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Re-examining the culture of learning in ITE: engaging with the new demands of the 21st century

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Abstract

This paper argues that in the 21st. Century, it is now more vital than ever to engage Initial Teacher Training (pre service) students with their own learning. It suggests in this challenging enterprise, university departments need to do more than deliver a mandated curriculum and a programme of 'remedial academic writing'. Tutors need to enact, through practice, a belief that 'ability' is not fixed; that 'knowledge' is uncertain, and that understanding is constructed through discussion & engagement. In this way they can better prepare their students for the challenges of working in schools in the 21st. century. The paper suggests that examining the creation of 'Learning to Learn' environments, considering the role played by epistemology, and reconsidering the role of dialogue, are powerful ways of positioning current practice, particularly, as student teachers and their tutors are all concerned with the business of learning, and more specifically, teaching children. There is more to learning than acquiring a body of professional knowledge. The paper forms part of an on-going three year study supported by ESCalate.

Key words: Initial teacher education, academic writing, epistemology.

Introduction

This paper attempts to examine the culture of learning that exists within Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and the extent to which this culture prepares Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) for the challenges of working in inner-city

schools in the United Kingdom (UK). It will look at the importance of dialogue, which is central to any culture of learning in higher education and will deal with the issue of making those students who are being prepared to enter the teaching profession more reflective. More specifically, the paper will deal with the nature of knowledge as well as those internalised belief systems that inform the learning of students in ITE and that can facilitate self-learning or, in some cases act as barriers to critical reflection and potential professional development. The paper arises from a three year study (now in its final year), supported by an ESCalate grant from the Higher Education Academy, being undertaken by staff working at Stranmillis University College, Belfast and University College Plymouth, St. Mark & St. John, which seeks to understand those personal and professional qualities necessary for NQTs to effectively respond to the Every Child Matters (ECM) agenda and the reasoning by head teachers when appointing them.

Background to the study

The study, entitled, "Meeting the Every Child Matters (ECM) agenda: the tail of two cities", seeks to understand those personal, as well as professional qualities that Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) need in order to meet the challenges of 21st Century teaching in inner-city schools experiencing significant regeneration. The study has, as its rationale, the increasingly accepted view that teaching is now more challenging than ever before. Indeed, it is becoming increasingly clear that significant numbers of NQTs are facing the challenges of responding to growing numbers of children in schools who present with complex social, emotional and learning needs. In addition, there have been growing numbers of children entering schools in the UK whose first language is not English (MacBlain, O'Neill, Weir, and MacBlain, 2006). To get some sort of perspective on this, figures indicate that in 2008 there were nearly one and a half million children in schools in England with special educational needs; about 20% of the population of school age children. Of the quarter of a

million pupils with statements of special educational need, more than half were placed within mainstream schools. At present, there are some eight hundred thousand pupils in schools in England whose first language is not English, and, currently, in schools in England, there are over two hundred languages spoken by pupils. Across the country this presents a significant challenge to teachers. In inner London, where over half of pupils attending schools are learning English as an additional language, the challenge is even more significant (DCSF, 2009).

The study has, to date, undertaken a survey of final year Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) and PGCE cohorts in both universities (Phases 1 and 2 of the study), with subsequent tracking of a sample of these students after appointment as NQTs (Phase 3 of the study) over three years, using semi-structured interviews. The initial survey sought to gain the perceptions of these students with regard to how confident they felt in dealing with sensitive issues such as bereavement, divorce and stress in the children they would be teaching. Subsequent interviews will seek to monitor the type of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) they feel they need and, more especially, the types of training need they could have gained from their initial teacher education. At the outset, the study sought to explore, through the data, how practice and theory during initial teacher training could be improved to better prepare teachers for meeting the challenges of working in inner city schools in the twenty-first century.

