

# British Teachers

## and Their Student Teachers on the Oxford Internship Scheme

Hino KATSUMI

### Background to the study

Thirteen years of experience as a teacher both at state and private schools in Japan has brought me to a question as to how teachers in other countries are trained or educated. British teachers came to be interesting since not a few returnee students in the school where I worked reported that they had a very good time in Britain. At this juncture it was fortunate for me to have had an opportunity to study in Oxford for 2 years. In this context this essay seeks to describe British teachers in terms of PGCE (Post Graduate Certificate of Education) students' experiences in Oxfordshire. A systematic interview was conducted with the students who participated in the Oxford Internship Scheme from 1993 till 1994.

### Research question

How do the interns (so-called student teachers on the Oxford Internship Scheme) perceive their mentors (supervising teachers at their practice school) and the Oxford Internship scheme?

### Research methodology

The research was conducted according to the following procedure.

- 1) Selection of interns
- 2) Pilot interview
- 3) Pilot questionnaire
- 4) Final questionnaire
- 5) Data analysis
- 6) Ethnographic research on a comprehensive school

#### 1) Selection of interns

The first task was how to select interns for each part of the data-gathering process. A large number of interns were needed to complete the questionnaire, but it was necessary to reserve an adequate number for the piloting of the questionnaire and for the interviews and conversations. It was suggested that half of the interns be selected at random to complete the questionnaire, but the final decision was based on the need to look at comparability of experience among the interns: one intern from each subject from each school was selected. Counting the numbers from each curriculum area, it seemed that the balance of respondents would be reasonable, ranging from 10 interns (chemistry) to 16 (biology) with the mean num-

ber being 13.625 and the mode 14. The number of interns representing each school varied according to the total number of interns in each school, which ranged from 5 to 14. Typically slightly more than half the interns in each school would be taking part; which is reflected by the total number of interns completing the questionnaire: 109 out of a total of 191. 82 interns remained to take other roles in the data-gathering process.

Six schools were chosen to pilot the questionnaire: the school with the fewest interns and that with the largest number of interns and four of those with an average number of interns which were city schools and two of which were not.

## **2 ) Pilot interview**

It was decided that a questionnaire be the main method of data-collection. In order to frame relevant questions for the finalised questionnaire, it was considered appropriate to conduct pilot interviews with interns selected by random sampling of the PGCE students on the Oxford Internship scheme.

The questions provided for the interviews were semi-structured so that closely focused answers could be expected. A tightly-structured interview form was not chosen because this would not give interns the chance to answer the questions in their own way.

This interview provided a rich source of information as to what to ask in the finalised questionnaire. For example, unexpected demands were made on the intern by teachers other than the mentor.

Wording of the pilot questionnaire,

based upon the data gathered through the pilot interviews, was elaborated. Thus my pilot questions were modified as follows:

- 1) Did the first term experience reinforce the view of a teacher you had or lead you to a new concept of the job?
- 2) Please list three of the most useful things you noticed as you observed your mentor working in the classroom.
- 3) What was the hardest thing for you to overcome or the most challenging to you during the first term?
- 4) Please comment on any unexpected demands made by the internship school.
- 5) In what respect do you think you have developed as a teacher?

## **3 ) Pilot questionnaire**

As planned at the outset, interns were selected at random for the pilot questionnaire. The results showed that the range of responses to my questions was not so wide as expected, despite the fact that they were open-ended questions. Some of the answers were too short; e.g. "Now concept" for the question No 1. It was held that there was a need for further elaboration of the wording in order to elicit more detailed information. I modified question No 1 as: "How did the first term influence your view of the role as a teacher?"

## **4 ) Final questionnaire**

The final questionnaire with a total of 19 questions was delivered to 82 interns in 22 schools. The response rate was 30/82=37%. This was a disappointing re-

sult since steps had been taken to encourage a high rate of response, such as sending a reminder and the PGCE students had easy access to the OUDES (Oxford University Department of Educational Studies) seminar members. Moreover, by participating in the questionnaire, the researchers were in a position to contribute to the improvement of the Internship Scheme. Although lower than expected, a response rate of 37% is significant.

### 5 ) Data Analysis

The results gained from the questionnaire are as follows :

#### 1 ) Did the first term experience reinforce the view of a teacher you had or lead you to a new concept of the job ?

The majority gave a positive response. Negative or other responses were rarely given. The answers were classified as follows :

Positive answer	22
Negative answer	4
Others	2
Blank	2

#### 2 ) Please list three of the most useful things you noticed as you observed your mentor working in the classroom.

As was predicted, the answers varied, though not as widely as expected, since it was a semi-open-ended question. These answers are classified into the following categories which are listed in Circular No 9/92 25 June 1992 by Department For Education (DEF)

A <Subject knowledge>	2
B <Subject application>	27

#### C <Class management> 30

Note : items which can be interpreted as belonging to both A and B are entered in both categories.

