A Values-based Approach to Teacher Education

This research explored students' and beginning teachers' experiences of teacher education and professional development in Northern Ireland. It focused on their perceptions and understanding of the values underpinning their teaching and learning experiences, at recruitment and across the three phases, of Initial Teacher Education (ITE), Induction, and Early Professional Development (EPD). A key feature of the research was the tracking of a cohort of 40 Postgraduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) primary and post-primary students from the 2004/5 intake, through each of the phases.

Recruitment
Personal and professional values played a significant role in the selection process for ITE.

➡ Selection methods should optimise opportunities for those who select to engage with candidates' values and attitudes.

The intake lacks gender, ethnic and on some courses, socio-economic and religious diversity.

➡ Measures may be needed to ensure that the intake reflects the diversity of broader society.

ITE
Student teachers anticipated correctly that ITE would challenge their values and attitudes. This involved reflection on both personal and professional values

➡ Opportunities to engage student teachers with values-related issues needs to be made explicit and involve appropriate methodologies.

Induction
Beginning teachers' experiences of induction were inconsistent, with many in short-term temporary employment describing the induction year as disjointed and disappointing.

➡ Professional development opportunities should be afforded to all beginning teachers. We suggest that various proposals might be considered, including a guaranteed induction year and the use of e-portfolios.

EPD
Securing long-term employment continued to be a significant challenge for many beginning teachers. Many questioned the value of Professional Development Activities (PDAs).

➡ Fragmented employment experiences for beginning teachers reduce the quality of the EPD process.

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The research

Background

Teacher education in Northern Ireland (NI) is currently undergoing a substantial review and our research was carried out during a period when teacher education was being closely scrutinised. Over the past five years, the Department of Education and the Department for Employment and Learning have commissioned a series of reports on its future, focusing on topics including the impact of demographic trends, the costs of ITE and the use of the ITE estate, the potential impact of the revised Northern Ireland Curriculum on teacher education, and a policy review of teacher education (DE& DEL 2003, 2005). Additionally, the General Teaching Council NI has undertaken a review of Continuing Professional Development, culminating in recommendations to establish a Professional Development Framework. It has also published a new set of professional competences, including a code of values and professional practice (GTCNI 2008).

Focusing on teacher education, the research adopted a values approach, rather than a technical or instrumental approach, and considered the nature of the values underpinning different phases of teacher education and professional development. Throughout the research, the term 'values' was broadly defined and referred to attitudes, beliefs, principles and criteria which informed or directed thoughts, behaviour, policy and practice.

Values were considered from three perspectives.

From an **individual** perspective, the emphasis was on students' and beginning teachers' personal values, attitudes and beliefs. These were considered with regard to how they informed their motivation to enter teaching, and the images which teachers generated of themselves as practitioners. The research also investigated how personal attitudes and beliefs informed student teachers' preconceptions and experience of teacher education and professional development. The role of teacher educators' personal and professional values was also addressed when exploring the recruitment and selection process in ITE.

From an **institutional** perspective, questions were raised concerning the formative influence of the values represented through different teacher education institutions on students' views, and of the expectations which schools had of beginning teachers. Here, the project sought to take into account the ethos of different institutions and selected aspects of the structure and focus of the curriculum provided by these.

From a **systemic** perspective, student and beginning teachers encountered implicit and explicit values through their engagement with the teacher education partnership model, the competence framework (in particular the GTCNI code of values and professional practice), and aspects of the NI Curriculum and classroom practice that seek to espouse particular values. This included citizenship, community relations, the development of inclusive practices and the handling of controversial issues (Montgomery 2005).

The study adopted a longitudinal approach, tracking 40 PGCE students across three phases of teacher education and professional development. A sample of 34 B.Ed students was included in the first two phases. Teacher educators, teacher tutors in schools and a range of stakeholders in teacher education were also consulted. A mixed methods approach, including interviews, focus groups and questionnaires, was employed to collect data.