Central to the study were the views of head teachers appointing these NQTs and, therefore, their views have been considered through individual interviews (Phase 3 of the study). The study will seek to disseminate (Phases 4 and 5) its findings through publication, presentations at national and international conferences and partnership with employers and policy and decision makers. Preliminary findings from Phase 3 of the study would suggest that head teachers/principals are increasingly valuing the ability of NQTs to be, not just teachers of their

subject, but teachers skilled to meet an ever widening diversity of needs among their pupils. Moreover, where once head teachers/principals might have prioritised curricular knowledge and subject expertise, they are now increasingly placing value on the willingness of their NQTs to be flexible, to work effectively as part of a team and to the diversity of pupils' needs, to other adults in the classroom, to teaching colleagues, and, of course, to parents. Typically, many NQTs state their astonishment at how the learning of many of their pupils is affected by the sheer range of special and additional needs, which they encounter in their first year of teaching. The result is that many come to quickly rely upon internal and external support mechanisms as a means of ensuring that they are not wholly overwhelmed. At the very core then of these challenges facing NQTs is the growing expectation that they not only impart subject specific knowledge to their pupils but that they also properly understand the nature of individual pupil-learning that is taking place before them each and every day. For too many teachers, and especially NQTs, the term *learning* remains a puzzle. Given that this is the case then there are obvious implications for initial teacher education and also for continuing professional development, especially in the beginning stages of teaching.

Challenging the notion of learning: developing transformative cultures

The term 'learning' is not easy to define. It is a term that is, all too often, surrounded by confusion and all too frequently a lack of specificity (Fontana, 1995). In an attempt to offer clarity to the term 'learning' the psychologist David Fontana referred to 'descriptions' of learning in which he draws a distinction between the Behaviourist tradition (more specifically, the notion of *Operant Conditioning*) and the Cognitive tradition (more specifically, the notion of *Instrumental Conceptions*). In drawing upon the work of the theorist Jerome Bruner, Fontana (1995: 145) has commented as follows:

This somewhat intimidating title (Instrumental Conceptualism) is used by Bruner to define one of the most coherent and consistent cognitive descriptions of learning and still one of the most useful for teachers... Learning...is not something that happens to individuals, as in the operant conditioning model, but something which they themselves make happen by the manner in which they handle incoming information and put it to use.

Having a clear understanding of what learning is, and more particularly, the cognitive processes that underpin it is fundamental for all who are involved in the process of teaching (Arthur et al: 2006, Galton: 2007, Hayes: 2008). However, it is recognized (Fisher & Rush, 2008; MacBlain and MacBlain, 2004a; MacBlain and MacBlain, 2004b; MacBlain et al: 2006; Hayes, 2008) that too many experienced teachers continue to overly concern themselves with content and its delivery, and do not concern themselves enough with the nature and extent of the reflective processes, and metacognitive structures that facilitate learning. Indeed, it can be further argued that too many teachers do not, in practice, see these reflective and cognitive processes, of which they are a dialectical part, as a priority. If this is the case then many learners, may well fail to have their individual learning needs met and, as a consequence, may fail to achieve their true potential (Long, MacBlain and MacBlain, 2007).

To counter this lack of engagement with reflective and cognitive processes and structures it can be argued that students preparing to enter the teaching profession should have as a major priority the need to devote real time to embracing theoretical views on learning, how it changes over time in children, young people and adults, and perhaps most importantly understanding the nature of their own learning. To do so would facilitate a most important process whereby they critically and objectively evaluate and understand their own internalized belief systems regarding the nature of learning that most likely have been acquired during their own schooling when much of their learning may well have been driven by more

traditional forms of pedagogy. To do so would potentially free them from vague and distorted notions of what learning actually is and lead to much greater understanding of the nature and function of knowledge, the purpose of learning, and the manner in which individuals at different stages of their development process information and construct meaning of the world around them, and act rationally to improve their lives through effective learning.

