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I am currently writing this with only 4 months left of my probationer year left to complete. It really doesn't feel like long since I shook like a leaf way back in August as I met my first classes for the first time! Although my confidence and ability has grown immeasurably since then I still catch my self every so often, when a class is working well, and have a wee giggle to myself, amazed that they are a. working b. doing what they are told and c. I got them to do it!

I am undertaking my probationary year in Biggar High School in South Lanarkshire. The school is quite small, around 650 pupils, and the Modern Languages Department teach both French and German. The intake in 1st year is split between the two languages (those coming from the smaller rural primaries having previously been introduced to German and those from the two larger primaries having been exposed to French). The catchment area is huge and predominantly rural. The vast majority of our pupils are bussed in to school from farms and local villages. In this way the school is very similar to my own experience of secondary school in Dumfries and Galloway but contrasts quite starkly with some of the more urban schools I was placed in during my Initial Teacher Education Year.

The 0.7 timetable we probationers are guaranteed under McCrone has been a godsend! I really do wonder how newly qualified staff coped with a full timetable straight away. I teach seventeen periods of French and one period a week of Higher Psychology (my second subject). My timetable consists of two first year mixed ability classes, one second year class, a third year General Credit Standard Grade class and a fourth year General Foundation Standard Grade Class. In this instance I am the class teacher but cooperative teaching methods are also used. My co-op partner takes the lead from me. I also have one second year and one third year class, each for a period a week, where I co-op teach. In both instances I take the lead from the class teacher. I am usually employed to extract smaller groups to do Speaking practice (sometimes to push the more able or to give more confidence to the less able). The 5 co-operative teaching periods on my timetable are invaluable, principally in regularly viewing someone else's methods and teaching style. Also when I am the class teacher it is great to have someone to give a second opinion and also to extract small groups of pupils, especially for the likes of writing folio preparation and assessment and for speaking assessments. Also, with a demanding General Foundation set it's sometimes just a real advantage to have another pair of 'teacher' eyes in the room!

I have had, and continue to, receive a high degree of support both in school and from South Lanarkshire Council. I am timetabled to meet with both my principal teacher and an independent supporter (in my case the Art principle teacher) for a period a week. I have been very fortunate to be so well supported. Both of my supporters have helped me cope with a variety of problems, both curricular (for example how to differentiate between Standard Grade assessment levels for the different elements) and cross-curricular (e.g. establishing classroom routines).

Formal observations take place 5 times in the first term and 4 times in the second term although I have also been observed informally at my own request. The observed lessons have been very useful. The probationer teacher must choose a focus for the observation. I have always picked something that I feel I needs attention. Unsurprisingly classroom management was my primary focus during the first term! I am currently finding that my areas for development have become more subject based (e.g. How do I increase the level of complexity of language being used in folio work? How do I differentiate this topic to a specific level?).

In Biggar the main responsibility for my report lies with my supporter, not my principal teacher, although the two do collaborate. One of each of my termly observations is also undertaken by a third party, in my case by the principal teacher of Business Studies who, again, discusses her findings with both my supporter and myself. Observations really allow you to see the progress you have made, which sometimes you can't see yourself, and also to draw your attention to things that you either didn't know you were doing badly or couldn't work out what the best strategy to take was.

We also have regular Probationer in-service training in Hamilton, roughly every 3 weeks in the first term, decreasing in frequency in the second term. Topics have included assertive discipline, literacy, the development of thinking skills and approaches to teaching PSE to name but a few! The Assertive Discipline course, presented by Geoff Moss, was extremely helpful. We were given this training in our second week of teaching with a follow up in January. This is something that I would like to have experienced during my Initial Teacher Education year. For example I didn't know how to react when a pupil said no to me and threw a chair because I had never really thought that such a thing could happen! Methods of coping with challenging behaviour were rarely discussed during our ITE year and never given much prominence but I am sure that any probationer you speak to will say that dealing with challenging behaviour and low level disruption are among their highest concerns, especially in the first few months.

I have found that I am still ascribing to the communicative approach to Modern languages teaching. Having said this with a General Foundation fourth year class sixth period this approach can, occasionally, go out the window! I feel, as do others that undertook the same Initial Teacher Education year that our subject specific training has been second to none. I have also found that lessons I taught while on placement that really daunted me are now becoming second nature as my confidence in my own ability grows. I am learning every day and every day presents its own particular problems and rewards. For example I am still finding it difficult to pitch lessons at the correct ability/age level and I also still have difficulty in differentiating between 5-14 levels. I am assured that these thing will become easier with time.

Speaking to the other 6 probationers in the school is also invaluable. Luckily they are great and we socialise regularly to swap stories and moans and generally reassure one another! Staff have been most welcoming and after an initial transition period the pupils appear to have accepted me. I have also found that involvement in extra-curricular activities really helps to establish you with pupils. For me it has been helping with school dances, the school

show and a trip abroad. I know other probationers (and pupils) in the school have benefited hugely from running science clubs and various sporting activities.

I have also seen a marked improvement in some of my pupils' attitudes towards me and my subject since helping to organising a trip to Paris in June. They are currently very excited and very motivated. To have gotten such a response makes you forget all of the not so nice things that pupils can say and do!

The last few months have really let me experience Modern Languages teaching and being a part of a secondary school. I feel I have learned the importance of promoting (and being enthusiastic about) your subject, taking part in whole school activities to get to know pupils well and the importance of getting to know other staff members well in order to get the best possible experience. All in all I have found the probationer experience, thus far, to be challenging, exhausting, fun and highly rewarding and I'm not looking forward to saying goodbye in June.