Here is the list of what the PGCE students were concerned about in terms of the frequency of the specific terms used :

Discipline	10
Management	7
Rapport	5
Control	4

#### 3 ) What was the hardest things for you to overcome or the most challenging to you during the first term?

The most common answers were :

nervousness, keeping groups on task, understanding levels of ability in the same-year group, organizing things for the week

#### 4 ) Please comment on any unexpected demands made by the internship school.

20 out of 30 answered "none" or left the space blank.

#### 5 ) In what respect do you think you have developed as a teacher?

Positive answers	29
Negative answers	none
Others	none
Blank	1

Answers to Question 1) included 4 negative answers and 2 in the category of "others". Question 5) on the other hand shows that the overwhelming majority of respondents claimed to have improved. There could be several explana-

tions for this difference between the responses to Question 1) and those to Question 5). One of these is that 4 interns saw types of mentors or teachers whom they did not want to emulate. As an experience per se, however, they viewed the first term as valuable in order to move on to the 2nd term where they could start as a teacher on their own account. The most significant areas of improvement and development in interns mentioned are as follows :

Confidence	17
Management	9
Planning	6
Skill	5
Organization	5
Rapport	4
Awareness	4

Significant is 'confidence.' The first term experience gave confidence to over 50 percent of interns. This should be regarded as a good starting point for a teaching career, as an encouraging preparation for a smooth transition to becoming a 'real' teacher, which is one of the Internship scheme's main goals.

#### **6) Ethnographic research on a comprehensive school**

I wrote a letter to the head teacher of the school to request his approval of my observing classes and teacher training. The professional tutor in charge of the internship at this school made arrangements so that I could see a variety of teacher training across the departments. I started with the science department, followed by mathematics, humanities, languages, special education, English and multi-cultural education.

#### **i) Strategy for Data Collection**

As methods for data collection, I chose observation, interview and follow-up observation after reading the literature on the pupils, the staff and the school policies. While my previous research centred chiefly on questionnaires with pilot interviews and a pilot questionnaire, this research placed emphasis on the following :

- 1) observation of interns and mentors in classrooms ;
- 2) observation of mentors and interns at profile sessions and General sessions ;
- 3) interviews with mentors, interns, the professional tutor, and the head teacher ;
- 4) follow-up observation of lessons and interviews if necessary.

The PGCE students' responses to the questionnaire showed the value which interns seem to place on the Internship scheme. This research therefore was meant to explore how the whole scheme would give interns confidence and good preparation for their future career as a 'real' teacher.

Participant observation was my initial plan to access the insider view or perception of the internship. However, this idea seemed to be unrealistic because of insufficient time to play a plausible role in the fabric of the school. Besides it did not appear practicable for a non-native speaker of English to write a report on the research and play some role which might require some preparation. Thus non-participant observation was chosen.

Initial three weeks were spent on ob-

servation. Then followed the period of interviews with the mentors and interns. After this, I interviewed the professional tutor to validate (triangulate) my interpretation of what I observed, judging that he is in the right position to look at the whole scheme in perspective.

## ii) Classroom Observation

An observation schedule was provided by the professional tutor after he learned the purpose of my visit to the school. He suggested that a variety of classes would better suit my purpose of looking at the school and internship training in a broader perspective. Thus the schedule for three weeks was prepared by the professional tutor.

Science classes were the first to be observed, then modern languages, mathematics, multi-cultural education and lastly humanities classes. Except for the multi-cultural education classes, all the classes were conducted by a mentor and his/her interns. There were 10 interns with 2 forming a pair in each subject department. This system is exactly as is described in the Oxford Internship scheme.

Mentors had been notified beforehand by the professional tutor that I was to observe their lesson. It depended on the mentor whether I was introduced to the class or not. Each mentor told me that I was free to ask questions or sit at the back of the class and just stay there for the whole lesson period. I decided to take as insignificant a role as possible so that I would be able to observe as natural a scene as possible, though I assumed that my presence would affect the situation to a certain degree.

## iii) Interviews

Interviews were conducted after making appointments with each mentor and intern. Questions were provided so that comparable data could be gathered. Interviews also allowed me the opportunity to validate my interpretation of teacher education conducted according to the Oxford Internship scheme.

Questions prepared for mentors and interns were semi-closed as seen in Table 1 since it was considered that semi-closed questions would give a chance for the respondents to answer relatively freely and yet not in too unfocused a way.

## iv) Results and Analysis

The responses to the questions asked during the interviews were as follows:

### Questions for mentors:

#### 1. Have you been a mentor before?

All the mentors answered that they did have previous experience as a mentor.

