

Supporting ITT providers: the effective use of plenaries

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Key Stage 3 National Strategy

Supporting ITT providers: the effective use of plenaries

Secondary ITT trainees, returners and overseas-trained teachers

Status: Recommended

Date of issue: 03-2004

Ref: DfES 0142-2004



Key Stage 3

National Strategy

Supporting ITT providers

The effective use of plenaries

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Context

The Key Stage 3 National Strategy advocates a flexible approach to lesson design, where each lesson comprises a series of carefully planned, coherent episodes and where the use of the plenary is considered an important element in that design and structure. The plenary can be used not just at the end of a lesson but also after specific episodes during a lesson in order to monitor and consider the learning that has taken place. The teacher and the pupils can usefully identify and clarify what has been learned, often by referring back to the lesson objectives, in order to help them to plan for successive learning and teaching that builds on the learning that has taken place. In its report on the Key Stage 3 pilot, Ofsted reports:

'From the outset, plenaries were often the weakest part of the lesson. Good planning was critical to the success of plenaries. Often there was insufficient time for them, typically because teachers underestimated the time required for activities in the main phase of the lesson. Plenaries were often the least active part of lessons. Teachers tended merely to sum up what happened during the main phase and pupils did not have the opportunity to articulate what they had learned. When pupils had such opportunities, they proved an important part of the learning process.'

In the section entitled 'Issues for attention' the Ofsted report states:

'In the further implementation ... of the Strategy nationally it is important that:

- *plenary sessions in lessons are used flexibly and geared to giving pupils an opportunity to say what they have learned.'*

Similar observations have been made by Ofsted when inspecting ITT programmes concerning trainees' use, or lack of use, of plenaries in their lessons.

There are a number of reasons why the plenary could be the least successful and least active part of the lesson. Sometimes teachers have not planned it sufficiently thoroughly or have not allowed enough time for it. Sometimes the teacher does all the work instead of making sure that the pupils are as active in this part of the lesson as they are in the starter, perhaps by summing up without giving the pupils an opportunity to articulate what they have learned. There is also a general perception of the plenary being the 'last part' of a lesson, resulting in it all too often being squeezed out. While it is important that key aspects of learning are secured before pupils leave the lesson, many teachers have found that there is also value in 'mini-plenaries' at important transition points within a lesson, ensuring that opportunities for pupils to stand back from and reflect on their learning are built into the lesson design, rather than being seen as an 'add-on'. The Key Stage 3 National Strategy encourages teachers to use plenaries when it would be helpful for pupils to reflect on and articulate what they have learned.

ITT plenary projects

In the summer of 2002, a number of ITT providers responding to an invitation from the Key Stage 3 National Strategy were successful in their bid for a small-scale research project to investigate ways of encouraging their trainees to become more effective in the use of plenaries in their lessons. They worked on the project with their trainees and school-based tutors in partnership schools, mainly in autumn 2002 and spring 2003, and submitted reports and case studies in the summer and early autumn of 2003. What follows are summaries of those reports and studies, focusing on the outcomes and the guidance, that it is hoped other ITT trainers and trainees might find useful.

The projects

University of Bristol: Graduate School of Education **Subject: English**

This project involved collaboration between the PGCE English trainees and their school-based tutors to consider, track and evidence their understanding of how to practise purposeful plenaries.

In particular, this project considered the issue of trainees running out of time, and addressed it by getting trainees to activate the following question, not only in their planning but also when teaching collaboratively with their school-based tutors:

Where are we in the process of meeting our objectives and how do we evidence this?

This question in turn raised the vital bond between the use of the plenary and assessment for learning in any lesson.

In addition, the project helpfully categorised different types of plenaries to three distinct purposes: monitoring, diagnostic and longitudinal.

University of Warwick **Subject: ICT**

Trainees and school-based tutors used Key Stage 3 National Strategy materials on plenaries (particularly the *Training materials for the foundation subjects* and video (DfES 0350/2002)) combined with ICT topics such as *control*, *handling data* and *communicating information*, with the intention of creating effective plenaries that would have the advantage of helping trainees and teachers work away from their machines.

It was found that the use of plenaries by school-based tutors and trainees helped pupils to reflect on their learning and use of ICT. Successful use of the plenary also led to its greater use in more lessons.

University of East London

Subject: Science

This project focused on science and involved sending a questionnaire to partner schools to ascertain plenary activities, their use, purposes and properties. This was followed by a workshop involving school-based tutors where there was consideration of the results of the questionnaire, Key Stage 3 materials, a sharing of plenary activities and the generation of new ideas for plenary activities.

Analysis of the questionnaire led to the creation of a list of the purposes of plenary sessions in priority order. The project was also successful in that school-based tutors were more aware of the purposes and features of plenaries, regarded them as important during a lesson after teaching episodes as well as at the end of a lesson, and understood that they needed careful planning.

St Mary's College, Twickenham

Subject: Science

Initially, the problems that trainees had when using plenaries were identified. Each trainee worked with a school-based tutor to tackle the problem and to improve the effective use of plenaries.

