



## 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 8 December 2014. The paper aims to stimulate further discussion with colleagues in teacher education.

#### Seminar 3: Teacher knowledge, skills and values

This seminar considered the knowledge base underpinning teacher capacities for educating all students and how these capacities can be developed in teacher education and studied in further research. The seminar considered the following aspects of teachers' knowledge base:

- Student-teachers interpersonal relationships
- Moral and relational teacher agency for social justice, and
- Teachers' decision making in relation to inclusive pedagogy

#### *Presentations*

**Theo Wubbels, Utrecht University** presented results from a thirty-five year programme of research on teacher-student relationships and interactions. Teachers' interpersonal behaviour can be seen as a specific blend of *Agency* and *Communion* where agency suggests someone is becoming individuated, dominant, has power and control, and communion refers to the social, including love, union, friendliness, and affiliation. Interpersonal styles positively associated with student outcomes are characterised by high levels of agency and communion, which become even more significant in the diverse classrooms.

**David Carr, University of Birmingham and Nataša Pantić, University of Edinburgh**

considered the meaning and implications of teachers' moral and relational agency for social justice drawing on philosophical and research-based insights. They argued that such agency involves teachers' understanding themselves as moral agents; understanding the contested nature of social justice; competence in 'system thinking' within the broader educational and social contexts; and a capacity to work collaboratively with others to address risks of exclusion or underachievement of vulnerable students.

**Archie Graham, University of Aberdeen** presented an expanded version of *phronesis* as a tool for exploring questions about teachers' decision-making. He considered the value of the phenomenological approach and the possibilities it offered for students' reflection on embodied experience, as well as for understanding the different ways in which teachers enact inclusive practices.

#### *Implications for teacher education*

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

- How can Agency and Communion be taught in teacher education?
- How can future teachers be supported to understand themselves as moral agents who can make a difference towards greater social justice?
- How can teachers be prepared to enter and sustain professionally appropriate relationships and work collaboratively with others to address risks of exclusion or underachievement of vulnerable students?
- How can teachers' be supported in tacit and intuitive decision-making in a hugely complex environment in which teachers make thousands of decisions each day?

#### *Implications for future research*

The participants suggested that many teacher education programmes already aim to educate teachers as reflexive agents committed to social justice. However, further research is needed to help us establish how successful we are in this effort. In particular, the need for evidence about graduates' capacities in the following domains was emphasised:

- a capacity to build professionally appropriate relationships;
- understanding themselves as moral agents;
- understanding the contested nature of social justice;
- competence in 'system thinking' within the broader educational and social contexts;
- a capacity to work collaboratively with others to address risks of exclusion or underachievement of vulnerable students;
- a capacity to reflect systematically on their practice and environment.

The related studies will require a variety of methods and collection of qualitative and quantitative data, including phenomenological studies of teachers' decision-making.