers were well-organised and were professional learning spaces. It was significant that *'The class environment is emotionally positive. There is co-operation rather than competition, and pupils are encouraged to reflect on their beliefs, implicit theories, self-esteem and abilities, on how functional or dysfunctional the learning process is for them, on what the objective of learning is, on how important effort is and how ability is conceived and assessed'*. They never wrote off a child and believed children could become more intelligent. They often had conversations with the children in their class, frequently at their physical level. They encouraged children to make use of memory strategies and a variety of study techniques and helped them to structure their learning.

Anne's research also noted that these accomplished teachers

- Knew the local community and environment
- Worked longer hours than other teachers in their school
- Rarely opened curriculum documents or syllabi
- Believed passionately in assessment – but as an issue for them as teachers, not for the children
- Used a lot of assessment for gap analysis – and acted upon it for children's learning
- Said they never taught the same lesson twice and always modified it for the needs of the class
- Were mistrustful of educational structures – they preferred to be 'disruptive of the system'
- Didn't feel they were very good at teaching and had a lot of self-doubt about their abilities

Twenty years on from this original research Anne was awarded a large European grant to identify the qualities needed for teachers in 2030. The qualities needed twenty years ago, now and in the future have much in common and there is much value in considering what constitutes accomplishment in teaching given the multitude of routes into teaching and the different ways in which quality is recognised. The overall findings of the current research show that:

- Many countries are experiencing an acute shortage of teachers
- Although teacher education has been made longer in duration, there is less acceptance that newly-qualified teachers are ready to teach
- Very little attention is paid to lifelong learning in the teachers' own continuing professional development
- There are almost no links between schools and businesses and, with a few notable exceptions, it is not possible for teachers (or pupils) to move in and out of the education system
- There are either actual or inherent restrictions that make the mobility of teachers difficult if not impossible except for language teachers
- The requirements to be qualified as a teacher vary considerably from country to country
- Some countries have no requirements or obligations for teachers to learn once they have leave formal training

Those who responded to the survey described a perfect storm of factors which challenged current education provision. These include:

- Rapid movement to self-employment
- Skills shortages in other industries as well as teaching
- Demographic changes in the population
- The influence of technology (especially Artificial Intelligence) and the collapse of ‘middle skill’ jobs
- The increasingly differentiated society and school system

Respondents to the survey were also asked to list the principal characteristics needed for teachers in 2030 and they noted that teachers would need to be good at:

- Collaboration and teamwork
- Creativity and imagination
- Critical thinking
- Problem-solving
- Flexibility and adaptability
- Global and cultural awareness
- Information and technology literacy
- Leadership
- Civic literacy and citizenship
- Oral and communication skills
- Social responsibility and ethics
- Showing initiative and reasoning

Anne then turned to discuss how accomplished teachers might be grown and developed for the future. There was a need to increase the trust in teachers and allow them more opportunities to use their imagination and take risks. The status of teachers needed to be raised by valuing the role of education as a social force for good. The preparation of teachers should not be a linear development but rather more a web of experiences. There was a need to encourage risk-taking in teaching and move away from a blame culture. The time spent acquiring NQT recognition should focus on modelling, not other teachers but also other occupations, business and cultural enterprises and professions. Even the way in which teaching posts are advertised should be re-examined to encourage independent thinkers and risk-takers. Pay is important for teachers but nothing is ever mentioned about the potential for changing the world. She concluded that teachers and school leaders should be committed to modelling lifelong learning of knowledge and skills. The idiosyncratic should be encouraged and celebrated but restrictive models of practice must be avoided. *‘Our learners have idiosyncrasies and we should celebrate these in our teachers – including red toenail polish’.*

There was then an opportunity for the audience to ask questions and debate the issues that Anne had raised. One of the Educators raised the issue of behaviour management being problematic for teachers especially those at the start of their careers. Anne responded by emphasising that curriculum design had an important part to play and that learning activities need to be absorbing for the pupils and students. Pupils needed to experience success in the classroom in order to encourage further learning and interest. Another audience member suggested that the transition from primary to secondary school was a marked change in style and produced a restrictive conformity which had to be undone when students entered higher education. Anne considered that independent schools were able to encourage more independence and rebelliousness than in state schools. There was a need to train young people to be ‘rebellious’ as this was important for social mobility.

A colleague wanted to know how ‘average’ teachers could become ‘good’ and stressed that classroom skills could and should be taught to beginning teachers. There was a need for a debate to identify

what we can teach trainee teachers. Anne explained from her own experience as a director of teacher education how she changed teacher education programmes to focus on real-life experiences and taking risks. She was clear that teachers need to know about child development in order to help their pupils and also that practical experience should be at the centre of teacher education.

There was a comment about the need for disadvantaged pupils to be given the greatest opportunities, for example catching up on cultural capital and also the need for school leaders to ensure that teachers' enthusiasm could be maintained throughout their careers. Another audience member suggested that beginning teachers might identify teachers in their school they would most like to be like – and then those they didn't! There was a need to showcase effective teachers and teaching and technology should allow us to share this. In discussing these points, Anne noted that from her research both extrovert and introvert teachers could be inspirational; there wasn't one model that fitted all people and situations.

An Educator spoke for many in the audience when she pointed out that in recent years there had been a climate of over-prescription in schools, especially for assessment. As a result the opportunities for enrichment had been reduced. However, her experience of seeing NQTs at work suggested all was not lost. While there might be a loss of morale amongst teachers who had been in schools for some time, there was marked contrast with young teachers who really cared about their pupils. It was very important to restore passion in teaching. Picking up on those points, a former headteacher stressed that there was need for trust in teachers and school leaders. Public accountability was important but it had resulted in too much negativity. One size did not fit all and we needed to get more joy into schools and teaching.

The vital importance of raising aspirations across the whole of the educational spectrum was emphasised and Anne stressed the need for teachers and taught to love learning. Teachers who inspired children with their love of learning and passion about a subject had a lifelong effect.

There was a question about key questions for governors when making appointments. Anne replied that there was a need to trust teachers and give them time to develop. Governors should be acutely aware of these when making appointments.

Another member of the audience picked up on an earlier comment about subject specialisms and asked if there were a real need for such specialists in schools. Anne considered that if a teacher loves the subject then they will develop knowledge of that subject. What was critical was that the teacher had a passion for that subject area.

The final comment from the audience was that, having heard Anne's criteria for accomplished teachers, a counsel of perfection was often a counsel of despair. There was no doubt that it was vital to enable good teachers to become exceptional but to allow this to happen there must be a teaching profession that had a battery of skills to develop and enable children's learning. Anne's response was that she believed that all teachers could become exceptional but that they needed opportunities, encouragement and resources (in a broad sense) to allow them to develop and succeed.

In thanking Anne for a most stimulating and engaging evening, The Master, Susan Fey, noted that time had run out but there were clearly further questions to be asked and comments made. That was always a sign of a successful presentation and discussion and she had no doubt that everyone would reflect on what they had learned during the evening and continue the discussion in other places. The applause which followed certainly confirmed that the Master was indeed correct.