Successful strategies that arose out of this work included:

- trainees and school-based tutors planning and evaluating lessons together;
- the school-based tutor teaching the plenary and the trainee evaluating it;
- the trainee using a strategy learned from their school-based tutor, or another teacher with a parallel group, and evaluating its effectiveness;
- the trainee being paired with a teacher in the department known to produce creative and effective plenaries;
- involvement of the whole department to trial and evaluate suggestions for plenaries with a range of classes.

Manchester Metropolitan University

Subject: Science

In this project, a group of trainees and school-based tutors drew on the Key Stage 3 National Strategy materials and modified and developed them into a sequence of activities suitable for use in their PGCE programme. The intention was that the activities would be underpinned by Bloom's taxonomy and would be spread across the course to become more challenging as the trainee developed, and also to demand that the trainees analysed the order of challenge that the plenaries present to the pupils.

The outcome of the project was a series of training sessions, all of which are suitable for science trainees but with the added benefit that the initial sessions are suitable for a trainee from any subject.

University of Surrey, Roehampton

Subject: Art and design

The aim of Roehampton's project was to produce training materials for using plenaries in art and design. It involved the university tutors and the Key Stage 3 consultant for Kingston-upon-Thames LEA using foundation subjects' plenary materials with school-based tutors in order to develop their understanding of plenaries and the materials' use with trainees. This was followed by sessions for the trainees, who then planned lessons using plenaries in different ways and at different points during a lesson.

The perceived benefits to arise out of this project included:

- trainees and school-based tutors using plenaries in a variety of ways in their teaching;
- plenaries becoming an established practice among trainees and school-based tutors;
- trainees recognising the benefits of plenaries for pupils in the way they articulate their experiences and reflect on their learning;
- trainees recognising the benefits of plenaries for teachers in their use as an evaluative tool.

University of East Anglia

Subjects: Modern foreign languages, mathematics and geography

The project aimed to engage school-based tutors and trainees in developing pedagogical approaches to plenaries in lessons, using the Key Stage 3 National Strategy materials on plenaries as the source. It involved school-based tutors and trainees from three subject areas and nine partnership schools.

The project began with an initial meeting between university tutors and school-based tutors which, in turn, led to the trainees and school-based tutors planning Key Stage 3 lessons and materials focusing on building effective plenaries into existing schemes of work. The trainees taught the planned lesson which was observed by the school-based tutor. The focus of the observation and subsequent feedback was the effectiveness and benefits of the plenary within the overall structure of the lesson. The school-based tutor and trainee also discussed how the evidence they had gathered would inform future planning to incorporate plenaries in the department and the school. One mathematics department produced a list of suitable plenaries linked to *visual, auditory or kinaesthetic* (VAK) learning styles.

Edge Hill College of Higher Education

Subject: Mathematics

At Edge Hill, the aim of the project was to increase trainees' awareness of the opportunities that plenaries afford for giving feedback to pupils about their learning. Trainees at the college have always put a high value on observing and analysing videos of experienced teachers. Consequently, video footage of experienced teachers was used to highlight the variety of feedback methods and opportunities in a lesson. The plenary episodes on the video were interactive and involved pupils reflecting on their own learning.

The video helped to put the guidance on plenaries into context for the mathematics trainees and the tutors at Edge Hill intend to look for other partner schools where more examples of plenaries can be captured on video to benefit the development of the trainees.

Liverpool Hope University

Subject: Music

The Liverpool Hope project aimed to raise trainees' awareness of the characteristics and purpose of lesson plenaries in order to improve their planning and assessment of pupils' progress. The training day involved 17 music trainees and their school-based tutors. Together, they chose one class per trainee to be the centre of the project. Each trainee and school-based tutor identified a sequence of three or four lessons with the target class which would be the project focus. For those lessons, trainees planned the plenaries in detail, evaluated them with the school-based tutors (who had observed the teaching) and annotated lesson plans to demonstrate how assessment information gathered from the plenaries had impacted on planning the next lesson. The guidance for planning plenaries included a requirement for planning questions for differentiation.

The school-based tutors appreciated how the project had given them valuable time to reflect on their own practice and to contribute to their own development. They also noticed how the experience of the project:

- increased trainees' understanding and use of learning objectives;
- had a positive impact on trainees' whole lesson plans, not just the plenary;
- made them more prepared to take risks in planning and teaching.

The trainees involved in the project expressed improved:

- confidence in constructing and using plenaries and learning objectives;
- understanding of the link between assessment and planning;
- ability to intervene in the lesson in order to involve pupils in reflecting on their learning;
- confidence to try new teaching styles (e.g. group presentations);
- class management.

Plenaries in practice

benefits for pupils, trainees, school-based tutors and the partnership

"I think it's fun to think about what we've been learning, and then I feel good when I realise how much I've learnt."
(Key Stage 3 pupil)

"I like being asked what I've learnt because it makes me think about it a bit more instead of just rushing off at the end of the lesson."
(Key Stage 3 pupil)

"At first, I felt funny talking about what I'd learnt in case I'd missed something but I like seeing if I've 'got' all the parts of the lesson now."
(Key Stage 3 pupil)

Pupils

- Enhances their motivation and a sense of achievement.
- Consolidates their learning through increased reflection and communication.
- Prompts them to think about **how** they learned.
- Demands their participation.
- Increases their awareness and understanding of the 'big picture' and how the separate parts of lessons fit together.

