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Professional attributes

This chapter covers

Ofsted (2009) has identified several noticeable characteristics of ‘outstanding’ trainee teachers. This chapter examines each of these characteristics in turn. Each characteristic is exemplified to enable trainee teachers to identify whether they are demonstrating them during periods of school-based placement. The chapter focuses heavily on how trainees can develop creative, innovative approaches in teaching. It addresses the notion of being a risk taker and it stresses the importance of a flexible approach.



According to Ofsted outstanding trainees:

- > take risks when trying to make teaching interesting, are able to deal with the unexpected and ‘grab the moment’;
- > inspire and communicate their enthusiasm to learners;
- > have an intrinsic passion for learning;
- > show innovation and creative thinking – lateral thinkers;
- > have the ability to reflect critically and rigorously on their own practice to inform their professional development, and to take and evaluate appropriate actions – they are able to learn from their mistakes;
- > take full responsibility for their own professional development;
- > are highly respected by learners and colleagues and, where appropriate, parents/carers and employers;
- > have the clear capacity to become outstanding teachers;
- > demonstrate, or show the capacity to develop, leadership and management skills (2009: 36).

These characteristics will now be examined in turn to enable you to evaluate whether you are demonstrating them fully during your periods of school-based training.

Taking risks

According to Ofsted outstanding trainees ‘take risks when trying to make teaching interesting, are able to deal with the unexpected and “grab the moment”’ (2009: 36). However, the notion of risk is subjective and one person’s perception of risk may differ radically from that of another. Consequently you may feel that you have taken a risk in your teaching but your mentor may not share this view. An example of this is illustrated through the following case study.



Case study

A trainee teacher with a Year 4 class supported the children in applying their mathematical understanding of area by engaging the children in an outdoor lesson. The children were asked to calculate the area of the football pitch. The trainee felt that the lesson was an example of risk taking and evidence of creative practice. In the post-lesson feedback tutorial the class mentor explained to the trainee that there is an expectation that children should work both inside and outside the classroom. Working outside was also common practice for this group of learners. For these reasons the mentor felt that no risks in teaching had been taken.

Reflection

- > Can you think of ways in which the trainee could have genuinely taken risks to teach this aspect of mathematics?
- > Reflect on lessons you have taught where you have ‘played it safe’. How would you change these lessons to become a risk taker?

Being a risk taker is potentially problematic and trainees may be tempted to ‘play it safe’ when planning and teaching lessons. Trainees (and teachers) often mentally rehearse worst case scenarios at the planning stage and this may prevent them from taking a risk. Such scenarios include:

- > learning outcomes not being met;
- > the children becoming over-excited resulting in a noisy learning environment and loss of focus;
- > other teachers in school not liking your teaching style.

These potential pitfalls may prevent you from taking risks in your teaching. Additionally the context you are working in will ultimately determine whether you are able to take risks in your lessons. If you are working with creative, energetic teachers who also take risks in their teaching then you will ultimately be more inclined to do the same. Unfortunately if you are placed in a school with teachers who 'play it safe' and expect you to teach in a similar way then the opportunities to take risks will be more limited. Your class mentor will play a pivotal role in this respect. If your class mentor is open to fresh ideas and approaches and regularly experiments in teaching, you are likely to model this approach.

However, we emphasise that you should be willing to experiment with teaching styles and approaches regardless of the context in which you are placed. Your ITT provider does not expect you to be a carbon copy of your class teacher. The aim of teacher training is to empower you to develop your own professional identity as a beginning teacher. By the end of your training it is important that you have formulated your own set of principles about education in general and children's learning specifically. Trainees should consequently take every opportunity to learn from experimentation, try out new ideas and evaluate their actions during periods of school-based training. Research has suggested that creative teachers frequently take risks in both their private and professional lives (Boden, 2001; Craft, 2001) so it appears that creativity and risk taking go hand in hand.

Before taking risks you need to think through carefully how you will manage the lesson if things do not go according to plan. Risk taking, by its very nature, means that children's responses and outcomes cannot always be predicted. Sometimes it is too easy to adopt a predictable structure that you know will work because you have used it many times before. Being a risk taker assumes a degree of flexibility to deviate from tried and tested structures.

