



ESCalate Research Grant Project Final Report

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Project Title Meeting the Every Child Matters agenda and the challenge for employers: a tale of two cities

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Title: “Meeting the Every Child Matters agenda and the challenge for employers: a tale of two cities.”
Final Report

1. Summary

This study highlights the importance of the personal qualities of Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) in meeting the diverse needs of children in inner-city schools. The study presents a positive picture of NQTs being well supported in their initial year of teaching but raises important questions for providers of Initial Teacher Training (ITT) in England and Initial Teacher Education (ITE) in Northern Ireland. Given that these personal qualities are extremely important in ensuring that NQTs can cope with the demands of the job, then there is a pressing need to address this in the pre-service phase. Findings from the study suggest that the development of personal skills (for instance: assertiveness, managing stress, employing effective coping mechanisms, communication, building rapport with others and a sense of humour) should not be left to chance but should be central to the preparation for entry to the teaching profession. The study revealed that none of the subjects at the centre of the study were contemplating leaving the profession. Instead, there were strong indicators that they were taking full advantage of the ‘open door’ policy of support. The study also indicated that the perceptions held by NQTs of childhood and special educational needs and disability and their levels of confidence in effectively managing these needs prior to taking up employment were of significant importance.

2. Project overview

Many teachers working in inner-city schools now have to work in ways that demand greater understanding of the complex needs of large numbers of children. In addition to this, the teaching profession has undergone huge change over the past decades with the inclusion of many children with complex needs within mainstream schools and the introduction of new initiatives by government, coupled with increased accountability and responsibility. In 2008 there were, for example, nearly one and a half million pupils with special educational needs in schools in England, equating to approximately 20% of the school population. In addition, in terms of linguistic diversity there were over half a million pupils learning English as an Additional Language (EAL) in England, reflecting over 200 native languages. In addition to the above, NQTs may encounter the effects of abuse and neglect of pupils within their care and their ability and confidence in dealing with this aspect of their professional work will, in part, depend upon the effectiveness of the training they have received as well as their personal qualities such as resilience and coping mechanisms.

Faced with this growing number of pupils with complex social and emotional needs and those pupils whose first language is not English head teachers are being increasingly faced with the challenge of employing NQTs who need a different type of skills and knowledge base and the necessary personal qualities to effectively respond to the challenges of teaching in the twenty first century. In addition, across the U. K. the training of teachers has been subjected to increased scrutiny with some arguing that the manner in which they are prepared to work as teachers is outdated and destined to oblivion and that many teachers entering the profession are ill-prepared and that following expensive appointment processes too many are leaving the profession after only a short period of employment.

This joint project, between University College Plymouth, St. Mark and St. John and Stranmillis University College, aimed to explore, against the "Every Child Matters" initiative and the ongoing multi-million pounds of regeneration in the cities of Plymouth and Belfast, the extent to which schools in similar cities are, in reality, responding to the emotional, social and health needs of pupils. The project sought to investigate current thinking behind how teachers in training are prepared to meet the changing needs of students growing up in cities experiencing regeneration and the decision making processes behind recruitment. Specifically, the project sought to ascertain:

1. what personal qualities head teachers seek when making appointments of NQTs,
2. what level of skills base they are looking for in regard to understanding emotional and social development.,
3. what continuing professional development they expect to provide for NQTs,
4. how Higher Education Institutions can better prepare teachers in training for working in schools where there are high levels of need amongst pupils

Methodology

Initially, prior to the project formally commencing anecdotal evidence was gathered through conversations with university college tutors, visiting students on professional placement in schools and through talking with final year students on the B. Ed. degree and the PGCE programme, and with head teachers known to the project team. In this

way, issues were identified and thinking became more focused, particularly in terms of what we hoped to investigate. A number of meetings of the initial project team took place and through these a number of hypotheses were identified and an initial structure to the study emerged. Following this, data was gathered from final year B. Ed. degree and PGCE students across both institutions using questionnaires, which sought to gain a baseline assessment of the PSHE experience and confidence levels of students in these cohorts in regard to dealing with the needs of children with a range of emotional and social difficulties. Once information was gathered a data base was set up to hold the information and then select a number of students who could be tracked into their first teaching post within both cities when they could be interviewed, and their head teachers also interviewed. In all, seven students were chosen in each of the two cities including students taking up posts in specialist schools with children with moderate and complex difficulties. Interviews took place and data was transcribed and logged for future use in publication, conference presentations, and any subsequent dissemination. Subsequent to the interviews with the NQTs, separate individual interviews were carried out with the head teachers of each of the same schools where the NQT cohort were working. Once again the interviews were semi-structured and followed the same outline as the NQTs' interviews: what personal qualities did school head teachers seek at the appointment stage; what level of prior knowledge and skills were head teachers looking for in NQTs in relation to children's social and emotional development; what support was in place for the beginning teachers; and what suggestions could be made to improve the HEI courses. In accordance with ethical guidelines (BERA 2004) each of the participants was given sufficient information in advance regarding the purpose of the study, was assured of anonymity and confidentiality, and was informed that they could withdraw from the research project at any stage, if they so wished. One of the NQTs subsequently did withdraw. It was decided after analysis of the data and subsequent rejection of a submitted article by the two project leads from each institution that it was necessary to gather much wider data in order to gain possible publication through a strengthened design. As a result, new questionnaires were given to NQTs in Belfast (n=79).

