Constructing a Pedagogy for Voice Training in ITT

When a prospective teacher comes to interview for a course of Initial Teacher Training they are often asked ‘What are the most important skills a teacher needs to have? The answers to this question are often varied and frequently include such things as ‘patience’ or ‘a love of children’, which are not skills at all but attributes or characteristics. Very seldom if ever does the candidate suggest ‘the use of the human voice’.

Many teacher education courses fail to recognise what constitutes professional communication skills. Professional skills are often defined as the ability to observe, the ability to make constructive evaluations, among others, and most will cite ‘good communication skills’. However, this final skill is not a given and cannot be achieved until the trainee has some knowledge of how the voice works and the most effective ways of using his/her voice in the classroom.

In 2006 in his keynote speech to the Professional Association of Teachers the General Secretary, Philip Parkin said:

‘…speech is a teacher’s and increasingly a teaching assistant’s ‘main tool’ for getting children **to behave and learn** and yet independent studies have concluded that at least 50% of teachers experience voice disorders.

He went on to say that ‘voice care should be part of training of all teachers to avoid ‘damage’ and ‘premature end to careers’. Teachers are one of the highest users of their voice in professional settings.

Teaching is a ‘profession’ and as such needs a set of professional skills that need to be acquired to do the job. The idea that teachers can be unqualified amateurs needs to be examined. We do not feel the same about doctors.

As a professional, every teacher becomes a ‘professional voice user’ and as such should have a voice of professional skills level that is strong, robust, adjustable, expressive and lively. A teacher’s voice is the most important tool a teacher has. Excellent subject knowledge is not enough.

*‘Ascribing the term ‘professional voice user’ carries with it an implicit expectation that individuals will have had training to bring their vocal skills up to a ‘professional’ level.*’ (Martin and Darnley 2004:1)

The voice load for a teacher is even greater than that of an actor and actors receive hours of voice coaching during their training. The teacher, on the whole, receives very little and in some cases none. Six years ago this was the disturbing truth and the starting point for an investigation in the Thames Primary Consortium, an Essex-based SCITT. By introducing trainee teachers to the anatomy and production of the voice followed by the main skills of vocal delivery there was the assertion that such training would not only improve trainees’ vocal health but also, and perhaps more importantly, improve teaching, learning and *behaviour* *management*.

The main question was:

‘What role might voice training have in initial teacher training to promote improvement in a trainee’s handling of behaviour management and the ability to create a classroom environment that is conducive to learning?’

It has been observed from recent research that children, who have a teacher with a voice problem or vocal damage, find the processing of information very difficult and this ultimately affects their ability to learn. Rogerson and Dodd (2005)1 observed that children who had to listen to an impaired voice were at a disadvantage. The additional processing time needed to understand what a teacher had said made comprehension very difficult.

Another recent study suggests that the variations of small sounds in the human voice are difficult for dyslexics to hear.2 This is important when teaching phonics.

The study of ‘normal’ voice in the classroom and its effects on children’s behaviour and learning appears to be unexplored.

**Constructing the Pedagogy**

The result of this study has been the establishment of a specific pedagogical approach to voice training within an ITT curriculum. Rather than a non-essential addition, voice training, when integrated into all the areas of professional development, with a common language between all participants, has proved to be effective in improving trainees’ ability to manage pupils’ behaviour and learning. It has also had a positive impact on trainee absenteeism and the teaching of phonics. In June 2011 Ofsted rated this element of the Thames Primary Consortium training course to be ‘outstanding’.

The Thames Primary Consortium is a successful SCITT that has been running for over 12 years providing initial teacher training in the Essex area. In September 2014 there will be a cohort of 100 trainees. There is also a large group of mentors that numbers over 150 from 56 schools.

