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### **Book Section**

**Title:** Changemaker values within the Foundation Degree Learning and Teaching and the development of a Teaching Assistant Teachmeet Event

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**Example citation:** Jones, J. and Edwards, J. (2014) Changemaker values within the Foundation Degree Learning and Teaching and the development of a Teaching Assistant Teachmeet Event. In: Alden Rivers, B. and Smith, J. (eds.) *Changemaker in the Curriculum: The University of Northampton: Case Studies 2013-2014*. Northampton: The University of Northampton. pp. 49-54.

It is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from this work.

**Version:** Published version

**Official URL:**

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B4okx9c0JOCbZXRYRINwWUttR1U/view>

<http://nectar.northampton.ac.uk/7577/>



## Case Study 11

## Changemaker values within the Foundation Degree Learning and Teaching and the development of a Teaching Assistant TeachMeet event

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The Foundation Degree in Learning and Teaching is a programme within the Education Children and Young People subject area in the School of Education.

The programme has the overarching aim of improving the life chances for children and young people through the provision of a high quality, innovative programme which enhances the professional development of support staff, primarily teaching assistants, working in schools and education settings.

The values embedded within the programme are aligned with the University Raising the Bar Strategic Plan and with the University's focus on social enterprise, through AshokaU Changemaker Campus (University of Northampton, 2014). This includes ensuring that the student experience and outcomes are central to developing socially aware individuals, with knowledge and skills which support their employability and have positive impact on children and young people. Feedback from students and their employers has demonstrated how the programme impacts upon students' work-based practice and their career paths and identified how their roles, supported by the professional development experienced through FDLT, impacts upon the educational experience of the children with whom they work.

Over the last fifteen years there has been a large increase in the number of teaching assistants employed in the UK. Full-time equivalent figures from DfES/DCSF/DfE statistics indicate 61,260 teaching assistants employed in publicly funded primary and secondary schools in England in 1997 compared with 232,300 in November 2012. Alongside this, demand for professional development and training for teaching assistants has experienced growth in response to the increased numbers and diversity of roles undertaken by teaching assistants. Appropriate training and professional development is needed at HE level in order to support teaching assistants as they play increasingly integral and significant roles within school teams.

Schools' workforce remodelling placed emphasis on schools optimising deployment and management of teaching assistants to raise pupil achievement and identified the need to provide teaching assistants with appropriate professional development and career pathways. It also stressed a flexible approach towards deployment of teaching assistants and encouraged the development of Foundation Degrees for teaching assistants enabling them to enhance their work-based skills by underpinning these with knowledge and understanding of theory and educational issues. (National Remodelling Team, 2006). Since this time the need for effective deployment of teaching assistants in schools has been subject of further research and recent publications have highlighted the need for effective deployment of teaching assistants in schools so that their roles can best support the teaching, learning and well-being of children (Blatchford et al., 2012).

The Foundation Degree Framework (2008) established Foundation Degrees within the Integrated Qualifications Framework (IQF) and endorsed their importance in providing schools with well-qualified FD graduates on flexible career paths (QAA, 2010). This also identified a foundation degree as a starting point for a route to Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). Most recently, the

Department for Education has established a review of teaching assistant standards with part of the remit being to inspire their confidence and ensure schools make best use of their skills and expertise (Department for Education, 2014).

The University Strategic Plan; Raising the Bar and Changemaker Plus have informed us of how to grow in directions that have raised standards and provided new opportunities for students. For example, part of Raising the Bar and Changemaker Plus is to work with others in partnership and through networks and this strong principle has led to the Foundation Degree Learning and Teaching programme managing high quality engagement with employers and other partners.

However, we have also identified some difficulties to be overcome in reaching the school support staff who might benefit from the programme:

- Budgetary constraints within schools limit their employment of teaching assistants and their ability to commit to supporting their professional development
- The reduced role of Local Authorities and altered relationships with regard to networking amongst support staff training providers
- Potential difficulty in communicating with and making links with schools associated with changes in schools' landscape, with increased numbers of academies and free schools

This led to the consideration of an additional means of developing outreach to schools and school support staff via the provision of a Teaching Assistant TeachMeet event.

### **What did we do?**

TeachMeet events, where teachers get together to share ideas and good practice with other teachers, are well established. The events are hosted by a group of teachers in a school who then circulate their event details, mainly via Facebook and Twitter. This makes the event very open to anyone who is interested in attending and the event is based on some of the attendees offering micro-presentations of seven minutes or nano-presentations of two minutes. The key requirement of a presentation is that it is a means of sharing real and practical experience of teaching and learning.

We used these principles to set up and host the first ever TeachMeet for teaching assistants (TAs) at the University of Northampton's School of Education on 22 May 2014. Following in the footsteps of the successful national TeachMeet concept, the aim was to use the ethos and structure to allow TAs to share ideas, resources and enthusiasm for supporting learning.