#### 2. How do you help interns prepare for lessons?

'Giving suggestions and materials to think about' are the most common means of helping the interns work on the preparation of the lessons.

#### 3. How are interns treated by the school?

Mentors normally introduce the interns as "staff who will be around in school for a year."

No word like 'student' is mentioned. However, pupils know that they are students.

"The school officially treats the interns as regular staff."

#### 4. How well are theory and practice linked in the classroom?

Table 1

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 Questions for mentors :

1. Have you been a mentor before ?
2. How do you help interns prepare for lessons ?
3. How are interns treated by the school ?
4. How well are theory and practice linked in the classroom ?
5. To what extent do interns take part in the life of the school as a whole ?
6. What sort of approach do you assume toward interns ? Instruction style , learning together or something else ?
7. Do you prepare a short range and long range plan for interns ?
8. How often do you contact interns outside the classroom ?
9. At what stage do you judge you can leave the whole class to your intern ?

## Questions for interns :

1. How does your mentor help you prepare lessons ?
  2. To what extent does your originality find its way into the shaping of lesson planning ?
  3. How do you learn from your mentor ?
  4. How are you integrated into the school ?
  5. How do pupils regard you ?
  6. How does the school ethos affect teacher training ?
  7. How well are theory and practice linked in the classroom ?
  8. To what extent do interns take part in the life of the school as a whole ?
  9. What sort of approach does your mentor assume in mentoring you ? Instruction style, learning-together style or something else ?
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“The partnership between the university and the school goes as well as is expected in theory.”

**5. To what extent do interns take part in the life of the school as a whole ?**

“It depends on the intern, but basically they are too busy to take part in any other school business than preparing for their subject , especially during

J-weeks (2days at school and 3 days at university). In S-weeks (5 days at school) some of them do join in extra-curricular activities.”

**6. What sort of approach do you assume toward interns ? Instruction style , learning together or something else ?**

Half of the mentors interviewed answered 'instruction style' while the other half the “learning-together’ approach.

**7. Do you prepare a short-range and long-range plan for interns ?**

Most of the mentors answered that they made short-range plans. One mentor said, “Day-to-day teaching has to make a lot of small adjustments to the demands of each day. Since the university has made a long-range plan, I try to go along with it. So I don't make any long range plan myself.”

**8. How often do you contact interns outside the classroom ?**

Representative answer : “Not very often. It is preferable that interns join informal parties for the teachers to get to know each other. At least teachers encourage the interns to get together with other teachers.”

**9. At what stage do you judge you can leave the whole class to your intern ?**

Most of the mentors responded along the following lines : “Generalisation is impossible. The right answer must be ‘it depends on the intern.’ Some interns can start teaching at an early stage on their own. Some need more time to be independent”. On the whole the mentors leave the whole class to

the intern step by step. One mentor said that he would leave the whole class when his interns satisfies all the requirements he set for the interns.

### **Questions for interns :**

#### **1. How does your mentor help you prepare lessons ?**

The following answer represents the responses given by the interviewees ;  
 "Strict mentors give assignments to work on or give suggestions to think over. Laissez-faire type mentors do nothing but let us do whatever we like. So in a way life or death depends on what I do. I have to take the whole responsibility for the result."

#### **2. To what extent does your originality find its way into the shaping of lesson planning ?**

Interns under a laissez-faire mentor said that they were free to try any original ideas they came up with. On the other hand, interns under strict mentors have fewer opportunities to show their originality in the shaping of lesson planning, at least during J-weeks.

#### **3. How do you learn from your mentor ?**

"By observing the mentor teaching in the class and getting suggestions at each tutorial or profile."

#### **4. How are you integrated into the school ?**

"Initially introduced to the department staff and then to each class gradually by teaching the subject. Introduction to the whole school staff at a time is not the rule. People come to know us in due course."

#### **5. How do pupils regard you ?**

"Most of the pupils regard us as

teachers but some of them ask us if we are students. It depends on the way the interns behave. If you behave with dignity and confidence, they regard you as a regular teacher. If you do not, they treat you like someone just older than they are."

#### **6. How does the school ethos affect teacher training ?**

As far as the interns' information network is concerned, the school ethos varies to a significant degree from school to school. They said, "C school is committed to the internship scheme, which makes it easier for the interns to be at home in the school. On the other hand, there are some schools where interns are treated as a burden. Teachers regard interns as mere assistants and require the interns to take care of petty chores. In the worst case, the interns were put into the worst class, one which even experienced teachers could not control. Thus, those interns dropped out during the course."

