Read through this story and see what you notice in this student-teacher's story.

Adapting practice

The issue:

I was beginning my sequence of lessons for the third term in mathematics. I had been away from my year 2 class for 10 weeks and a lot had changed in a short time. Whilst I was away my teacher mentor said she had started using two higher-attaining girls to help two lower-attaining boys with their learning at points throughout the day. My teacher mentor said she had used this approach when she thought it was needed as she was sometimes alone in the class without an additional adult whilst I was on my second school placement. A new child with English as an additional language had also just joined the class.

I went to a Professional Learning and Development session that week prior to starting my sequence of lessons. During the session we learnt about several scenarios involving an autistic child and how the teacher had used peer support in class. The child liked to sit next to a particular girl all day. At first it appeared that he was learning and progressing but it later became apparent that he was copying the girl and had become reliant on her.

This gave me the idea to use two higher-attaining girls to support the two lower-attaining boys during the talk task but not for the independent task. I thought they should sit in their maths attainment groups for this task so the boys do not become reliant on the support and are able to do their work independently.

What happened?

Upon trialling this method, it seemed to work. It enabled the lower-attaining boys to learn the basic concepts during talk tasks before they did the independent task. They were able to understand the independent task much better and it freed me up as I was in the class without an additional adult. It also allowed me to support other children in the class including the new child with English as an additional language. Both lower-attaining boys are different in their strengths and I was concerned that maybe they were copying each other but on questioning them individually they were both able to give me the correct answers.

I discussed what I had done with my teacher mentor at our weekly mentor meeting and she thought it was great as it enabled me to support the rest of the class so that everyone could make progress. She has therefore given me control of maths planning and delivery for the remainder of the term in both year 2 classes. We have had another child join us who has English as an additional language. Using this approach has given me greater ability to help the new children and sometimes I use another higher attaining peer to support them, in a similar way.

What was learnt?

If it wasn't for the Professional Learning and Development session, I would not have thought of using this structured approach when I did. I may have got there in the end but the learning from this session opened my eyes before I started my sequence of lessons and made my lessons much more seamless from the start. I will use this same approach in my new school setting as I start my career as an early career teacher.

Connecting learning across institutional boundaries

This is a story to celebrate, where the student-teacher used her learning in the Professional Learning and Development session to adapt her classroom practice. This seemed fortuitous timing and happened largely through the proactivity of the student-teacher.

- 1. How could you enable more such connections to be made – as a mentor? as a centre-based teacher educator? as a partnership?

- 2. Are there things we can learn from this story about:

    a. timing and relevance of centre-based sessions?
    b. student-teacher motivation and engagement?
    c. school-based opportunities?

- 3. How do we surface where such connections have been made? How can we disseminate this student-teacher's learning to others?

Taking it further: thinking about affordance

The invitational quality (or affordance) of the school is enabled by seeing student-teachers as colleagues, allowing student-teachers opportunities to engage in all teaching activities and having a clear policy for the education of student-teachers. There are four different types of activities that can be made available to student-teachers in school:

1. Pupil-level activities (with or for pupils) e.g. planning, teaching and marking
2. School-level activities e.g. communicating with colleagues, other professionals, parents and carers
3. Access to school-based resources e.g. pupil information, school data, teaching resources
4. Professional learning and development opportunities e.g. staff training and development

Of these, Timmermans (2012) showed that student-teachers were most likely to have access to pupil-level activities and school-based resources; not all activities were available or allowed at each stage of the student-teacher's development; and provision was not related to the learning needs of individual student-teachers. The affordance of partnership schools was often based on the individual decisions of mentors instead of on shared views regarding initial teacher education or the rhythm of the work itself.

- What learning opportunities are available to your student-teachers in partnership schools?

- What are the barriers to accessing learning opportunities that your student-teachers experience?

Timmermans, M. (2012) Kwaliteit van de opleidingsschool. Over affordance, agency en competentieontwikkeling [Quality of the opleidingsschool. On affordance, agency and competence development]. Tilburg University, the Netherlands. https://research.tilburguniversity.edu/en/publications/kwaliteit-van-de-opleidingsschool-over-affordance-agency-en-compe

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