Despite educators and academics continuing to engage in discussion and debate, however, surrounding theories of learning and the effectiveness of various pedagogies, the central debate in regard to schooling in the United Kingdom continues to focus to a greater extent upon what can be loosely referred to as traditional teacher-led pedagogies versus more modern “problem-based” approaches to learning (Geens, James and MacBlain, 2010). Indeed, the debate between “traditional” and “modern” views on teaching has raged throughout the last few decades, at times verging on the vitriolic as can be seen in the reference by American philosopher Nell Noddings (2005), cited in Pring (2007:3) to the philosopher John Dewey who was seen by many as being responsible for the diminution of traditional methods and the introduction of “modern” approaches to teaching:

...not only has he (*Dewey*): been hailed as the savior of American education by those who welcome greater involvement of students in their own planning and activity [but also] he has been called ‘worse than Hitler’ by some who felt that he infected schools with epistemological and moral relativism and substituted socialization for true education.

Pring (2007:3) also cites, as part of his own experience in relation to the influence of Dewey, the following incident:

Indeed, when I came to Oxford in 1989, I was seated at dinner next to Lord Keith Joseph, who had been Secretary of State for Education under Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. He accused me of

being responsible for all the problems in our schools – because I had introduced teachers to John Dewey.

In schools traditional methods are typically characterized by formal learning situations where the emphasis is upon the delivery and acquisition of subject knowledge, in preparation for examinations, and where children are expected to take little responsibility for the management of what and how they learn. In universities the traditional approach is characterized by large cohorts of students sitting in lecture theatres and note taking with an over reliance upon their lecturers seeking out the information and then presenting it to them in the form of handouts, and in more recent years, power points. Such 'traditional' approaches to learning offer limited opportunities for individuals to actively engage with others in the construction of knowledge and new understanding, and even fewer opportunities to engage at a critical level in epistemological advancement. Indeed, Race and Pickford (2007), amongst others, have argued that this type of delivery can be 'relatively ineffective' and 'inefficient'. The implications then for students preparing to teach are obvious. Most worryingly is the degree to which they will, in actual practice, use this approach with children if they have had it modeled to them during their time at university. At the root then of understanding their own learning, and challenging existing belief systems as to what it is and how children should be taught and engage in learning lies the role of dialogue. It is through dialogue that students will engage with their peers and with their tutors in academic debate and it is through dialogue that they will construct new meaning, understand their own learning and their psychology of being a teacher.

Learning in ITE: challenging the stereotypes

In ITE, as in all Higher Education Institutions, dialogue occurs at many levels and is fundamental to the acquisition of knowledge, to critical and reflective engagement with knowledge, purposeful engagement with

others, and creative and effective problem solving. Where it is purposeful and critical it becomes more effective. It is through purposeful, reflective and effective dialogue, that student teachers can critically engage with their peers and tutors about the problems they will face and so become better prepared to address the complex needs of many pupils they will come to teach, and especially those pupils who have complex social, emotional and learning needs. They will also gain better understanding of their own learning, and their own needs.

The curricula within higher education are externally validated and so will have clear and necessary structures in place before students arrive at college. This can be likened to long term planning in schools. However, the organisation and delivery of the curricula in schools allows different learners to progress at different rates and according to their individual needs through differentiated teaching and learning. In higher education, however, curricula largely dictate delivery, with little reference being afforded to individual need (Race and Pickford, 2007). This point becomes more pertinent when we consider recent moves by government in the UK to widen participation and attract students who, previously, would not have considered university study and who experience learning difficulties themselves. Given this, it could be argued that Higher Education should be less concerned with transmission of knowledge to students through direct teaching formats such as lectures and 'classes', and more concerned with facilitating processes whereby students actively engage in identifying their own individual learning needs and then internalize appropriate and efficient strategies for meeting these. After all, this is what NQTs will be expected to do with their pupils. At this point it is worth considering how teaching and learning has developed in recent decades within schools in the United Kingdom and the ways in which teachers have been prepared. In doing so, it will provide a context within which to address the wider argument, which lies at the core of this paper.