Sometimes risk taking demands the flexibility to deviate from prescribed lesson planning both within and between lessons in response to what children say and do. It is not always necessary or even desirable to have each day precisely mapped out to five-minute intervals. Children come to school with new experiences each day. They bring in objects which they have either found or been

given. Risk takers are able to 'grab the moment' and seize the opportunity to embrace children's interests or experiences and build these into learning experiences. Consequently risk takers are able to think on their feet.

During centre-based training you will have been introduced to specific ways of structuring lessons, particularly in literacy and mathematics. You may also have been introduced to some of the materials produced by the National Strategies. Trainees often find it helpful to follow this non-statutory guidance as it provides them with a structure upon which to base their teaching. However, there is a danger that over-prescription can stifle imagination within teaching. Trainees who take risks are willing to try out new approaches that they have never used before. They are keen to experiment with creative approaches and deviate from common approaches to structuring lessons. These trainees realise the potential benefits of varying their teaching styles in order to maximise learner participation. Cremin (2009) argues that creative teachers take ownership of planning, teaching and assessment and exert a strong sense of professional autonomy in the classroom.

Lesson stimuli

A creative stimulus for a lesson will engage and excite your learners. Think carefully about the use of the following as resources to stimulate learning:

- > music;
- > a piece of art work;
- > a poster;
- > objects from the natural world, for example bird's nest;
- > a 'magic' mobile telephone;
- > a rusty key;
- > a letter in a bottle;
- > an old boot;
- > an old diary;
- > a sealed box;
- > a feely bag.

Consider the ways in which you may use these resources to support learning across the curriculum. Also reflect on what additional resources can support creative practices.

Trainees may be empowered by discovering that specific lessons do not have to follow specific formats. It is not necessary to start every mathematics lesson with a mental/oral starter, followed by whole-class input, focused group work and a plenary. Literacy lessons do not necessarily have to begin with a big book or a

shared writing activity. Phonics lessons do not always have to follow a four-part structure. These approaches may work some of the time but if they are over-used there is a danger that the predictable structure may cause children to disengage. Varying your approach adds interest for both you and your learners.

You might decide to teach children about mathematical concepts through a series of outdoor games. A lesson on fractions can be brought to life by asking the children to make sandwiches and find different ways of cutting them into halves or quarters. A treasure hunt around the school can be an exciting way of teaching the children about logical thinking and can focus on specific areas of the curriculum. History lessons can be brought to life through the use of drama strategies. The National Strategies provide a comprehensive overview of a range of drama and speaking and listening strategies. The use of drama and talk across the whole curriculum can be a powerful and engaging way of teaching children subject-specific skills or aspects of knowledge. Trainees who take risks exploit such possibilities and use the broader curriculum as a context for applying children's literacy, numeracy and ICT skills. This approach ensures that these fundamental skills are applied and practised in context.

In all of these approaches the key point is that you firstly need to establish the intended learning outcomes. Once you are clear about what you want the children to learn you can then plan imaginative activities which address these. The intended learning outcomes should be derived from your assessments of children's prior learning. You should avoid the temptation to think of exciting activities first then match learning outcomes to fit the activity. This approach may be detrimental to children's learning, as an accurate understanding of children's misconceptions and next steps in learning should drive planning and teaching. You should therefore make sure that teaching is driven by an accurate identification of children's needs rather than being activity driven.

Practical task

You are teaching a lesson on position in mathematics to a Year 1 class. The learning objective is:

> To visualise and use everyday language to describe the position of objects.

Think of creative ways of teaching this objective. Try to make the learning active and fun.

Then take other objectives from the National Curriculum or the EYFS framework and think of innovative approaches to teach them.