The event also involved a range of companies and organisations who support learning and teaching, such as Toshiba, Ecokids, Twinkl, Thinking Child, SEN Magazine, Crick Software, Teaching Assistant Focus and Springboard Stories. Some of these companies provided displays of their work and presentations at the event.

There were 48 people in attendance, including TAs and Higher Level Teaching Assistants (HLTAs) from local schools and schools from surrounding counties. The event also included students studying the Foundation Degree in Learning and Teaching and applicants who will be joining the programme in September.

Speakers included:

- Sue Dixon, from Thinking Child, who shared ideas based on 'what can we do when children have switched off to literacy'
- Junior and Edwina from The Fix Up team who shared ideas about self-belief and motivation of children and young people.
- Greg Yarnall from Beanstalk Reads talked about volunteer reading in schools and the charity 'Born to Read'.
- Kevin Hewitson from Advocating Creativity Ltd. discussed how children need to overcome challenges and how we can offer motivating approaches to numeracy which are sensitive to learning intelligences and the use of multisensory approaches.
- Joy Judge, who has set up the online forum TA Focus discussed the potential of TAs and their opportunity to develop a voice which can influence policy.
- Two members of staff from the University's School of Education also gave talks; Dr Estelle Tarry shared her research about teaching assistants in an international context and her development of videos of international TA's practice. Jean Edwards gave a presentation about how TAs can use Twitter to make contacts and share ideas.
- Former FDLT student, Dawn Parker, shared a presentation about 'Smart Through Art' and the experience of her pupils from a special school taking part in European exchanges based on art.

There were also presentations from current FDLT students on the following:

- The use of Cued Articulation providing focussed support for individual children
- Everyone can have fun with geography – offering children from SEN provision with a fascinating school journey
- QR Codes in learning and teaching – offering children and parents access to communication via QR codes in the school newsletter and website
- Using digital media and green screen technology to bring children's literacy to life – presentation on training received and the application of this to creating film with children in school, using ipad Apps e.g. Path on a Visual Poet
- Inspiring children's interest in plant life through a school project for children and taking them to the Chelsea Flower Show

Jean Edwards, Senior Lecturer at the University of Northampton, commented:

'This was a very successful event and we are proud to have hosted the first ever TeachMeet for Teaching Assistants. We were also supported by our own students currently on the Foundation Degree for Learning and Teaching who took the brave step of volunteering to share their practice at the event.'

James Underwood, Subject Leader for Teacher Continuing Professional Development in the School of Education compered the event and commented that

'These presenters had come along after a day of being teaching assistants and were immersed in the activity of supporting the learning and well-being of individuals and groups of children.'

## Outcomes

At the end of the evening we evaluated the event via the Twitter Feed used at the event, by asking two questions – 'What did you learn?' and 'What would you like to do next?'

We got useful feedback and will build on the enthusiasm and positive reaction to this event in our development of similar events.

Twitter Feed comments encapsulated how the event was a platform for TAs to share good practice. The comments really indicate how inspirational the participants felt the event to be. Comments show how enthusiastic the participants were to promote ideas which would really benefit the learning and well-being of children and young people, not just in their own school community but in the wider community created by the TA TeachMeet event. Alongside this, the comments show how the event provided the participants with the opportunity to build their IT and other practical skills and the comments indicate that the event supported participants in further developing their own sense of professionalism.

A range of comments from the Twitter feed:

- Wow, really impressed with all the speakers. Enjoyed meeting so many inspirational people
- Great speakers with some interesting ideas and useful apps and websites to use at school
- Great ideas and some really useful websites
- Good apps, for example how to use Padlet
- iPad ideas such as demonstrated in the presentation 'path on a visual poet'
- A formative event and great useful sites
- An amazing range of resources available to help TAs in their role in school
- There is a lot of passion out there
- A great evening. I am looking forward to the next one.
- Fantastic opportunity to learn more and ideas – thank you. Let's hope for more sessions.
- So many ways to inspire children
- Really useful. Inspiring
- Lots of fantastic and useful ideas that we can't wait to try out back at schools.
- A new multiplication strategy
- I have learnt and signed onto Twitter

### Next steps

The event reinforced our awareness of how the Foundation Degree in Learning and Teaching is committed to delivering life changing opportunities and encouraging students to be enterprising in developing and sharing their practice. The range of presentations offered by FDLT students, demonstrated how they each have very specific roles in schools which impact on outcomes for children. It showed how inspired the students are by the positive support of their employers, their motivation to make a real impact on the lives of the children and young people they work with and the opportunity they have to explore the principles of teaching and learning further within the FDLT programme. The inclusion of presentations from a diverse range of speakers beyond FDLT was a catalyst to further motivate and inspire this.

There are opportunities for the School of Education to develop similar events and Continuing Professional Development for teaching assistants. The on-going developments and improvements to methods of communication via the University website and via social media will support this.

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