During the first phase, the research examined current recruitment and selection procedures, student teachers' motivations and expectations in relation to teaching, and their initial perceptions of themselves as teachers. In the ITE phase, attention shifted to students' engagement with values-related dimensions of teaching and learning and the NI Curriculum, including citizenship, community relations, developing inclusive practices, and handling controversial issues in the classroom. During Induction, the research explored beginning teachers' experiences of securing employment and the impact of initial teaching experiences on their personal and professional development. Their later perceptions of themselves as emerging professionals constituted the focus of the final phase, in which we examined teachers' Early Professional Development (EPD).

Findings

Recruitment and Selection

Over-subscription for places on ITE courses means that applicants need high academic qualifications. Research data suggests that there are up to ten applicants for every available place on primary courses and up to seven for every available place on post-primary PGCE courses, depending on the subject area.

In some respects the recruitment profile for ITE in Northern Ireland reflects national and international trends. The recruits consist in the main of young single females. The prevalence of applicants from Northern Ireland who have a grammar school education also appears to have been a feature of the intake over many years. However, there is evidence of change here, as increasing numbers of mature students and those from Further Education or secondary schools enter ITE,

reflecting a shift in the socio-economic profile of the intake.

Many teacher educators expressed concerns about the diversity of the intake to ITE and the extent to which it is representative of wider society.

Teacher educators acknowledged the significant role played by personal values in selection procedures and that an emphasis on these values might exert an influence on selection decisions. Interviews are an important part of the selection process and inevitably involve a risk of subjectivity. While they acknowledged the merits of the interview, teacher educators also saw advantages in employing additional selection procedures, such as group interviews or presentations. But most selectors thought that time constraints and high applicant numbers would prohibit their use.

Attempting to gain an insight into candidates' personal values and attitudes during interview was widely regarded as important in establishing their suitability for teaching. However, not every teacher educator believed it was possible to discover an applicant's values through interview.

Initial Teacher Education

Most student teachers expected that ITE would require them to engage with values and values-related issues, and that this engagement might influence their own values and attitudes.

Preparation for teaching various dimensions of the NI Curriculum, particularly parts employing active learning methodologies, such as citizenship and community relations, required student teachers to reflect on their own values and beliefs. Teachers also encountered challenges as they sought to develop their confidence and skills in preparation for exploring contentious issues with peers and pupils, and to implement inclusive practices.

The potential effect of the revised NI Curriculum on the qualities and attributes required of student teachers was acknowledged by some teacher educators and disputed by others. There was a perception that primary teachers, in particular, would be required to develop personal and social skills and to demonstrate creativity and adaptability.

Emerging definitions of professionalism for student teachers were associated with the acquisition of knowledge and skills, the development of effective relationships with pupils, and the demonstration of appropriate personal qualities.

Induction

While some of the beginning teachers in our sample were content to apply to any type of school, others expressed strong

preferences not to teach in specific types of school. Religious affiliation was the most significant factor and influenced almost a third of beginning teachers when choosing the schools where they wished to teach.

There was a significant disparity in beginning teachers' employment experiences. Individuals might take up permanent, long-term temporary, short-term temporary, or substitute teaching posts. Of the research sample of 30, a fifth secured a permanent post upon graduation.

Some beginning teachers provided clear statements about the criteria for gaining employment. These included the need to offer more than one subject at post-primary, the advantage of gaining experience across a range of schools through temporary teaching and, for some, the expectation of spending up to three years in temporary positions before gaining permanent employment.

Induction provision was regarded as effective for beginning teachers in permanent or long-term temporary posts, but was seen as being much less valuable for those in temporary or substitute teaching posts. Here, support was considered uneven and disjointed.

The greatest source of support for beginning teachers during induction was other beginning teachers. Teacher tutors, other teachers, principals and Education and Library Board, Curriculum and Advisory Support personnel (ELB-CASS) were also cited, albeit less frequently.

Early Professional Development

Although there was a significant improvement in the employment status of many beginning teachers in the sample during the period of our research, over half remained in temporary or substitute teaching positions at the end of the EPD year.

Most beginning teachers regarded the contribution of PDAs as negligible. The additional paperwork and accompanying pressure to complete them were regarded as unnecessary and unhelpful, as beginning teachers encountered many other challenges in their early professional career.

