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 learning 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 demographics of schooling.

This briefing paper summarises presentations and discussions of the seminar held on 21st September 2015. The paper aims to stimulate further discussion with colleagues in teacher education.

Seminar 5 – Teacher education curricula for diversity

This seminar explored key issues around initial teacher education for diversity in different contexts, partnerships with schools for professional learning and the development of change agency across the continuum of a teacher's career. The papers in this seminar considered the following themes:

- A framework to rethink a coherent teacher education curriculum for diversity
- Collaborative inquiry with teachers to improve learning for all students
- The place of leadership in teacher education curricula

Presentations

Ana Maria Villegas and Francesca Ciotoli, Montclair State University, addressed the limitations of typical university-based teacher education programs in preparing teachers for the changing demographics of developed nations towards greater diversity. They argued that current approaches result in a fragmented teacher

education experience where teachers often receive conflicting messages from different courses. Alternatively, they proposed a broad framework that takes a more conceptually coherent approach to preparing responsive teachers for a diverse student population along different axes. They highlighted the importance of teachers developing 'sociocultural consciousness' and demonstrated its applicability to teachers of students with disabilities.

Joanne Deppeler, Monash University, presented research on supporting collaboration and inquiry with teachers in schools that focused on using evidence as a means of stimulating practitioner experimentation and collaboration as the fundamental strategy for developing effective teaching and learning practices. She identified the potential for collaborative knowledge production among professionals as well as the barriers around facilitating genuine critique, and navigating boundaries that divide professionals to build collaboration in teacher education research. She outlined the implications for such an approach to teacher education in policy contexts dominated by competition, choice and accountability.

Christine Forde and Beth Dickson, University of Glasgow, addressed issues around how teacher education can contribute to developing teachers who will participate in, and, lead change for diversity. They argued that the recent policy shift towards leadership being the driving force of change to improve schools raises critical questions around what leadership in practice means and how it relates to the development of learning and teaching. They proposed that teacher leadership development and professional learning across each stage of the continuum of a teacher's career has to be embedded within the interdependent concepts of professional identity, agency and expertise around learning and teaching.

Implications for teacher education

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

- To what extent is broader historical knowledge and understanding in different national contexts important in developing the socio-cultural consciousness envisioned by the overarching framework for developing response teachers?
- How can new teachers challenge inequalities institutionalised within schools?
- What can be learned from studying the trajectory of a teacher's career from the beginning to 40 years? Can this provide insights into what needs to change in initial teacher education?
- Since school structures that would allow expertise to develop are not pervasive or sustainable, what do we need for teachers to work together and share expertise?
- Do we see teachers as professionals or as those who implement the expertise of others?

Implications for future research

Many teachers still do not have a vocabulary to talk about what they do, and teaching is still done in isolation. Research that aims to make tacit knowledge more visible is needed.

There is a need for a coherent overarching framework that establishes a roadmap for continuous professional learning and a coherence that justifies the activities that teacher educators undertake.