In 2002 the former head of the Standards Agency for teaching in the UK, Michael Barber offered a useful model for understanding teaching and learning within schools in the UK. His views are most interesting as they also offer a useful platform for exploring the learning and epistemological advancement of students training to become teachers. In particular, they highlight the importance of these students increasing their own understanding of what constitutes knowledge and the part that teachers play in imparting knowledge. Barber suggested that in the UK there have been 'cycles' of teaching approach. At first, he suggests, there was 'uniformed professionalism' with teachers selecting approaches based on personal opinions or intuitions. This was followed by 'uniformed prescription' during the 18 years of Conservative (1979 -1997) rule when traditional teaching in subjects was considered the correct approach. Following a change of government, when New Labour came to power in 1997, the third cycle of 'informed prescription' led to the development of the literacy and numeracy strategies which attempted to produce a unified approach using the strengths of the different approaches already discussed. These strategies, although never made compulsory by law, were rigidly imposed and placed a requirement upon schools to prove that other teaching methods that they were using did, in fact, produce higher standards. This has led, arguably, to an expectation on the part of teachers of there being only one correct way to teach all children. The standards were judged by assessment tests imposed by government, which to some, have questionable validity (Hayes, 2008:270). The fourth cycle, now that perceived falling standards have been halted, is that of 'informed professionalism' when teachers can use research to inform their approach to learning in the classroom. However, there are complex reasons why this last cycle has not been universally adopted across the UK. One such reason has been the lack of awareness on the part of many teachers of the need to become actively

engaged in researching their own practice (Barber, 2002; Elmer, 2002; Everton *et al.*, 2002).

Learning to Learn: a necessary requirement or just a good idea.

Much has been made recently of developing children's capacity to 'Learn to Learn' in the school context (Claxton, 2006; Hargreaves, 2005; Rawson, 2000), and it seems unsurprising that attention is beginning to be paid to how we might go about developing the same capabilities within university settings (Fisher & Rush, 2008; Poerksen, 2000; Wingate, 2007) given the need to involve learners with the business of learning. As Poerksen (2000) wryly comments, we need to move from a teaching paradigm of instructing the ignorant in the 'truth' through a process of knowledge transfer, to a learning paradigm. The concept of Learning to Learn (L2L) is based on the premise that intelligence is not fixed and that it is possible to develop capabilities for better learning. Rather than a set of skills (Rawson, 2000), it is an approach to learning based on a wider conception of knowledge than the ability to engage in the updating of vocational skills. The Education Council (2006, paragraph. 5, annex in Fredriksson and Hoskins, 2007, p.129) defines Learning to Learn (L2L) thus:

"Learning to learn' is the ability to pursue and persist in learning to organise one's own learning, including through effective management of time and information, both individually and in groups."

Fredriksson and Hoskins' definition of L2L encompasses *affective* dimensions, including social skills such as 'learning relationships', 'motivation', 'confidence', 'learning strategies', and the 'ability to overcome obstacles', and *cognitive* dimensions concerned with the 'capacity to gain', 'process and assimilate new knowledge'. They focus on the importance of life-long and life-wide learning: that is, from birth to death, drawing on work, family, community and specific learning environments such as school or adult education. What learners need to develop is the ability to build on prior learning and life

experience, and to understand how to apply this new ability in a range of circumstances.

According to a report by the think-tank, DEMOS (2005), L2L has relationships with other commonly used terms such as problem solving, thinking skills and critical thinking, but the underpinning theme is seen as meta-cognition: the capacity to monitor, evaluate, control and change how one thinks and learns. L2L can thus be associated with reflecting on one's learning and applying the results of that reflection to further learning. It involves:

- understanding the demands that a learning task makes;
- knowing about intellectual processes and how they work;
- generating and considering strategies to cope with the task;
- getting better at choosing the strategies that are the most appropriate for the task;
- monitoring and evaluating the subsequent learning behaviour through feedback on the extent to which the chosen strategies have led to success with the task (Hargreaves, 2005:7).

