

## BASKET online discussion: 14-26 January 2013

### 1. Should teachers of adult basic skills be required to hold any teaching qualifications at all?

There seems to be an early consensus that basic skills teachers should have training. A number of reasons have been given. Some contributors have highlighted the important role that training has in making teachers aware of their preconceived ideas about what teaching is, most of them formed through their own experiences of education:

*I started teaching before I had any qualifications - once I started on my first teacher education programme I wondered what I had been doing that year - probably relying on instinct and some of the models of teaching I had had as a student myself - not all of those were good.* Diane Thurston (Newcastle, England) ,

*I have also talked to very many teachers of all subjects who have said that their training was absolutely invaluable in moving them on from assuming that all teaching needed to be just the way they themselves were taught - what other models do we have otherwise?* Mary Osmaston (Preston, England)

*It is worth mentioning that 'learner-centred' pedagogies are often not obvious choices for untrained teachers (and, sadly, many trained teachers), who naturally expect to help, advise and 'teach' (didactically) rather than to listen, support and 'facilitate' learning.* Ian Grayling (Leicester, England)

Training also gives teachers new and old access to the experiences and learning of others.

*Learning how to teach, by just doing it, is a recipe for bad habits and assumptions about learners and learning that may go unchallenged, with damaging consequences.* Ian Grayling (Leicester, England)

On the issue of whether training should lead to or be driven by qualifications there is less consensus. While Ian Grayling agrees that good training is more important than qualifications, he also says that

...qualifications remain the currency that teachers need within the workplace.

Marc Coyne (Shetland Islands, Scotland) notes that

*By introducing required qualifications we move towards becoming 'professionals'.*

But he also points out that *qualifications do not guarantee standards and he questions the link between training and qualifications*:

*My view is that training is important to assist good teaching – but not necessarily a qualification. Another issue might be headed 'training versus qualifications'. It is entirely possible that training is needed but is not satisfied by the qualifications available. Indeed it is possible that the requirements of qualifications actively interfere with the developments that might occur with unaccredited training.*

Marc Coyne also questions whether teachers should gain qualifications before they begin teaching or only once they have some classroom experience on which to reflect:

*Does a qualification have to be gained prior to any experience - chicken and egg stuff!*

Finally, on the content of training/qualifications, the need for subject knowledge training has been raised by a number of contributors.

*...one of the main problems with literacy and numeracy teaching to adults, and to some extent also ESOL, is that some (many?) teachers' subject knowledge and understanding is not good enough.* Mary Osmaston (Preston, England)

*...being a confident user of literacy and numeracy skills does not necessarily mean that you will know the methods and approaches to successfully teach these skills to someone else. Jill Little (Scotland)*

Discussion about the need for teachers of adult basic skills to have teaching qualifications continued into week two. Ana in Spain pointed out the lack of consistency in our expectations of professionals:

*When talking about learning it seems like anybody who knows about a subject can teach, but this questions about being a professional in learning processes would never be asked when talking about health.*

Olga from Russia wrote of the importance of recognising that it is possible for someone to successfully teach “possessing only good subject knowledge, patience and creativity”. For Olga “the possession (of a) special qualification can't be an indispensable condition for training of adults”. That teachers bring much to the classroom that goes beyond a teaching qualification was also highlighted by Graciela in Norway, who focused on experience and the need to provide mechanisms for recognition of this and other qualities outside of the formal qualification process suggesting that “experienced teachers should get their experience recognized and be able to rapidly acquire the corresponding formal qualification.” Such a process of Accreditation of Prior Experience and Learning (APEL) would allow greater recognition of the qualities of teachers who may not have had the opportunity for formal accredited training or who hold qualifications from a different country or field. However, as Graciela points out, equivalence is a difficult issue, “... unless we have established a consensus about what the necessary qualifications are, unless we do have curricula for the different types of basic skills teachers, we cannot recognize prior experience as equivalent to formal qualifications”.

A number of participants expressed the view that teachers value teaching qualifications, suggesting that teachers view them in a positive light.

*I believe that most teachers themselves wish to gain qualifications to demonstrate their professionalism', validate their skills, knowledge and understanding, and develop their careers. Judith Kirsh, UK*

*teachers are very much interested in gaining qualifications and luckily most of them are aware that it is not only about improving their knowledge and skills. It also necessary and important to reflect attitudes and practices in order to improve teaching and learning processes and the understanding and interaction between teachers and learners. Monica Tröster, Germany*

*I think that when a teacher gains more qualifications, skills, knowledge and information, she will be more engaged and interested in her profession, and also develop her attitudes to adult learners. Randi Husemoen, Norway*

It was also pointed out that teachers' qualifications can have an impact on how they are viewed beyond the world of basic skills: “... teachers have a very low status and furthermore most of them - at least in Germany - are freelancers and their working conditions are very often precarious.” (Monica Tröster, Germany)

Accredited training may also make it easier to work in collaboration with other professional groups:

*I believe that accredited training is important for us in order to deliver high quality learning programmes and also to be seen as equals when we are making partnerships with other organisations. Gillian Lawrence, UK*

The discussion also touched on the content of any teacher training qualification. For Ana in Spain “...a teacher should know about a subject (Know), about learning processes, organization of learning, (know how) and about how to do it (attitude, professional way).” Ana suggested that we look at the

Alpine study (<http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/doc/2010/keycomp.pdf>) for a possible description of the competences of adult teachers.