Trainees who take risks recognise the value of enquiry-based learning. Fundamentally children need to be independent learners. They need to discover new learning for themselves and develop the skills needed to become lifelong learners. Passive learning and didactic approaches (imparting knowledge) have little value in today's schools. Children will quickly forget what they have been told but will remember what they have discovered for themselves. Trainees who take risks will therefore provide opportunities for their learners to practise being scientists, historians, mathematicians and so on. These trainees provide learners with opportunities to use source material to answer questions, to problem solve, experiment and research new learning. This changes the role of the teacher from someone who imparts knowledge to someone who is a facilitator of learning. The key skill in this respect is the ability to provide children with an effective learning environment, which includes the necessary resources to enable children to be independent learners. Clearly there are risks associated with such approaches but the potential benefits outweigh these. Such benefits include learner motivation and participation, opportunities for learning how to learn, and deep learning which is fostered through self-discovery.

According to Hayes:

In a vibrant learning community, pupils not only need relevant work but also a productive engagement with thinking and problem-solving that will equip them with the skills of self-reliance when adult support is unavailable and they have to rely more on their initiative. (2009: 30)

Therefore the aim of education is to teach children to be self-sufficient and ultimately to be independent learners themselves. Outstanding teachers (and trainees) are able to facilitate children's independence by providing them with ownership of their own learning. Piaget emphasised the value of active learning and children's interaction with the physical environment. He stressed the importance of the child's involvement in their learning and the need for children to construct their own understandings (Whitebread, 2003). Vygotsky emphasised the role of social interaction and language in the learning process. Practice should be underpinned with a secure knowledge of theory so that you know why you are adopting particular approaches. Both theories have implications for teaching, and enquiry-based learning and collaborative work are good examples of approaches which reflect these theories.

Clearly children will need to be taught the necessary pre-requisite skills to enable them to get maximum benefit from independent enquiry-based learning. Without such underpinning skills (i.e. the ability to read for meaning, write,

use ICT, ask questions) children will be unable to find out their own information in history, geography, religious education or citizenship. Unless children can plan an investigation, predict outcomes, control variables, identify fair testing, observe, record and draw conclusions, they will find it difficult to work as scientists. Therefore in the early years teachers have to devote a substantial amount of time to teaching specific skills. However, it is still possible to plan opportunities for independent learning in the early years through creating effective learning environments which encourage children to be curious, problem solve and apply what they have been taught.

In the early years trainees who take risks might use the children's interests as a starting point for planning and they might develop learning spaces in classrooms which reflect these interests. Involving children in the planning process is becoming increasingly common in the early years and primary age phases and consulting children regularly about what they want to learn is now seen to be good practice.

Risk taking necessitates a willingness to deviate from traditional prescribed structures to lessons. It is associated with a desire to experiment with teaching styles and approaches. Being a risk taker represents a commitment to continual experimentation and reflection. Confident trainees who take risks are not afraid to be flexible in their approaches and frequently empower children to lead the learning. Risk takers are confident practitioners who are able to build on firm foundations. They reflect and experiment and find innovative approaches to teaching and learning. In the early stages of your development you may not have the confidence to do this and time needs to be spent on establishing secure pedagogical knowledge, skills and understanding. As you gain in confidence you will be able to gradually reflect on your practice and experiment with it. However, it may be detrimental to your development to take risks too soon.

Grabbing the moment

The Ofsted criteria for evaluating trainee performance emphasise that outstanding trainee teachers are able to 'grab the moment' by capitalising on unforeseen opportunities and situations for the benefit of their learners. It is therefore important to recognise that you need to be flexible in your approach.

Flexibility is essential and trainees who demonstrate this are able to seize unplanned opportunities and integrate them into their teaching. However, this is not always easy to do. You should have planned your lessons in sufficient detail so that there is no wasted time during the day. You will be required to

identify timings on your lesson plans so that your lessons can progress at a good pace. You will have identified learning objectives that must be covered and you will have specified learning outcomes for groups of learners and individuals. Additionally you may be in a school where the head teacher asks for your planning in advance and a weekly timetable. The head teacher may expect you to be teaching specific things at certain times and if you deviate from your planning then you may be required to justify this. Your university or provider link tutor will arrange visits to observe you and they may expect to see specific lessons. It is difficult to deviate from such a tightly planned schedule and your daily timetable and lesson timings may well provide you with a degree of security that you value. You have specified the schedule and you expect your learners to be at a certain stage by a specific time. You know how far you want them to progress by the end of the week as this has been specified in your weekly planning and you have identified precisely what you want them to learn.

