

Diane Campkin In Conversation with David Frost

David: I think you and I have something in common in that neither of us became teachers straight after university. I left school at the age of 15 and worked in various industries before going to college to qualify to be a teacher. The motor trade and food production were amongst the most memorable for me. So what did you do before becoming a teacher?



Diane: Yes, like you, my first career was completely unrelated to teaching. I Levels and worked in the marine and energy insurance sector. Teaching was had always been drawn to though so I began to explore it as a career after having my daughters. I worked as a teaching assistant in a local primary school, studied for a degree with the Open University and then progressed onto a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE), my teaching qualification. It taught me a valuable lesson, that with motivation, it is possible to combine study and work, even with a young family.

David: Yes, I also learnt the value of part-time study. I did my masters degree when I was a full-time teacher in a secondary school and later did a PhD the same way. What kind of teaching role did you have and why did you find it helpful to join the Teacher Led Development Work (TLDW) programme?

Diane: I started my teaching career in Early Years, teaching the Reception class. I was very fortunate to work in a school that had a long association with HertsCam and, in my second year of teaching, my headteacher sent me along to a local TLDW group. To be honest, after seven long years of study and training to become a teacher, more training was the last thing I wanted! However, at the very first session, I realised that TLDW was nothing like ‘training’, or even CPD. Instead it was a wonderful opportunity to reflect on my moral purpose, collaborate with others, think about the change I wanted to make in my classroom and be supported whilst I led that change. I found that, even though I was an inexperienced teacher, I had voice and agency and could use them to make a difference as a teacher. It was extremely empowering.

David: That’s good to hear. I think it is very interesting to think about the role of experience here. You say that you were inexperienced but nevertheless were empowered, having a voice, flexing your agency and so on. It reminds me that whatever stage we are at in our careers, or anything else in which we might be novices, we still have experience as human beings. This means that we are entitled to respect and can be expected to make a contribution to improving what we see around us. The idea of experience is also relevant in the sense that it’s your experience that is the raw material for learning. So often a programme that is supposed to advance people’s professional learning just ignores their experience. So, tell me how you came to join the MEd.

Diane: Former students had spoken highly about the HertsCam MEd and it seemed to be a natural progression to join it after my positive experience of TLDW. I was keen to continue being a leader of change and the MEd offered the chance to do that, whilst deepening my developing understanding of leadership. By this point I had become Early Years Lead and my

job had therefore become more demanding, however I knew that the support I would get from the HertsCam teaching team would help me to be successful. I also realised that studying on the MEd would enable me to focus on my moral purpose which can be so easily side-lined due to the everyday demands of teaching. The MEd sessions became a much valued opportunity to have the time to focus on what was important to me as a teacher and so the time spent studying never felt burdensome, but instead inspiring. For me, the HertsCam MEd was purposeful in a way that a research based programme would not have been. It was empowering to know that I was able to continue to make a notable difference. Studying on the MEd enriched my practice and my professional identity in ways I had not anticipated and I will always be grateful for the opportunity to participate in it.

David: It is good to hear that the MEd enriched your practice and identity, but what about others? Did you feel able to exercise leadership and influence colleagues ? Through your MEd project, were you able to establish improved practice in the school?

Diane: One of the most important aspects of the MEd was collaborating with others, both in my school and in wider networks. Through this, I was able to exercise leadership and influence others. Colleagues in my school contributed to my development work, trialling ideas and providing feedback and critical friendship. The MEd helped me to reflect on the type of leader I wanted to be, supported by engagement in relevant literature. I am not a top-down, authoritarian leader because I know that effective change can only be truly embedded when colleagues are involved in the process of change. One of the best aspects of the MEd was being able to empower others through my leadership and to see them finding their voice and agency. I believe that this greatly contributed to my being able to improve practice within my school, despite the challenges of leading change through a pandemic.

David: I first started teaching on a masters programme in the late 1980s not long after I had completed the course myself. In those days nobody expected that doing a masters course would help you to change anything in school in a direct way. When we re-constructed the HertsCam MEd in 2015 we were determined to make sure that critical scholarship would be harnessed to support teachers as agents of change. Like me, you also joined the teaching team within a very short time of graduating. How did that feel?

Diane: I felt very privileged to be invited to join the teaching team soon after graduating. It gave me the opportunity to continue as a scholar-practitioner alongside a team of exceptionally talented fellow professionals. HertsCam has taught me so much about leadership and collaboration, as well as helping me to find my moral purpose, voice and agency. It is hugely motivating to be able to guide others in the way that HertsCam has guided me.

David: The MEd has a long history of course, starting with being a course provided by the University of Cambridge (1999-2015). Then, in 2015, it became our own programme but validated by the University of Hertfordshire. We have had a great 6 years but wanted to go international which required a new academic partner. We were fortunate in finding the right university who wanted to work with us to develop the course so it could be offered in other countries. We were also fortunate that we were able to employ you to help us with the

development of the new international programme. I suppose you have had to learn a lot in the last few months. Has this been worthwhile for you?

Diane: It's been a very enriching experience. It's given me opportunities to collaborate across different areas of education and with international colleagues. HertsCam has opened up avenues that I wouldn't have otherwise accessed and I'll always be grateful for that. I've seen at first hand the care and dedication that goes into creating our MEd programme. It has also reaffirmed how unique and far-reaching our MEd is. As part of my role, I've researched other MEd programmes and haven't found any that are comparable in supporting students to make a difference through development work. The academic rigour is there too, of course, aligned with the opportunity to make long lasting, impactful change which is what makes it so different and worthwhile. To have the opportunity to ensure that the programme can continue and grow, so that other teachers can benefit from it as I did, is a great privilege.