**The 5 Voices Model**

The initial impetus for the introduction of this particular model of voice training came from work with one particular trainee. This trainee had had a bad experience on a GTP and had withdrawn after 2 terms and then began to retrain at the Thames Primary Consortium. She lacked confidence and had problems gaining children’s attention and managing behaviour. When she was observed it was immediately evident that she had a voice that was both dysphonic and not being used to good effect. This meant her voice lacked modulation and power. She was given nine hours of voice training along with her fellow trainees and she received one to one voice training over a three-month period. Having undertaken this training she has become a very successful teacher; is now lecturing at the Thames Primary Consortium and has remained in teaching.

This success prompted an analysis of those trainees who were experiencing difficulties and those who were outstanding. It became apparent that those trainees who were outstanding had excellent classroom presence and a large part of this was due to their use of voice. Those who were experiencing difficulties often had less effective voices. The progamme was described in the recently published Carter Review (2015)

***Case study: Thames Primary SCITT - Use of Voice in Managing Behaviour***

*In 2009 Thames Primary SCITT evaluated the qualities that were emerging in the practice of their strongest and less able trainees and identified a correlation between use of voice and quality of teaching, particularly in the trainee’s ability to manage behaviour. In 2010 the SCITT introduced a rigorous voice training programme, delivered by qualified voice teachers, that moved beyond vocal care and explored the vocal techniques needed to create voices that were effective and easy for children to process. Almost immediately the SCITT saw a reduction in trainee absence due to voice loss and an improvement in behaviour management. The SCITT then extended the training so that all mentors in school were trained enabling them to guide trainees in their use of voice and creating a common language for professional dialogue about use of voice in teaching and learning. The SCITT now assesses trainees’ voices at interview in order to plan support. They also provide 1 1⁄2 days of voice training, provide training for all new mentors and provide one- to-one voice support when required. (p.32)*

**Training the Mentors**

The use of the 5voices model was introduced seven years ago. Observations of the programme showed that it made a very powerful impact very quickly. However, at this stage although the tutors and trainees were able to talk about voice, the mentor community lacked both the knowledge and the vocabulary to support the further development of trainees’ voices in the classroom. This led to the introduction of ‘*mentor training’* in voice studies.The mentors have now all had the 5voices training programme themselves and can consequently engage in a meaningful dialogue with the trainees about the impact of their voices on the children. One experienced mentor said at a recent training session: *“the most useful thing we have ever done is the voice training because I can have a real conversation with my trainee about her voice and we both know what we are talking about”*

It is a firm belief that it is **not unrealistic to have an expectation of providers** that they deliver high quality voice training as part of ITT**.** The total voice training budget (including 1:1 support) costs 0.4% of the total lecture and supervision budget of Thames Primary Consortium.

Over the past three years several case studies have been carried out in order to gauge trainees’ teaching ability in relation to voice training.

Impact is measured termly in surveys so adjustment can be made the content of the programme, on exit we ask the question “how well did the voice training prepare you to do the job?” Answer is always, “very well”. In our exit survey last year we asked three questions:

How well did your training prepare you to:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Very Good | Good | Satisfactory | Unsatisfactory | VG/G total |
| Use your voice effectively in the classroom | 100% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 100% |
| Manage behaviour | 82% | 18% | 0% | 0% | 100% |
| Teach phonics | 65% | 30% | 4% | 0% | 96% |

Lesson observations were carried out with a focus on teacher presence, behaviour management using voice and use of voice both before and after intervention with small groups. On average in our sample groups observed lesson grades rose by 0.9 on a rating scale of 1-4.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **NAME** | **observed lesson AVG prior to voice intervention** | **observed lesson AVG following voice intervention** | **final grade** | **progress following intervention** |
| Trainee 1 | 2.5 | 2 | 2 | 0.5 |
| Trainee 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| Trainee 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 0 |
| Trainee 4 | 2.5 | 1.5 | 1 | 1 |
| Trainee 5 | 2.5 | 1 | 1 | 1.5 |
| Trainee 6 | 2.5 | 1 | 1 | 1.5 |
| Trainee 7 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| Trainee 8 | 3 | 2.5 | 2 | 0.5 |
| Trainee 9 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 1 |
|  |  |  |  | **0.9** |

At Thames it is very clear about the impact of the programme and the next step is to continue to moderate judgements that mentors are making about voice and…in the words of our former Secretary of State for Education to “train the next generation of outstanding teachers.”