Being flexible within this context is certainly a challenge but flexibility enables you to:

- > respond to children's immediate interests;
- > respond to things that children say and do either directly or in their play;
- > respond to comments by parents and carers;
- > respond to changes in weather, for example a sudden fall of snow;
- > respond to sudden rare events, such as an earthquake;
- > respond to experiences outside of education which children discuss in school, such as a family holiday/visit, cultural festival or other positive and negative experiences.

Many young children demonstrate sheer delight when there is a sudden change in the weather. If it suddenly starts to snow during the day the children's attention will immediately switch to the snow. Creative teachers can seize this opportunity and quickly adapt their lessons 'on the spot'. Thus, the theme of 'snow' can become a rich context for children's writing (both fiction and non-fiction), reading and understanding of science. Young children could investigate the properties of snow either through exploration in the outdoor area or in the classroom. Knowledgeable trainees can then observe children working with the snow and use this context as a vehicle for extending their language by introducing them to new vocabulary.

Sudden world or local events such as earthquakes, floods or hurricanes can form a stimulating context for learning across the breadth of the curriculum. Older children can research into these physical changes using enquiry-based learning

approaches. They can use books and e-learning to research into specific topics and they can present the information to their peers. They can organise events to raise money for victims and use the skills associated with enterprise education to help others in situations of crisis. Such events can provide rich contexts for the development of children's writing and reading.

Children may come to school with special objects that they want to share with you and the rest of the class. These may be interesting and unusual and could potentially provide rich contexts for learning. We have worked with children over the years who have turned up with various objects. One child turned up with an old dusty boot that he found on the beach at the weekend. This raised several interesting questions:

- > What was it?
- > Where was it found and how did it get there?
- > Who might have owned it?
- > What might have happened to the owner?

This created a rich context for writing. The children decided that the boot belonged to a giant and subsequently wrote stories about how the giant lost his boot! Interesting and unusual objects can form the stimulus for a class discussion and can be displayed in the writing area in early years settings to provide a stimulus for children's writing.



Case study

Nosheen was placed in a large EYFS unit for her first placement. The parents and carers came into the setting in the morning to meet and greet the practitioners and relationships were positive. Nosheen chatted informally to one of the fathers one morning about his child's progress. She found out that he was called Pete and that he worked for the organisation Dogs for the Blind. As a dog trainer, Pete was responsible for ensuring that the dogs were well trained for their future role.

Nosheen asked Pete if he would come into the setting to talk to the children about the organisation and his role. Pete was happy to oblige and arranged to come in the next day. He brought with him some photographs of the dog trainers and the dogs and these were displayed on the interactive whiteboard. Pete also brought some video footage to show the children a typical training session and some further footage of the dogs working with their owners.

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Nosheen prepared the children for Pete's session by directing them to think of (and write down) specific questions that they wanted to ask him. The children responded really well to the session. They were engaged and asked many questions. This session then provided a context for subsequent learning in the setting over several days.

Reflection

- > How did Nosheen 'grab the moment' and why was this beneficial to her learners?
- > Look at the EYFS framework. What learning opportunities were presented in this session?
- > What subsequent learning could you develop from this session? Refer to the EYFS framework.

If parents or carers offer to come into school to talk to the children about unusual jobs that they do then it is important to capitalise on this. One parent of a child in my class worked as a radiographer. She volunteered to come into school to show the children some X-rays. This offer was immediately taken up and she brought in a selection of interesting X-rays and a light box. Some of the X-rays showed images of lungs that were damaged by smoking. Others showed broken limbs or limbs held together by screws. The children were very engaged during the session and it would have been difficult to replicate the experience.

Parents or carers may offer to come into school to work with small groups of children. They may have a specific skill/talent that they are willing to share. Trainees who grab the moment seize these opportunities because they believe that the experience will not only be enriching but difficult to replicate. On this basis the experience is deemed to be educationally worthwhile, regardless of whether it fits in with a class topic or theme.