The ESRC TRLP *Learning How to Learn – in Classrooms, Schools and Networks Project* (2006) examined three particularly closely associated concepts: L2L, LHTL [learning *how* to learn) and assessment for learning (AfL). Underpinning these approaches were second-order (Bateson, 1972) or double loop learning (Argyris and Schön, 1978); these ways of working comprise reflection, intentional learning and collaboration. The successful learner is seen as a problem solver, or intentional learner; that is one who *tries* to learn, is aware of the strategies they employ, and is willing to take responsibility for their own learning, often referred to as 'agency' (Resnick, 1989). Although these capacities might not come naturally, it is argued that they can be taught or developed. Claxton (2006: 5) believes that these capable learners have

dispositions, or traits, which strengthen their ability to learn; he terms such individuals 'the Explorer', 'the Investigator', 'the Sceptic and 'the Finder-Outer', adding that they have the capacity to be resilient, resourceful, reflective and reciprocal. Key characteristics are, for example, curiosity, being ready for a challenge and having the ability to work alone or co-operatively.

Careful evaluation of existing organisational structures requires having an awareness of individual needs and shared aims with the students in meeting these (Chickering and Gamson, 2004). Rawson (2000), drawing on Johnson-Laird's (1983) description of the mind turning in on itself, to create and question its capabilities, and Bruner's (1987) notion of 'decentring', argues that L2L involves developing the ability to become more critically aware of our own perspectives and how they may be changed. This questioning stance resonates with Mezirow's (1991) concept of 'meaning perspectives' or 'personal paradigms for understanding ourselves and relationships'. To borrow Claxton's (2006, 2) terminology, we need to encourage tutors to make explicit, and student teachers to reflect on, their 'epistemic mentality': the cognitive habits of mind that go to make up one's capacity to learn, and 'epistemic identity': the emotional and personal attitudes, tolerances and beliefs that expand or contract one's capacity to learn. If, as Claxton, suggests, habits of mind are contagious, we might then be better placed to develop students' understanding that knowledge is not fixed and certain; that the ability to respond to hunches and hazy ideas can lead to better problem-solving.

It may well be the case that, as university educators tasked with the duty of preparing students to enter the teaching profession that we agree that developing the capacity for independent and engaged learning is key to involving students with their own learning. The challenge for us is to consider how to adapt our pedagogy, embedding the philosophy of L2L, or LH2L, in our courses; according to

Fallows and Steven (2000), a common concern amongst academics is that in limited curriculum time, it is not possible (or desirable) to spend time on teaching students how to learn. It may be that we draw on examples from schools where 'infusion' or 'epistemic change' programmes (Claxton, 2006) have been adopted. An Infusion approach is, as the name suggests, embraced at a whole school level. Classrooms become settings in which the various constituent elements of learning capacity (e.g. reflectiveness, resourcefulness, resilience and reciprocity) are acknowledged, discussed, understood and systematically strengthened. An epistemic culture employs particular language and activities which explicitly focus on stretching each aspect of learning capacity. Intentions to expand learning capacity are made transparent and students are *actively involved* in making the culture even more effective. There is encouragement to look for out-of-school applications and modifications of the learning dispositions, so that a continual *transfer* of thinking occurs.

Revisiting epistemology: developing transformative cultures

According to Hofer (2001) research suggests that it is rare to find adults with a sophisticated, critically aware stance regarding 'knowledge' (King and Kitchener, 1994; Kuhn, 1991), and that studying at university has less effect than is often assumed, or claimed (see Hofer and Pintrich, 1997), since epistemological beliefs are deeply ingrained. If we accept that engagement with the learner's beliefs about the nature of knowledge is important in fostering self-learning amongst student teachers and, subsequently, NQTs, then it is useful to look at Hofer's (2001:367) clarification of three general views of epistemology and its relationship to learning: Epistemology is developmental, development is the aim of education, and thus part of the goal of education is to foster epistemological development; Epistemology exists in the form of beliefs, and learning is influenced by the epistemological beliefs that individuals hold; Epistemology is either theory-like

(Hofer and Pintrich, 1997) or exists as more fine-grained epistemological resources, and in the process of learning such theories and resources are activated and engaged in ways that are context-dependent. One attempt at challenging the implicit epistemological beliefs and positioning the university tutor as a co-learner can be found in the recent work of Alexander (2008) and Lefstein (2009) both of whom suggest the need to adopt a more critical stance when interpreting and explaining dialogue. In particular, their work is clear in that it offers a means of modeling dialogue between teachers and their pupils.

