



The Pros and Cons of Bespoke Masters Provision Compared with Traditional Masters Programmes For Teacher Professional Development

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Contribution

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It appears that access to high quality CPD is becoming more challenging but where it is available there are positive impacts linked to career development, improved pupil progress and school improvement (Bubb and Earley, 2010; Mincu, 2013). There is an ongoing discussion about Masters level qualifications across Europe (Tauch and Rauhvargers, 2002; Crosier, Purser, and Smidt, 2007), their value for the teaching profession and accessibility. This debate and view seems to have some support in the UK from the National College which attaches M level credits to its leadership programmes and the recent BERA-RSA enquiry 'Research and the Teaching Profession: building the capacity for a self-improving system' (2014), which draws upon international research. However, research also suggests that there are barriers to Masters awards for teachers which include cost, time and access (Linnet, Marland, Pill and Rea, 2006).

This paper will report on an ongoing comparative study between off-site M level bespoke programmes implemented in response to these concerns and traditional M level programmes. It discusses the rationale for each programme, pedagogical approaches within the models of CPD and the implications for schools, teachers, and HEIs post programme.

The research questions are:

- How do bespoke M level programmes compare with traditional programmes in enabling students to overcome potential

- barriers to CPD?
- How are the CPD needs of schools and teachers being met through the development of bespoke programmes alongside traditional M level opportunities?
- What are the professional development implications for developing off site M level provision for HEIs, schools and teachers?

Theoretical perspective

The relationship between research, its application in schools and teacher professionalism is a current debate (BERA 2014, ECER 2016). Masters programmes can be seen as a way of engaging teachers in enquiry orientated learning and of providing connections between research and practice. Off-site M level provision is not new as the MAST programmes supported by government successfully involved schools in school based CPD (Burton and Goodman, 2011). However, the advent of teaching schools appears to have increased the opportunities for schools to commission and be involved in the design and delivery of CPD. Schools and individuals across Europe face tough decisions about finances and investing in a Masters award for an individual or school is an important decision. There is a need to ensure value for money, and to recoup any initial investment through improved practice and pupil outcomes. Commissioning a bespoke programme linked to a particular school or group of schools seems to be an increasing approach to addressing a range of issues from recruitment, retention of staff to standards, pupil progress and leadership development. Arguments for bespoke provision include the ability to influence the content, delivery and organisation of the programme to suit schools and individuals. The development of a "community of learners" (Wenger, 1998) and the critical mass of several staff or peer support rather than an individual involved in CPD simultaneously seem to support retention, completion and outcomes from a school perspective (Cordingley, 2013). Comparing different approaches and pedagogical to engaging with Masters programmes for schools will be important for schools, teachers and HEIs to support their decision making processes.

Method

A flexible design was adopted to compare off site bespoke M level provision with, in this case, HEI traditional face to face Masters programmes from one institution. Ethical approval was sought using the BERA guidelines and the study began with a documentary analysis of the content and materials of the programmes. Participants are drawn from staff involved in facilitating both programmes, and teachers undertaking M level programmes either at the HEI or following a bespoke off-site model. In addition, Head teachers or those commissioning, sponsoring or supporting teachers undertaking M level programmes will be invited to participate.

Data collection

Multiple sources of data are planned to support the need for systematic information across both models to enable comparison (Robson, 2011). Data collection is planned for participant questionnaires across programmes, face to face interviews with facilitating staff, teachers and schools that have commissioned bespoke programmes and supported teachers on M level programmes. Data will be collected as hard copy notes, questionnaires and digitally recorded interviews. Questionnaires will be provided to participants as hard copy or electronic to support participation rates. Consents will be sought, confidentiality and data protection guidelines will be adhered to.

Data analysis

Data analysis begins with comparison of documentary evidence from the programmes, including handbooks, schedules, assessment materials. Comparing the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment is planned to inform similarities and differences of theory, and practice interactions with teacher professionalism between modes. Questionnaires and interviews will be analysed as they are collected. A thematic coding analysis will be applied to interviews. Data will be analysed to allow comparisons between the experiences and perceptions of facilitation staff, and teachers participating on Masters across the different M level programmes to address the research questions. Data will be analysed to look at how pedagogy and curriculum might be adapted, shaping professional learning activities to meet teacher needs and interconnections within the Masters framework.

Expected Outcomes

This research is currently ongoing with the expectation that conclusions will be available in early August 2016. The expected outcomes from the findings are that the paper will be able to report on the pros and cons of the off-site and traditional HEI based Masters programmes from the perspectives of students and staff. The paper also intends to discuss pedagogical and curricula issues linked to research informing practice through Masters programmes. Implications for teachers and schools considering CPD through M level awards will be discussed. It is expected that findings will support HEIs in considering bespoke and traditional M level provision for the future.

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