Reflecting on their own professional development, most beginning teachers believed they were fully accepted as a teacher and recognised as a member of the profession by colleagues. They identified a growing sense of professional-ism in their developing knowledge and expertise in different subject areas, their improved classroom management, their management of pupils' learning and their own personal development.

Major implications

Recruitment and Selection
Despite references to inadequate resources, teacher educators were willing to consider alternative selection methods which have the potential to facilitate greater insight into ITE candidates' personalities. Further exploration of methods such as group interviews, candidate presentations and interactive tasks may be valuable. Despite this, there was a strong commitment to retain interviews, which are relatively labour-intensive and expensive. The level of diversity amongst ITE enrolments concerned the majority of teacher educators, and warrants further discussion.

Initial Teacher Education
Student teachers expect to engage with values during ITE. The NI Curriculum stresses values, while the GTCNI has introduced a code of professional values. These developments raise questions about current opportunities for students to reflect on and discuss values, and about methods which might be used to support such engagement (GTCNI 2006). How are values-related issues introduced to student teachers? What significance does the GTCNI code have for beginning teachers? Student teachers' expected that their personal values would be challenged. Our research indicated that this happens to some extent. The main question arising is whether this should be done in a more planned and explicit way.

Induction
The disparity in beginning teachers' experiences of teaching suggests that full access to induction is not available to every new teacher. This may have 'negative repercussions for all stakeholders' (Sharp 2006). The proposal for a guaranteed induction year has received widespread support, including that of the GTCNI, MLAs in the Northern Ireland Assembly and the teacher unions. However, views expressed by the Department of Education officials have indicated that the costs involved may be prohibitive. The introduction of e-portfolios to record beginning teachers' work should they move between schools has also been proposed (Osler 2005). In the interim, active and sustained support from principals and staff appears vital in promoting and sustaining beginning teachers' early professional development.

EPD
Beginning teachers in temporary or substitute posts continued to have inconsistent experiences. Some were unable to complete PDAs because of their disjointed employment. It is important that beginning teachers be afforded effective support throughout this phase of their professional development. Some challenged the value of PDAs, regarding them as an imposition, distracting teachers from the many challenges they encounter as new practitioners. How relevant and valuable are PDAs? Could successful completion be more effectively rewarded?

A key question concerns whether EPD can be provided to take more account of beginning teachers' varying employment situations.

During the course of the research, three cross-cutting themes emerged:

Partnership
The Teacher Education Partnership model is premised on effective, supportive partnerships between higher education institutions, the ELB-CASS and schools. A review of support currently provided to student and beginning teachers across ITE, Induction and EPD suggests that integration and coordination between the different partners could be improved, and that the process of learning to teach should be more embedded in schools. It has also been proposed that the HEIs should have an extended role across Induction, EPD and CPD, to allow greater continuity of support and more meaningful progression using the Career Entry Profile (Osler 2005). This proposal introduces a range of issues which clearly require greater consideration by the various partners.

Faith-based education provision
The school system in Northern Ireland, for the most part, is separated along denominational lines, which are reflected in arrangements for ITE at undergraduate level. These structures impacted on students' and beginning teachers' perceptions and decisions about their choice of ITE provider and possible teaching posts. For many teachers, it means that their experiences of schooling, ITE and employment may be confined largely to one sector, although broader support services provide opportunities for teachers to engage in professional development across school sectors. Even taking into account the historical reasons for the current structures as well as the level of support for the existing arrangements, changing demographics raise questions about their long-term viability (Taylor & Usher 2004).

Employment
Many student teachers acknowledged they had applied to a particular HEI in the belief that attending it would help them secure employment in particular schools. However, some students changed their employment preferences during their period of study, whilst others took up positions or taught subjects for which they were not originally prepared. The current shortage of teaching vacancies is becoming an increasing concern for newly qualified teachers and the issue has been raised in the Northern Ireland Assembly. The situation has been partially addressed in recent times through a reduction in the ITE intake. However, as the research demonstrates, many beginning teachers still enter the profession through temporary or supply teaching posts, resulting in fragmented and inconsistent experiences.