**Five Voices and the Effective Teacher**

The 5voices programme is now in its fourth year of the fully integrated model.During this period, there has been a move away from the one-off voice training session and through various manifestations there is now an integrated programme in place.

The ‘the5voices’ framework grew out of the standard workshop for voice training for teachers that has been the established model over many years. This is still the predominant approach by ITT trainers throughout the country who engage an outside voice lecturer to run a one off workshop typically comprises of an introduction to voice production and voice care.

Most voice training in ITT consists of a single session of between 1 - 3hrs and is not repeated. The one stand-alone workshop has its limitations. The trainer only works with a group on one occasion and therefore has no opportunity to discover what those trainees have taken from the session. There is no follow-up or one-one intervention except in exceptional circumstances.

The one-off session approach leads to some confusion for trainees. Often they see no connection between voice production and their daily work in the classroom. Those who have had no voice problems see no relevance to their work.

Many trainees are being given erroneous advice by their mentors and older teachers, such as ‘a sore throat is an occupation hazard, forcing the voice into a lower pitch helps with discipline, and shouting is the only way to control children.’ But perhaps more alarmingly, only people with a voice problem, for example nodules or polyps, need any help with their voice. Teachers are often unaware of how their voices are being heard by their students or that they can, with practice, vary their voices. If teachers are fixed on certain ideas about voice the big question is how do you change their understanding?

Anne Karpf (2006:19) in her book ‘The Human Voice’ suggests:

*‘Although interpreting the human voice is one of our most important daily social activities, the way we speak and hear remains almost entirely hidden, and unexplored.’*

This being the case, it was important to create the scaffolding to bring together what many trainees see as disparate ideas.

**The Pitch and Tone Colour Quandary**

Consistently in our work we find there is ignorance about the importance of vocal tone colour and most trainees think that pitch and tone colour is interchangeable. It is important for trainees to understand that every individual voice has its own tone colour quality as well as a pitch range. This quality is dependent on the shape and condition of the vocal resonators and articulators.

However, a person’s individual tone colour can be varied depending on the circumstances of use. Changes in reaction and feeling can be achieved through adaptations of tone colour from the warm and tender to the harsh, cold and brittle.

Using a matrix, we can make a clear distinction between pitch and tone colour, emphasising that pitch and tone colour are two separate vocal features. Shifts in pitch do not in themselves vary tone colour.

By using a visual model of this matrix and orally demonstrating the different voices that can be achieved trainees are given a context for the different voices. This approach helped trainees to recognise that vocal tone colour as well as pitch shift give children different cues and clues about what teachers require of them. For example, a harsher tone denotes some kind of behavioural matter whereas a warmer tone during a question and answer session for example encourages participation and engagement.

**The Rationale for a Voice Map**

The popularity of the visual matrix led to the expansion of this idea into a vocal map, giving trainees a visual image of what they are trying to do. The map helps to illustrate the different changes in the voice so that trainees understand the variations in pitch and tone colour that provide the different voices used in the classroom.



There are five main voices that trainees need in their toolbox. However, this map is not definitive as there are other subtler tonal variations that teachers can use on different occasions. English teachers, for example, will need to master the many degrees of tone colour that bring expression to a text when it is read aloud.

The Voice Map is a starting point to guide teachers into the use of a multi-tone colour range of voice, which helps children to understand the commands and instructions they are given. It is quite common for trainees who are parents themselves to observe that their child comes home saying their teacher shouts all the time. Indeed in one instance the child had said ‘I not going to listen to him anymore, he gives me a headache’. This child perception of shouting was due to the overuse of a very firm tone and had nothing to do with volume.

The main purpose of designing the map is to help trainees understand the difficulties they are giving pupils by not using a more extensive tone colour range.