This makes it clear that creating a L2L environment focused more directly on problem-solving, and modeling the process of metacognition, are not sufficient to promote deeper engagement and to challenge 'common knowledge'. Attention also needs to be paid to the way in which dialogue is used in the creation of knowledge and understanding. After all, Alexander (2001) argues that dialogue in English classrooms is generally used as a culturally constructed means of social democracy; it is about ensuring all have an equal opportunity to have their voice heard, rather than ensuring that thinking is probed and extended. Current education practices based on social constructivism, for example dialogic teaching (Alexander, 2001, 2008), view pedagogic interaction as cooperative inquiry with participants building on each others' ideas to reach common knowledge, rather than starting from difference & engaging in critical argument. Drawing on the vocabulary of L2L, and the theory of epistemology 'protecting' existing views about knowledge, it is clear that without a focus on developing *ways* of talking, and starting from difference and disagreement, students will not be encouraged to become 'sceptics' or 'explorers'. If we are to motivate learners to develop and question their own values, beliefs and epistemologies, then we need to look more closely at this construct of 'common understandings'.

Drawing on the work of Gadamer (1998), Lefstein proposes the metaphor of *fusion of horizons*. This explains that each participant brings their own perspective, or *horizon* of assumptions, prejudices, values and ideas to the dialogue, and is only able to 'see' what is on their horizon; their prejudice limits their thinking. Another person's horizon, however, has the capacity to reflect back prejudices, and thus help participants to become more conscious of the boundedness of their own understanding. According to Lefstein (2006) rather than simply developing coherent chains of thinking and enquiry through talk, we need to develop criticality. Although students are encouraged to be 'critically analytical' in their writing, it is not clear how far this is modelled, explained or enacted in dialogue with each other and with tutors.

Current and potential challenges: developing a more collaborative and reciprocal model of teaching and learning

In the current climate of heightened accountability, a mandated curriculum and associated national Standards for Qualified Teacher Status (Qualified Teacher Status), Initial Teacher Education (ITE) providers in the United Kingdom (UK) can, at times, find themselves treading a narrow path between compliance with external demands and the desire to promote reflective teaching and learning (Ax & Brouwer, 2008; Cochran-Smith, 2005 and Shulman, 2005, cited in Good, McCaslin, Tsang, Zhang, Wiley, & Bozack, 2009; Fisher & Rush, 2008; Geens, James & MacBlain, 2009; Gillard, 2005; Li, 2008). Despite, or perhaps because of the unnatural divide which has occurred between practice and academic learning, we need to design ways of *involving* students with their *own* learning. Part of the challenge today for teacher educators and head teachers (referred to as principals in Northern Ireland) is making our young teachers more reflective through our ITE courses, because it is this reflection that will help them to be successful teachers working in inner city contexts where there is a wide diversity of needs.

The key to this may be to develop a more collaborative and reciprocal model of teaching and learning; one in which the role of epistemology (one's beliefs about the nature of knowledge) is more clearly articulated, through dialogues at a range of levels and where alternative perspectives are more carefully discussed, considered, and articulated, and more fully understood by those tasked with employing the new teachers of the future. At the very heart of such a collaborative and reciprocal model lies the need for Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) to engage in dialogues with each other, with their university tutors and with the practitioners in schools with whom they come into contact. It is through such dialogues that our realities are constructed and our understanding of events takes on wider meaning.