#### **7. How well are theory and practice linked in the classroom ?**

Half of the interns understand what the theory of the internship scheme is about. They answered that most of the case theory and practice go together well. The other half did not quite understand the theoretical aims of the internship scheme, so the interviewer gave some tips and repeated the question. The answers were identical with those of the former half. More than half of the interns interviewed answered on these lines : "Lectures at the university seemed irrelevant and boring."

**8. To what extent do you plan to take part in the life of the school as a whole ?**

The answers given were almost identical with those given by the mentors. They are too busy to join any extra-curricular activities during J-weeks. But they hope to take some part in extra-curricular activities in S-weeks.

**9. What sort of approach does your mentor assume in mentoring you ? Instruction style, learning-together style or something else ?**

7 out of 9 interns answered that their mentor assumed the 'learning-together' approach. 2 interns answered that the 'instruction' style was dominant.

**v) Conclusion**

**a) School ethos and Internship**

The elusive notion of "school ethos" is often used when topics centre around school and education. According to a number of people, the head teacher is responsible for creating the school ethos. Strict discipline, school uniform, the decor, the teacher-pupil ratio, teachers' dress and many other elements relate to school ethos. Now the head teacher I interviewed said that the range of decisions which he can make has been limited, which implies that he is not as responsible as before for shaping school ethos.

As far as the ethos affects the Internship scheme, all interns answered that this school was quite helpful and understanding, compared with some other schools where interns are treated merely as extra members of staff to do extra chores which full-time teachers do not want to carry out.

This co-operative ethos was confirmed by the professional tutor who represented the views of many mentors in the school when he said that they appreciated the presence of interns for three reasons :

1. they bring new ideas ;
2. pupils get more attention because a mentor and interns are in the class ;
3. mentors consider this an opportunity to reflect and reassess their own teaching.

**b) Interns' perception of Internship**

The results collected from the questionnaire for the PGCE students (1992-93) was confirmed by the interviews with interns in Cheney School. None of the interns interviewed denied the value of this scheme, though two of them commented, "After all everything boils down to personality no matter how excellent the scheme might be." All of the interns disagreed with an independent school headmaster's<sup>1)</sup> view on PGCE practice teaching that "it could be dispensed with." Some of the interns mentioned that Eton and other public schools had earlier applied to join the scheme but were refused because public schools would not provide a wide range of experiences.

The interns' view of J-weeks echoed that confirmed by the data gained through the questionnaire administered to the PGCE students in 1993. This period is extremely busy with preparing for each lesson at school, attending lectures, seminars and writing reports for the university. Most of them wished that S-weeks would come sooner when they



could concentrate on teaching.

### **c) Mentors' perception of Internship**

All mentors were unanimous in that they valued this scheme. This proved that the professional tutor truthfully represented the mentors' views of practice teaching. As to the question on how they regard the task of mentoring, there were several points where they differed. Some said that they always welcomed the task of mentoring while some others said that they appreciated the task when the interns were good but when the interns turned out to be less committed, they felt the task to be just time-consuming and burdensome.

They viewed the presence of interns as an asset to the school, as they often bring new ideas and methods for teaching. Besides, pupils receive more individual care thanks to the increase in staff in the classroom.

Mentors are cautious as to when they leave the whole class to the intern. All mentors said that they would take it step by step till interns really can manage the whole class on their own account. It depends on interns' personality and ability when they can start on their own. Language mentors said :

Some interns are mature and sufficiently prepared already to take over the whole class at this stage before S-weeks start.

Modern languages interns, compared with other subject interns, seem to have an advantage, since they are quite sure that they know, at least in quantity, far more than the pupils, which tends to give them confidence earlier than other subject interns.

## **Conclusion**

Judging from the results of the questionnaire No 1, the interns confirmed their positive view of a teacher, while No 2 questionnaire obtained results that the interns' chief concern was how to survive each class as class management was listed as top of the three most useful things they noticed as they observed their mentor working in the classroom. In fact many interns expressed how they were struggling to survive each class. They were more concerned about practical knowledge than theory, though they understood the value of theory. Questionnaire No 3 confirmed the results of questionnaire No 2, highlighting the hardest things for the interns to overcome during the first term ; nervousness, keeping groups of students on task, understanding different levels of ability in the same-year group and organising things for each week. In short the interns couldn't afford to see beyond the daily chores of each lesson, as each lesson was indeed a 'sink or swim' battle for survival.

Questionnaire No 5 provided the result that the majority of interns claimed that they had improved. The most significant areas of improvement and development interns mentioned are confidence. This symbolises what the Internship is aimed at. If interns can start their new career as a teacher with confidence, the training the Oxford Internship Scheme provided should be regarded as a success, which leads to the conclusion that the mentors generally worked as a good model for the interns to be motivated to

become a teacher like them.

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