



2014 Briefing Papers



Seminar Series on Teacher Education for the Changing Demographics of Schooling: policy, practice and research

Calls for reform in teacher education are increasingly made in response to dissatisfaction with student performance and poor outcomes, particularly relating to the long tail of underachievement of specific groups such as students from ethnic minorities, those living in poverty, or those who may have additional needs associated with disability or language. This ESRC seminar series brings together key stakeholders to consider the implications of the research evidence underpinning teacher education for diversity, and to articulate a framework for further research in the field. The seminars are designed to address a set of integrated themes to allow for the development of evidence-informed ideas on how to prepare teachers for the changing demographic of schooling.

This briefing paper summarises the presentations and discussions of the seminar held on 21 March 2014. The paper aims to stimulate further discussion with colleagues in teacher education.

Seminar 1: Teacher education for diversity

The first seminar explored approaches to teacher education for diversity in the UK and elsewhere, and the implications for teacher education reforms of programme structures, and curricula. The seminar considered the following aspects of reform of teacher education:

- The changing demographics of schooling
- Academic diversity in teacher education
- Changing policy context of teacher education reforms

Presentations

Lani Florian, University of Edinburgh provided an overview of the changing demographic of schooling in the globalised world in which we live today. She argued that the changing concept of identity from unitary to overlapping identities suggest that new ways of thinking about human diversity within teacher education are needed. She challenged some of the tradition of preparing teachers to work with groups of students who are assumed to be broadly similar – most students – with specialised responses for some who are thought to need something different from, or additional to, others of a similar age. Following the idea that overlapping identities are fundamental to individuality, she argued that by preparing teachers to understand that differences between learners are to be expected. She also argued that in developing new ways of working with and drawing on the expertise of specialists in support of all children learning together, teacher-educators can support existing and emerging generations of teachers with the social consciousness, confidence and

skills they need to teach diverse groups of learners. And this they can do without perpetuating the marginalisation that can occur when some are treated differently to others.

Pavel Zgaga, University of Ljubljana addressed the question of academic diversity in teacher education and issues that arise as Schools of Education in different European countries strive to fulfil their missions while implementing the 'Bologna agenda'. How should the two-cycle system be organised for teacher education? How should teacher education respond to competition in higher education? He presented various ways in which teacher education institutions throughout Europe have responded to these questions. In general, the Bologna process has resulted in an increase in the total time required to obtain a teaching qualification. On the other hand, the internationalising of teacher education seems to lag behind many other areas of higher education (e.g. there is a low rate of Erasmus exchange students in education compared to other subjects).

Anna Beck, University of Glasgow presented her research on the process of teacher education policy formulation and implementation based on a case study of 'Teaching Scotland's Future'. She identified a number of barriers to the implementation of policy recommendations for Career Long Professional Learning (CLPL), which must be overcome if CLPL is to serve as an important phase of teacher education for the development of expertise in relation to supporting children and young people with diverse needs.

Implications for teacher education

The following questions were raised in the discussions after the presentations:

- How do we strike the right balance in teacher education curricula between providing input about specific aspects of diversity and preparing our student teachers to maintain high expectations of each pupil considering their individual contexts, while removing barriers to learning and participation as necessary?
- Should the teaching workforce reflect the changing demographic of schooling? If so, what steps can be taken to ensure that it does?
- What can we learn from the varying teacher education traditions in Europe that can help us respond better to the demands of preparing teachers for diversity?
- What are the implications for policy change in Scotland? How can these implications be disseminated to a wide range of actors involved in the process?

Implications for future research

Greater clarity is needed about what is meant by 'responding to diversity'. Identity can be recognised in many different ways – social, biographical and, biometric. These models for classification converge and combine in complex ways within and across people's lives. We need to take stock of the ways in which the concept of identity is conveyed and taught in teacher education – for example, in the overlap between the courses that are taught in very specific specialist programmes. One challenge for future research will be to specify new ways of thinking about human diversity. How do people learn, and how do they learn together? What are the new ways of working with colleagues, and with specialist knowledge?