For Kari Letrud (Norway), raising awareness of the fact that many adults struggle with large reading and writing difficulties is important. The training of teachers in adult education should include courses that show that we all learn differently.

The role of theory was discussed by Ian and Anne, among others

*It is at least as important that the teacher has a repertoire of evidence-based and peer-reviewed teaching strategies in order to be effective. Ian Grayling, UK*

*I very strongly feel that tutors need to have training in aspects that may not seem directly subject-related, but which have a profound impact upon learning styles, for example, training in recognising dyslexia and being able to use assistive technology; autism and autistic spectrum; hearing impairment, etc. Anne Walters, UK*

However, as Ian noted, theory alone is not enough and too much theory is not a good thing

*The problems come when either the new teacher does not receive the right balance of theory and practical pedagogy in their initial training.... Ian Grayling, UK*

A couple of new discussion topics were introduced and now lie ready for further exploration. Cath Hamilton (UK) raised the issue of learners with learning difficulties and disabilities "...even if you have the best tutor in the world, the learner will not be able to progress unless these underlying difficulties (specific learning difficulties) are addressed". Cath asked participants whether this was an area that is covered in training in their countries.

And Mieke de Haan (the Netherlands) noted that "...in the Netherlands there is a discussion about work with volunteers in literacy especially in literacy for adults." This is also a hot topic in the UK and has been for many years. Is there a role for volunteers in adult basic skills? What should it be and what training, if any, should they be required to undertake?

The last word on this one (for now) should go to Aileen in Scotland "...the quality of the professional development and its accessibility to diverse and sometimes marginal practitioners is what will make the most difference to learning and teaching".

## **2. If teaching qualifications are required, is it enough for those to be about teaching children?**

A number of points have been made about the distinctive nature of teaching adults:

*Adults appreciate recognition of the experience and knowledge they bring to learning at all levels. Diane Thurston (Newcastle, England) ,*

*This is a group of learners who have experienced failure before and there will be reasons why they have not so far achieved. Caroline Haswell (West Highlands, Scotland)*

*In adult literacies learning we aim for an equal relationship where the adult learner takes control of their own learning by setting their individual goals and not following a set curriculum. It is also important to know how to make use of the existing knowledge and skills that an adult brings with them and to how to build on these. Jill Little ( Scotland)*

For Susanne (Weingarten, Germany)

*...teaching adults and teaching children is different in certain aspects: we have different motivation, we have different experiences in learning, even the teaching/ learning psychology is different.*

For Zdenek Karasek (Hungary) the key training need is a move from a transmission to an experiential approach to teaching and learning as education systems move towards competence-based learning.

*We have an experience that, generally, professional teachers (of children) are not better prepared for this change of methods than professional trainers (of adults) without pedagogical qualification.*

Finally, Angela Shapiro (Glasgow, Scotland) suggests that it would be:

*interesting to carry out a mapping exercise to find out which qualifications exist across the 19 countries.*

Discussions about the distinctive nature of teaching adults continued into the second week. For Lis Karin Andersen (Norway) adults need to apply what they learn in a different context than children and young people, requiring the teacher to have knowledge of that context. For Silvia Patru (Romania) motivation is a key issue "...*motivating adults is different. Adults are usually on the run, overwhelmed by tasks and chores, and harder to energize than children*". Anne Walters (Scotland) reminded us that adult learners bring much to the teaching and learning process that we would do well to make the most of, treating adults as partners and drawing on their knowledge of their own needs:

*We also need to recognize that adults can participate in planning their own learning – more of a partnership approach. ...what matters most is professional development that explicitly engages with such questions, fostering critically reflective practitioners.... Aileen Ackland, Scotland.*

There are some short country reports on the BASKET project pages that may be helpful here ([http://basket.vox.no/?page\\_id=435](http://basket.vox.no/?page_id=435)), and while it is probably beyond the remit of this discussion to map teacher training requirements across the 19 countries (a very interesting research project though...), it would be very interesting to hear from more colleagues beyond the UK about how their systems work and what issues they face.