It is clear that with the growth of a culture of 'lifelong learning' student teachers need to begin their professional life with the will, and ability, to engage fully and actively in what is a rapidly changing knowledge society driven by advances in ICT, global networking, increased materialism and, more recently, fractured economies. Given this premise it is not unrealistic to argue that this has obvious and major implications for head teachers and school governors, tasked with appointing Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) into a profession that must respond to these new challenges. They must, it can be argued, go beyond focusing upon functional levels of competency when making appointments; much greater account must be taken of those belief systems that NQTs have in regard to their own thinking and learning; the metacognitive structures and capacities that they have internalized and that have contributed to their personal qualities of resilience, reflectivity, sensitivity, and caring.

Claxton (2006) argues that the current narrow focus on lifelong learning for an employment agenda ignores the fact that many young people lack personal resources to cope with the high levels of challenge, complexity and individual responsibility that the twenty-first century

requires. Wingate (2007) writes that although attention has been paid to students who enter Higher Education (HE) through non-traditional routes, what is often not acknowledged is that learning at university is *different*, even for traditional entrants. In a league-table culture of spoon-feeding 'knowledge', students are less equipped for self-learning (National Audit Office, 2002). What seems evident is that when student teachers perceive a disconnection between university and the 'real world' of the school classroom, the potential for real engagement with thinking is lost. Taught sessions, therefore, become reduced in the minds of the students to serving a limited and functional twofold purpose: firstly, to gain knowledge which is to be reproduced in order to pass the academic requirements of the course; secondly, to increase a professional repertoire of demonstration lessons which may be used to pass teaching practice. To develop a more transformative culture, we need to examine more closely as tutors what we mean by 'learning', and how we can expand in our students the capacity, and the will, to engage with learning at a much deeper level, and in a systematic and sustained way. Central to the work of university tutors preparing students to enter the teaching profession lies a key question, do head teachers see the role of university tutors as preparing 'trainees' or 'educators'?

Conclusion

This paper set out to examine the culture of learning that exists within Initial Teacher Education and the extent to which this culture adequately prepares NQTs for meeting the challenges of working in inner-city schools in the C21st. It addressed the need for a greater emphasis upon dialogue as a central device in any culture of learning in higher education and emphasised how dialogue lies at the very heart of effective preparation of future teachers. Equally important was the focus upon the nature of knowledge and those acquired belief systems that inform or militate against critical and reflective learning in

students being prepared to enter the profession of teaching.

The paper identified two key elements to the learning of students in ITE. The first is preparing individuals to be effective and purposeful practitioners and the second is developing reflective individuals able to innovatively prepare future generations for the challenges ahead. There appears to be a stronger more traditional focus on teaching and the delivery of knowledge in higher education, as opposed to a focus on the processes that underpin effective learning and how these might be developed. As we engage with the challenges of the C21st. it is now, more than ever, essential to engage students preparing to enter the teaching profession with their own learning.

University departments at the centre of Initial Teacher Education need increasingly to confront the ways in which they deliver their curricula and to engage in much deeper and more rigorous reflection on how they support, effectively or otherwise, those students in ITE who have, to date, required selected and chunk-sized curricula, all too often underpinned by programmes in remedial academic writing. Tutors need to model and expound, through their interactions with students, the belief that abilities are not fixed and that what is more important is the realization of potential and the means by which this can be achieved. Moreover, tutors need to engage their students with those philosophical notions of the uncertainty of knowledge and how their understanding can be, and is, constructed through dialogue and through critical reflection resulting from interaction with their peers, their tutors and those pupils, teachers, parents, and other professionals they meet during the course of their ITE programmes. It is by engaging like this that they can come to better prepare their students for meeting the challenges of working in schools in the 21st. century.

The paper has emphasized the importance of establishing and promoting university environments in ITE where learning how to learn is seen as a core principle in the preparation of teachers working with all children, and perhaps more particularly, those with complex social, emotional and learning difficulties. Particular emphasis has been placed within this paper on the role played by epistemology and dialogue, which are extremely powerful ways of affecting change in practice. After all, there is more to learning than acquiring a body of professional knowledge.

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