Trainees who grab the moment build on children's home experiences and take every opportunity to develop in their learners an appreciation of social and cultural diversity. Children within a class have diverse experiences out of school. They may attend weddings, visit other countries or take part in celebrations. As an inclusive community it is important to teach children about respect for cultural differences and to celebrate diversity. Trainees who grab the moment are able to value children's home experiences and use these as a context for

learning in the classroom. This is empowering for children and provides them with a sense of belonging.

Children may come to school and ask questions. They may have seen a rainbow for the first time during the journey to school and they may ask the teacher questions about it. They may want to know what it is and how it has formed. Confident teachers are able to capitalise on children's immediate interests and use them as a basis for developing sustained shared thinking. The REPEY research defines sustained shared thinking as:

... an episode in which two or more individuals 'work together' in an intellectual way to solve a problem, clarify a concept, evaluate activities, extend a narrative ... both parties must contribute to the thinking and it must develop and extend. (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002: 8)

The research found that in effective settings dialogues between children and adults were characterised by sustained shared thinking and that staff with higher qualifications encouraged more sustained shared thinking than staff with lower qualifications. This research has implications for the way in which adult-child interactions are conducted. In your interactions with children you should seek to extend children's thinking through good quality questioning and through working with children to extend their thought processes. Children's questions could be a good starting point for developing sustained shared thinking but rather than giving them answers you could extend their understanding through further questioning, modelling and researching with the child so that they discover the new learning for themselves. In this way excellent practitioners develop the skill of scaffolding children's learning (see Bruner, 1996).



Case study

Lilijana was teaching a class of children aged 4–5 years. A small group of children were playing in the water tray with sponge balls. Lilijana was supporting them. The transcript of the conversation between a child and Lilijana is shown below:

Child: Look the ball is going under the water now! Why did it do that?
Teacher: Yes it was floating and now it is beginning to sink. That's a good question.

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Child: How did that happen?

Teacher: I am not sure, what do you think? How shall we find the answer?

Child: It's because it is heavy.

Teacher: So why did it float in the beginning?

Child: It wasn't heavy then?

Teacher: What made it become heavy?

Child: It has got water in it now.

Teacher: So how can you make it float again?

[Child grabs the ball and squeezes the water out of it and places the ball back on the surface of the water.]

Teacher: What is the ball doing now?

Child: It is floating.

Teacher: What is it going to do?

Child: It will get filled with water and sink.

Teacher: You're right!

[Lilijana then collects a rubber ball and places it on the surface of the water and they both watch it.]

Child: It is still floating.

Teacher: Why isn't it sinking like the sponge ball?

Child: Because the water can't get in.

Reflection

- > How did the teacher scaffold the child's language?
- > How did the teacher capitalise on the child's play to promote learning?
- > How did the teacher demonstrate respect for the child's ideas and develop these further?
- > Carefully analyse the types of questions the teacher used to support learning.

Young children are curious and often ask many questions. Avoid the temptation to brush these questions aside if you do not know the answers. Demonstrate to your learners that you are also a learner and enjoy the challenge of finding out the answers to the children's questions together. This process enables you to model the skill of how to be a learner and this is fundamentally more important than having all the answers to children's questions at your fingertips. Children's interests and questions can then be used as a context for developing learning across the curriculum for the rest of the day or week. It takes confidence to demonstrate this level of flexibility but by the end of your training you should become less reliant on minute-by-minute session plans.

Trainees who grab the moment are able to respond to events that take place during the school day. The children's interests may be ignited through a stimulating act of collective workshop or by an event that they have experienced before they arrived at school. Demonstrating flexibility in your teaching will require you to tune into your learners. You will need to listen to them, talk with them and observe them to find out what they are interested in at that specific time. Providing your learners with opportunities to lead the learning in this way for some of the time is a powerful way of raising their self-esteem.

However, we wish to emphasise that it is not appropriate to abandon planning all of the time or to do little or no planning in the name of flexibility. You need to remember that planning and the identification of clear learning objectives and learning outcomes are key professional requirements that need to be demonstrated to achieve the QTS standards. Additionally, planning for progression is also a requirement of the standards. Therefore we are not advocating a completely child-centred approach. We do, however, feel that children (and teachers) can benefit from a degree of flexibility some of the time and that this flexibility might allow you to respond to children's questions, interests or unplanned sudden events.