**Constructing the Pedagogy**

Having developed the Voice Map, attention was given to developing a more sophisticated integration of voice work within the Thames Primary Consortium Course. This began with a voice assessment at interview using a proforma to identify voices that may need additional help during the course. Successful Trainees are asked to fill out a voice pro-forma prior to starting the course. It is made clear to trainees that the purpose of this assessment is to tailor the course content to their individual needs. This forms part of trainee baseline assessment.

Trainees are asked to keep a Voice Journal and make regular self-assessment of their needs. Mentors and tutors alert the Course Director to any concerns. Voice Journals are completed as necessary. Trainees are asked to complete a Professional Voice Development Action Plan at the end of each practice and this is shared with the mentors at the trainee’s next school and forms part of their CEDP when they leave the course in July.

**Sharing a Language**

The most important part of the development of this pedagogy was a need to share a common language. It became apparent a language was needed that was common to all participants; trainees, mentors, class teachers and personal tutors. By training all these groups, the personnel are able to help trainees to identify when use of voice has strengthened their practice by looking at its impact on the quality of the learning and behaviour of the pupils.

**In Conclusion**

Trainees should never underestimate how the voice affects pupils’ ***behaviour and learning***. The information collected from the trainees seems to be suggesting that the use of the Voice Map is extremely helpful. By being able to move through the different voices they are finding the children’s response to be more consistent. Their classrooms are calmer and less noisy.

But voice training should not just be seen a tool for improving behaviour, important as that is. The voice, in its infinite variety, can lift spirits, inspire and focus the attention of pupils on the excitement of learning. The course run at Thames is very practical where trainees are encouraged to rehearse the different voices and given different classroom scenarios. This allows them to determine the voices needed for each situation.

After some 20yrs of suggesting to successive Governments that voice training should be a critical part of the skills set for teachers, we now have a Government document ‘Improving teacher training for behaviour’. Under Personal Style there are three bullet points:

• \_Trainees should be able to vary the tone and volume of their voice to teach effectively and manage behaviour.

• \_Trainees should know how to look after their voice.

•\_Trainees should understand how to stand, move, make use of space and use eye contact in order to be an authoritative presence in the classroom.

In the Carter review there are several references when the training of voice and body language are suggested as import aspects of skills development for trainee teachers.

*Behaviour Management*

*XXII. Behaviour management should be prioritised within ITT programmes. ITT providers should build in opportunities for trainees to learn from a range of outstanding teachers, with a specific focus on managing pupil behaviour. We* *have found that the most effective programmes are practically focussed and underpinned by deeper understanding of behavioural issues. We believe it is crucial that trainees receive practical advice -tangible strategies for new teachers, grounded in evidence. All ITT programmes, for example, should support teachers to develop their own classroom presence and cover use of voice, body language and how to develop classroom routines and defuse situations (10)*

*A popular element of the course are trainees’ sessions with a voice and body language coach to support the development of a positive presence in the classroom; the course seeks to develop individual strengths and approaches around a central model of consistency, clarity and rigour, giving trainees a set of core effective approaches to manage classroom behaviour and means of adapting these in context. (p.32)*

*We agree that behaviour management is not a straightforward area where we can give trainees simple answers. We do, however, feel that in all programmes there is a need for more practical and specific advice on managing behaviour – what strategies are likely or unlikely to work. This would include classroom presence, use of voice, body language, as well as how to develop and establish classroom routines and defuse situations. We believe new teachers should start their careers armed with tangible strategies and techniques to draw upon. (p.57)*

It is hoped that voice training will become an integral part of the skills programme in all ITE courses and will be at the heart of the new directions for teacher training. As in Robert Frost ‘s poem ‘The Road Not Taken’… let us hope, for the sake of the children we teach that we have the courage to:

…take the road less traveled by

And that will make all the difference’

© Dr *Lesley Hendy, Jo Palmer-Tweed, Suzanne Parke (2014)*

*Reference:*

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