Further information

Publications:

Clarke, L. & Abbott, L. (2007) "*Put Posters over the Glass Bit on the Door and Disappear*": Tutor Perspectives on the Use of VLEs to Support Pre-service Teachers', *Teaching in Higher Education* 13 (2) 169-181.

Montgomery, A. & Smith, A. (2006) 'Teacher Education in Post-Devolution Northern Ireland' *Scottish Educational Review* 37, Special Edition 46-58.

Moran, A. (2008) 'Can a Competence or Standards Model Facilitate an Inclusive Approach to Teacher Education?' *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, published on-line April 2007.

Moran, A. (2008) 'Challenges Surrounding Widening Access to Teacher Education: Can it be Achieved?' *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 34 (1) 63-77.

Selected conference papers:

Abbott, L. 'Northern Ireland Beginning Teachers Experiences of Induction: the Haves and the Have Nots', BERA Conference, London, September 2007.

Abbott, L., McCully, A. & Montgomery, A. 'A Values-based Approach to Teacher Education – Key Methodological Issues'. TLRP-BERA Seminar, Belfast, December 2006.

Clarke, L. 'Supporting Beginning Teachers using VLEs', ESRC-TLRP 'Learning to Teach in Post-devolution UK' Seminar, Belfast, January 2007.

McCully, A. & Montgomery. A. 'Moving out of the Comfort Zone: Student Teachers' Engagement with Controversial Issues'. ESRC-TLRP Conference, Glasgow, November 2006.

Montgomery, A. 'The Role of Religion in Teacher Education in Northern Ireland – Perspectives of Student Teachers'. ECER Conference, Geneva, September 2006.

Montgomery, A. & McGlynn, C. 'New Peace, New Teachers: Student Teachers' Perspectives of Diversity and Community Relations in Northern Ireland'. AERA Conference, New York, March 2008.

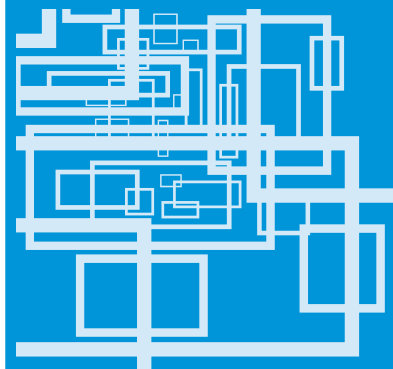Montgomery, A. & O'Connor, U. 'Citizenship Education in Northern Ireland – Preparing the Teachers'. APERA Conference. Hong Kong, November 2006.

Montgomery, A. & Smith, A. 'Reflecting on Diversity in Teacher Education'. ESRC-TLRP 'Learning to Teach in Post-devolution UK' Seminar, Belfast, January 2007.

Moran, A. 'Beyond Professional Compliance: Redefining Teacher Education as a Moral Visionary Profession'. AERA Conference, San Francisco, April 2006.

Moran, A. & Abbott, L. 'Transforming Initial Teacher Education: Progressing Inclusive Pedagogies and Practices through the Values Dimension' BERA Conference, London, September 2007. (317)

The warrant

This study adopted an innovative methodological approach by tracking student and beginning teachers over three years, across four phases of teacher education and professional development; recruitment and selection, ITE, Induction and Early Professional Development. In the course of the research, representatives from each of the major stakeholder bodies involved in the provision of teacher education and professional development in Northern Ireland were consulted. During the first two phases, structured interviews were conducted with 74 student teachers (40 postgraduates and 34 undergraduates), enrolled on four ITE courses in three different institutions. 23 teacher educators from the three institutions were also interviewed. During induction, follow-up interviews were conducted with 30 beginning teachers from the original PGCE sample, and during EPD, with 26 of this sample. 18 teacher tutors and 17 induction providers were also consulted. Questionnaires were administered to 463 ITE students (273 BEd and 190 PGCE), and focus groups were conducted with 70 post-primary PGCE students during the ITE phase. In addition, a quantitative analysis of 2,000 applications for entry to ITE courses was completed and a further 100 applications were analysed qualitatively. Critical engagement with local, national and international colleagues involved in teacher education through research, practice or policy development was sought during the course of the study.

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