Within early years and primary education it is often unhelpful to confine learning to specific time slots. Children may need longer than thirty minutes to write a powerful story or they may resist being told to tidy away when they are making a new product in design and technology. If children are absorbed in a particular piece of learning it is educationally sound to allow them to continue into the next session rather than asking them to stop. It is difficult to pick something up again a week later. Grabbing the moment, by allowing children to immerse themselves in deep learning, demonstrates flexibility in your approach. However, you will need to think through carefully how you organise this and you will need to discuss it with your class mentor. It may be possible to combine some structured sessions with sessions that allow children opportunities to carry learning over from one session to the next.

Inspiring learners

Outstanding trainees inspire and motivate learners through teaching creative, innovative lessons which make a lasting impression on their memories. One trainee asked the children to be scientists in one lesson I observed. She told them that a company employed them and that their job was to investigate

which type of paper out of a selection was the best for mopping up spills. She gave each child a white laboratory coat to wear and they spent the entire lesson carrying out important scientific investigation work for the company. Creating such a context increases learner motivation and fosters pupil participation. It provides children with a purpose for their learning and adds a new dimension. Further guidance on creative teaching is included in Chapter 4. These lessons are interesting and relevant and foster frequent opportunities for pupil participation.

Demonstrating a passion for learning

Outstanding trainees demonstrate a love of learning and they communicate this to their learners consistently. This passion for learning emerges in their teaching. During periods of school-based placement you need to be energetic in the classroom. You need to communicate enthusiasm through verbal and non-verbal forms of communication. You need to show your learners (and mentors and tutors) that you are genuinely excited about what you are teaching and you can do this through varying your voice tone and facial expressions. You need to demonstrate to your learners that you enjoy learning from them. They need to see you as a learner as well as a teacher and outstanding trainees model being a learner very effectively. In some lessons you may be able to create opportunities to sit alongside children to enable you to model being a learner. Outstanding trainees can switch from teacher mode to learner mode within a lesson. In the EYFS you might model being a learner by playing alongside children or by reading a book to yourself in the reading area. You might work alongside children in the writing area so that you can model being a writer. Throughout the primary years you might work alongside children in art and design and technology by creating your own products. There are many ways that you can communicate a passion for learning. You need to create the spaces and opportunities to model the learning process.

Thinking creatively and being innovative

Outstanding trainees are lateral thinkers. They demonstrate the ability to plan and teach lessons which are original, creative and engaging. These lessons are planned with clear learning objectives and learning outcomes in mind. However, these are taught creatively. These lessons make an impact on learners because they remember them several months or even years later.

Cremin (2009) argues that creative teachers frequently provide children with time and space to experiment. She argues that they develop a pedagogy which is based on trust and respect for children's ideas. A creative pedagogy provides children with the freedom to organise their own learning and make their own decisions (Cremin, 2009). Creative teachers are open to new ideas and encourage children to see the relevance and purpose of tasks they are asked to undertake (Cremin, 2009).

There is a growing market in which trainees and teachers can obtain commercially produced lesson plans. The internet now enables trainees to download lesson plans and schemes of work, often free of charge. Companies have been established that provide lesson plans which cover the entire curriculum from the EYFS to Year 6 and beyond. These 'off the shelf' lessons may be useful for stimulating your thinking and giving you ideas. However, they will rarely meet the specific needs of *your* learners. You are unlikely to deliver creative, inspirational, innovative lessons if you rely on commercially produced material. Trainees who achieve outstanding outcomes demonstrate the ability to think for themselves. They are able to provide learners with rich contexts and clear purposes of learning. They demonstrate an ability to plan meaningful links between areas of the curriculum and their lessons excite, motivate and energise *their* learners. No class has the same needs and this is where commercially produced material falls short.