Trainees

- Improves teaching skills (e.g. handling transitions and endings, actively involving pupils, questioning).
- Increases understanding of assessment for learning.
- Keeps the focus on learning objectives throughout a lesson.
- Develops reflection on their own learning.
- Improves the classroom climate for learning.
- Encourages risk taking in lesson design and teaching practice.

School-based tutors and the partnership

- Creates a basis for discussion about teaching and learning.
- Increases appreciation of the effectiveness of collaborative planning, evaluation and reflection.
- Increases understanding of the purposes and features of plenaries.
- Provides an opportunity to analyse generic teaching skills from a subject-specific perspective.
- Sharpens mentoring skills by providing a clear focus for observation, co-planning and co-teaching.

It benefits school-based tutors and the partnership if:

- trainees and school-based tutors are clear about the purpose and variety of plenaries;
- trainees and school-based tutors recognise the benefits of plenaries for pupils as evaluative and motivational tools;
- the purpose and variety is shared by those involved in the partnership and built into the course;
- tutors and school-based tutors model effective plenaries in their practice;
- tutors and school-based tutors discuss and evaluate plenaries that trainees have observed;
- school-based tutors collaborate with trainees in initial planning;
- expectations are set that plenaries provide opportunities to develop teaching skills and to address ITT Standards for Qualified Teacher Status (QTS).

Conclusions

how work on plenaries can help trainees address Standards for Qualified Teacher Status (QTS)

The use of plenaries by trainees is a useful way to help them consider and understand both the structure of lessons (its learning episodes) and the importance of evaluating and monitoring learning as a component of assessment for learning to inform future teaching. The collaborative use of plenaries by tutors, school-based tutors and trainees is a useful means to address the Standards for Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) connected to planning, teaching and assessment, as well as a means to develop trainees' use of questioning. Some of the specific links to QTS Standards are:

1 Professional values and practice

1.7 improve own teaching

3.1 Planning, expectations and targets

3.1.2 use teaching and learning objectives to plan lessons, showing how they will assess pupils' learning

3.1.4 contribute to teaching teams ... plan for deployment of additional adults who support pupils' learning

3.2 Monitoring and assessment

3.2.1 make appropriate use of a range of monitoring and assessment strategies ... and use this information to improve own planning and teaching

3.2.2 monitor and assess as they teach, giving immediate and constructive feedback

3.2.4 identify and support more able pupils and other groups ...

3.3 Teaching and class management

3.3.4 differentiate their teaching ... more able pupils and those with SEN

3.3.7 organise and manage teaching and learning time effectively

3.3.9 establish a framework for classroom discipline

3.3.13 manage the work of teaching assistants or other adults

Taken from *Qualifying to Teach: Professional Standards for Qualified Teacher Status and Requirements for Initial Teacher Training* (Ref: TPU1065/1p/45k/fmp/jul 03).

Key messages: suggestions for good practice

Plenaries work best when they:

- are planned in advance of a lesson;
- reflect the objectives for the lesson;
- are employed after specific episodes in a lesson;
- are used to monitor or evaluate learning in order to inform future teaching and learning;
- are planned to actively involve pupils;
- are varied in format and approach across a series of lessons.

Useful references and resources

Training materials for the foundation subjects (DfES 0350/2002)

Module 8, 'Plenaries', of this training file comprises discussion, advice and ideas about why, when and how to employ plenaries in lessons.

Foundation subjects: key messages about structuring learning (DfES 0044/2003)

This leaflet emphasises the use of plenaries as vital elements in structuring lessons.

Making good use of the plenary (DfES 0192/2002)

This leaflet considers the purpose of the plenary, how teachers can involve pupils in the plenary and how the leaflet can be used in schools.

Key Stage 3 website (www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/keystage3/)

Most of the documents mentioned above can be found and downloaded from this site and if you enter a search for *plenaries* or *plenary* more subject-specific examples can be found.

The Key Stage 3 Strategy: Evaluation of the first year of the pilot

(London, Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), HMI 349, 2002)

Qualifying to Teach: Professional Standards for Qualified Teacher Status

and Requirements for Initial Teacher Training (Ref: TPU1065/1p/45k/fmp/jul 03)

Acknowledgements

The Key Stage 3 National Strategy is grateful for the support of the following ITT provider tutors (and their partnership schools' school-based tutors) involved in the project:

<i>Malcolm Reed</i>	University of Bristol
<i>Michael Hammond</i>	University of Warwick
<i>Neil Herrington</i>	University of East London
<i>Irena Grounds</i>	St Mary's College
<i>Dave Green and Jan Heywood</i>	Manchester Metropolitan University
<i>Jo Finch</i>	University of Surrey, Roehampton
<i>Nalini Boodhoo</i>	University of East Anglia
<i>Jean Sloan</i>	Liverpool Hope University
<i>Stephen Feller</i>	Edge Hill College of Higher Education

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Ref: DfES 0142-2004

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