Guidance notes for ITE trainers/mentors
Teaching styles and strategies

Teaching styles and strategies

Trainee teachers should be encouraged to develop different teaching styles according to the classes and the topics they are teaching. All teachers need a range of different strategies in their repertoire, to draw on as appropriate.

- Refer to the trainee teacher webpage on Teaching styles.

The ITE trainer should reflect on their own teaching approaches and consider whether they employ a range of different teaching styles and strategies when teaching trainees as well as teaching students. Model different techniques for trainees and arrange for them to observe good teachers who use different approaches. It can be advantageous for trainees to observe teachers in other subjects, as well as geography, especially where teachers have particular expertise, for example drama teachers (role play), science teachers (practical demonstration), PSHE or RE teachers (discussions).

Contrasting teaching and learning styles in geography

When discussing different teaching and learning styles with trainees it is best to avoid terms such as 'progressive' and 'traditional'. Explain how different styles are appropriate in different contexts and depend on factors such as the personality of the teacher; the learning environment; the behaviour of the class; the content to be taught; the preferred learning styles of the students and the students’ attitudes to learning. You may wish to introduce trainees to how different strategies broadly match with visual, auditory or kinaesthetic (VAK) learning preferences - although this classification is not universally accepted and is critiqued in Roberts, M. (2013).

In the early stages of the year, ask trainees to observe 3 or 4 lessons given by teachers adopting different styles. Ask them to complete the trainee teacher activity: Observing teaching styles on the Teaching styles webpage. This is an opportunity for trainees to gather information about teaching styles that you can discuss with them. Tease out exactly what they saw and how they felt the teacher’s style influenced the learning. It is likely that each lesson contained a mixture of styles. Take care not to criticise approaches that do not conform to your ‘style’, but ask the trainee to think about the reasons why the teacher they observed selected each approach.

Later on in the training, return again to ‘teaching styles’ but this time explore more thoroughly the link to learning outcomes. Ensure that trainee teachers explore different styles in relation to what they want students to achieve. Look at the ITE trainers support sheet What is meant by ‘Teaching Style?’ The approach described was being followed by mentors in Newcastle. It explores in some depth the aspect of the Teachers’ Standards which requires them to: ‘demonstrate knowledge and understanding of how students learn and how this impacts on teaching.’

Refer to Richard Bustin’s chapter in Jones (2017) which has a table (p135) which reminds us of different ideologies and their impact on school geography in the last 40 years. These influence the philosophy a teacher has for teaching geography, which in turn can affect their teaching approach and style. It is worth discussing these ideological influences with trainees.

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Training in teaching strategies

- Refer to the trainee teacher webpage on Teaching strategies.

Encourage trainee teachers to monitor the range of strategies they use with different groups because it is too easy for them to get trapped into using a few they feel comfortable with. Suggest they use a monitoring grid such as that in Biddulph, et al (2015)iii pages 126-7.

Exploring a teaching strategy

Give detailed attention to each of the strategies mentioned on the trainee teacher webpage on Teaching strategies at different points in the training. Focus on one strategy at a time and arrange for trainees to observe the strategy as used by different teachers in several contexts. Then ask them to plan in detail an ‘episode’ using this strategy within a lesson: Discuss with them,

- What do they need to consider in advance?
- What specific skills might they need to develop to employ this strategy?
- What student responses are they looking for?

Observe them using the strategy and focus on how they implement it in different contexts with different students. What do they need to develop? Discuss with them whether their use of the strategy is ‘fit for purpose’ in achieving the required learning? How would they need to adapt the strategy to use with a different age group?

Reviewing teaching strategies with trainees

Regularly discuss different strategies with trainees and encourage them to expand their teaching repertoire. Review how they use each in different contexts.

Occasionally, after trying out several teaching strategies, a trainee might, several months into training, revert back to a style of teaching with which they are most familiar. This may be one that involves a lot of teacher talk. Or they may stick to one style that they have found to be successful. This may be because they find that some strategies are more successful for them than others, or they meet difficulties with a particular group of students. ITE trainers need to stress to trainees that they need to become proficient in a range of strategies with different groups.

If trainees are using only a narrow range of strategies, agree together a different strategy to try in the next week and discuss the most appropriate class and topic to use it with. It could be appropriate, at the same time, for them to make a series of observations of different teachers and to think about the learning that these students are doing.

While some trainees keep to a narrow range of strategies, others become pre-occupied with using all the different strategies they come across and are always experimenting with new activities. You should counsel a mid-path between these two extremes! Experimenting is fine, as long as they evaluate the learning that results. If they are not considering whether their teaching strategies are actually appropriate to a specific class or context, an ITE trainer will need to focus them to reflect on

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‘fitness for purpose’. It is also quite common for trainees to busily plan a range of activities and forget about the geography that they are meant to be focusing on. Throughout all discussions on teaching style and strategies, the focus should remain on the geography that a trainee wants the students to learn.

Read Letting the learning shine Mark Enser reflects on some of the lessons he has taught and how in some the nature of the task dominated the lesson and the lesson was about the structure, not the geography. There is food for thought here to share with your trainee teachers when discussing different teaching strategies.

Reading for ITE trainers/methods (in addition to the trainee teacher readings)

- Andrew-Evans, J. ‘Improved learning through preferred learning styles’, Teaching Geography Spring 2006. The author researched how to enhance the performance of Y11 students and looks at the impact of teaching to preferred learning styles.

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