Outstanding trainees may teach lessons in ways that are original and using approaches that have not been tried before. These lessons will foster high levels of learner participation and children will make rapid progress because they are engaged. The best trainees are not 'technicians' who merely deliver lessons they have read in a book or downloaded from the internet. They are *educators* who demonstrate the ability to think creatively and imaginatively and consequently bring learning to life. These trainees do their best to ensure that every lesson makes an impact and leaves a lasting impression on their learners. Ofsted inspectors, tutors and mentors long to see lessons that they have never seen before. Worksheets are unlikely to impress and often result in dull, uninspiring teaching. The aim of teaching is to foster the development of pupils' thinking and filling in boxes on worksheets tends to stifle this. Try to think of an alternative way of teaching a concept rather than using a worksheet. Make the learning vivid, practical and fun. Remember that the outcomes of every lesson do not always have to result in recorded work. You can record the learning in many other ways with a little imagination. Examples of alternative ways of recording learning

and evidencing achievement are through the use of photographs, written observations, digital and audio recording.

Being reflective

Outstanding trainees are able to reflect critically and rigorously on their own practice and take action to continually improve their practice. To demonstrate this you will need to show that you have a depth of insight into the strengths and weaknesses of your own practice. Your ability to critically reflect will be evidenced through:

- > detailed lesson and weekly evaluations;
- > discussions with your mentor about your teaching – these should be daily, weekly and at the mid and end points of your placement.

Try not to be descriptive in your evaluations. Demonstrate to your mentors that you know what aspects of your practice need to be improved and identify the actions that you need to take to achieve your targets. Outstanding trainees often involve teachers and teaching assistants in the evaluation of their practice; they value their advice and take action on the basis of it.

In post-lesson feedback and meetings where progress is reviewed, outstanding trainees are able to articulate clearly their own strengths and areas for development. In these meetings outstanding trainees take an active role and they are able to make well-founded judgements about their own performance. These trainees do not rely on mentors or link tutors to make assessments of their teaching because they are able to rate their own performance and justify their judgements. These trainees are able to demonstrate a clear audit trail throughout their placement. This trail should identify:

- > key targets for the placement (through an action plan);
- > regular reflections on progress towards these initial targets;
- > regular identification of targets on a weekly basis;
- > evidence of implementation of strategies to address these weekly targets;
- > evidence of further evaluation following implementation of strategies.

Pollard argues that ‘maintaining a constructive engagement, a willingness to imagine new futures and a self-critical spirit are thus all connected to reflective practice’ (2005: 19). He emphasises that the ability to possess an open mind is essential for rigorous reflection.

Taking control of your own professional development

Outstanding trainees are able to take control of their own professional development. They are able to identify targets for their own development and take appropriate action to address these. During your placement you should take regular opportunities to meet with relevant professionals who will be able to help you address your targets. If you have a specific weakness with assessment then it would be useful for you to arrange a meeting with the assessment leader. It might be possible to work jointly on assessing children's learning/work or carry out some joint moderation. If you struggle with planning for specific aspects of literacy, arrange a tutorial with the literacy subject leader. If you are allocated professional development time, use this time productively to work on your specific targets. Outstanding trainees are able to identify key targets and actions to be taken themselves rather than being directed by their mentors. Prior to undertaking a block placement meet with your academic tutor to reflect on your previous placement and draw up an action plan to address your targets. Discuss ways in which you might address these targets with your tutor.

Being respected

Outstanding trainees are highly respected by colleagues, learners and parents/carers. In order to gain respect you have to show that you respect others. You might consider the following:

- > show others that you are interested in what they have to say by listening to them and making good eye contact;
- > value other people's ideas and support other colleagues in school;
- > minimise power differentials by creating a team ethos; ensure that the contributions of all team members are valued;
- > show children that you like them and are interested in them as people – value them as individuals and not just as learners;
- > be honest with people;
- > demonstrate to colleagues, parents and carers that you are a truly dedicated professional and are worthy of joining the teaching profession;
- > ensure that parents and carers know that you value their child;
- > involve yourself in the life of the school as you are part of a whole school team;
- > be organised and plan thoroughly;
- > ensure that punctuality and attendance are exemplary.

Reflection

Reflect on the above list and think carefully about ways in which you might address each point.

Staff in school will expect you to work hard and show commitment and resilience. Teaching is an increasingly demanding profession and you will get tired. You should expect this towards the second half of your placement but you should continue working to maximum capacity. You are accountable on many different levels and you will gain little respect if you continually complain about feeling tired.

Demonstrating the capacity to be an outstanding teacher

Outstanding trainees are not outstanding teachers. Outstanding trainees demonstrate the *capacity* to be outstanding teachers. They teach lessons that are often good and often show *characteristics* of outstanding lessons. To achieve the best outcomes on your teaching placement you therefore need to demonstrate that you have the capacity to be an outstanding teacher in the future. To demonstrate this capacity you should:

- > consistently act on advice and demonstrate improvements;
- > demonstrate insight into wider issues associated with teaching and learning and suggest ways of developing strategies for enhancing parent partnership or improving the standard of children's writing;
- > demonstrate the ability to consistently critically reflect on your own practice and make necessary changes;
- > begin to use assessment data to set pupils challenging targets which raise standards;
- > begin to use assessment data to identify group and individual needs;
- > experiment with creative, original, innovative teaching strategies;
- > create a highly effective stimulating learning environment which is conducive to learning.

Demonstrating the capacity for leadership

Your ITT provider will not expect you to lead staff meetings during periods of school-based training. You are, after all, there to learn! You also do not want to appear to be arrogant. However, there are subtle ways in which you can demonstrate your capacity for leadership.

The easiest and most obvious way to demonstrate this is to start with the team in your classroom. It is likely that there will be other adults working alongside you in the classroom whose role it is to support you. Ensure that you communicate with these adults frequently about their roles and responsibilities and develop your confidence by delegating tasks to them. Ensure that all adults working with you are clear about what you expect and that they know the learning outcomes of the activities for the groups of learners they are working with. Involve these adults in the planning process, ask for their ideas and empower them by giving them responsibility. Involve them in the assessment process by asking them to make simple records about the children they are working with. A simple briefing sheet, with space for them to write comments about children's progress, is an effective way of ensuring that communication is a two-way process.

Some trainees find it difficult to delegate tasks to more experienced professionals. You need to think carefully about your tone of voice and body language when you communicate with others. Additionally you need to value the ideas and opinions of colleagues and acknowledge their contributions. Do not be afraid to seek support and advice from members of the team, including support staff.

Ask to be involved in team meetings, especially planning meetings, and take an active role in these by making contributions. If you have visited other schools to observe practice then take the opportunity to share this with staff at meetings. Remember that schools are a learning community and effective teachers are usually receptive to new ideas. Play a full role and ensure that you contribute to the life of the school by involving yourself in extra-curricular activities. Share research and practice which you have been introduced to with your school-based colleagues. Many of them will welcome this opportunity to develop their own learning. Much of this can be done informally and ad hoc during the placement. Show your mentors that you are keen to share your knowledge but that you are also eager to learn from them.



Professional development

Ask your ITT provider to give you details of teachers who embed creative approaches into their practice. Your provider may have contacts with ASTs who are experts in creative practice. Make arrangements to visit one of these professionals in school and observe them teaching. Make a note of strategies which they use to engage their learners. Follow the observations with a tutorial with the teacher. Discuss ideas for embedding creativity across the curriculum.



Link to research

Research into creative teaching is extensive. Observations of creative classroom practice can be found in key literature (Jeffrey and Woods, 2003; Cremin, Burnard and Craft, 2006). There is also a large volume of work on the character traits of creative teachers which you will find useful (Fryer, 1996; Beetlestone, 1998). Jeffrey and Woods have written extensively about creative teaching, innovation and ownership of the curriculum (Woods and Jeffrey, 1996; Jeffrey and Woods, 2003; Jeffrey, 2006).

Further reading

Medwell, J. (2007) *Successful Teaching Placement: Primary and Early Years*. Exeter: Learning Matters.

This text provides a very comprehensive overview of the things you need to think about before, during and after a teaching placement. There is useful advice on planning, teaching and assessment, and general advice about coping with the challenges of placement. This text should be a core text on your reading list.

Useful websites

www.ltscotland.org.uk/creativity/index.asp

This website provides a useful selection of documents on creativity in education and several case studies of good practice from a range of educational settings.

www.teachers.tv/

The Teacher's TV website contains a wealth of video clips of good lessons. There are specific video clips on creative approaches and useful interviews with teachers.