In addition, a further feature emerged, which was considered to have significant value to the project and to future investigation in this area and to possible future publication. It emerged that the perceptions held by students and trainees in their pre-career phase in regard to the perceptions and personal constructions they had of the concept of "childhood" and of "disability" were of significant importance, especially with those students and trainees working within the area of early childhood and Key Stage 1 where the course of children's social, emotional and cognitive development was initially formulated. As a result, a further questionnaire was administered to final-year students on a range of programmes preparing students and trainees to work with young children (Stranmillis University College: (n=88) and University College Plymouth, St. Mark & St. John (n=57). As this data is analyzed it is anticipated that it will add significantly to the findings from the project and allow for wider and more accurate dissemination and possible future impact upon practice. It is now hoped to appoint two research assistants, one in each institution to contact all of the original interviewees by telephone and interview them to determine how their experience has been after a number of years and how they now feel about their skills and knowledge sets in regard to their own personal qualities and how these might have influenced their early career practice and to assist in the analysis and coding of this data.

Results

Findings from the project have offered clear support for the view that Initial Teacher Training (England) and Initial Teacher Education (Northern Ireland) providers should not assume that non-academic personal skills such as managing stress, developing resilience and effective coping strategies, being assertive and developing self-efficacy can be left to chance but should instead form a core part of the way in which teachers are prepared to work with children in the twenty first century.

The study offered further evidence for the view that the knowledge base and range of personal qualities and skills that are required for working in challenging and stressful situations within inner-city schools during the first years of teaching need to be more accurately defined and need to form a significant part of students and trainees' preparation. Findings from this study suggest that the preparation that some students receive prior to entering the teaching profession is in some aspects inadequate, resulting in lower levels of confidence in important areas such as meeting the needs of: pupils with English as an Additional Language, pupils who have been bereaved and who have suffered significant loss, and those with a range of special educational needs. The study found that confidence levels and the ability to cope with stress were lower amongst students on shorter PGCE courses than on longer B. Ed. Degree courses, which raises questions in regard to possible initiatives aimed at fast-tracking graduates into teaching careers. Data from this study also indicated that many students and trainees prior to beginning their careers may feel overly confident in their abilities to meet complex needs in children and may, in reality, not be as well prepared as they might think they are especially when meeting the emotional needs of children. The study offered strong evidence for the need for providers to look more closely at how students and trainees learn to recognise and

understand their own personal qualities and engage in greater critical self-analysis of their perceived levels of confidence in managing the challenging aspects of being a teacher in the twenty-first century.

Findings revealed a clear need for further research on a national scale to ascertain the true extent of the problem in Initial Teacher Training in regard to teachers leaving the profession after a short number of years and for the need to be supported in the early stages of their careers in developing effective coping mechanisms for managing the challenges of the workplace and their own stress levels. More work, for example, needs to be undertaken in terms of preparing teachers to work with other adults in the class room in the beginning stages of their careers and specifically when working with children with complex difficulties.

Interview data revealed many similar perceptions among NQTs and head teachers. Head teachers, in particular, recognized the value not just of academic qualifications but also of highly developed personal and social skills in NQTs which they saw as central to the formation of positive relationships with pupils, parents and colleagues and which support NQTs in coping with the challenges of meeting a wide range of diverse needs.

A further finding of the study was the strong indication that providers need to engage students and trainees more with their own learning, and particularly with those philosophical notions of the uncertainty of knowledge and how understanding is constructed through dialogue and critical reflection and that a much greater emphasis should be placed upon learning based on interaction with other professionals, tutors, peers and children during the course of their studies.

In summary, the findings have strong implications for how NQTs are prepared for their professional careers and for the level and type of support they are offered in their first years of teaching. The process of undertaking this study has already impacted greatly on the practice of both institutions at the heart of the study resulting in significant changes to undergraduate and postgraduate programmes within, for example, the area of special needs and/or disability and the extent to which colleagues new to research have found themselves developing their conferencing and publication skills, and knowledge.

Project Impact

University College Plymouth, St. Mark & St. John

A particular benefit of the project has been that a number of staff relatively new to research and academic publication have joined with the project team and this has given us increased impetus in the School of Education (Now the Faculty of Education, Health and Welfare) in terms of academic output and increased scholarly activity.

Within the college our findings from the project have caused us to scrutinize what we do with our undergraduate and post graduate students engaged in teacher training. For example, we have:

- Doubled the SEN input on the B.Ed. degree.
- Altered content of modules for the B.Ed. and PGCE (Primary) programmes in the area of SEN to prepare those students about to complete their training and enter the workplace. This last academic year saw us with over 95% of our trainees in employment and with a grade of “outstanding” from Ofsted, which took particular note of the high quality of preparation of our students to work with children with additional needs. We felt that as a result of the project we were much more informed in what we were doing in terms of preparing our students for the workplace.
- Further developed our partnership with specialist schools.
- Developed our M. Ed. Programme to incorporate new modules aimed at supporting the professional development of Newly Qualified Teachers in the initial stages of teaching and working with pupils with SEN. In addition to this we are hoping to launch a new M.Sc. degree in January 2012, which will be aimed at developing the professional practice of those currently supporting individuals with disabilities.
- Increased the number of staff engaged in research particularly in regard to delivering conference papers and gaining publication.

Stranmillis University College, Belfast

- The Revised B.Ed. degree programme for Primary and Post-Primary includes a greater focus than before on SEN. This is now infused through all four years for all students rather than being introduced in year 3. For instance for the first time in 2011-2012 all year 3 primary *and* post-primary students will spend a week in a MLD/SLD special school context.
- There has been a growing interest in the area of AEN/Pastoral Care (which takes in the impact of bereavement, abuse, bullying etc) in recent years. This is reflected in the successful year 4 option for all B.Ed. students (Primary and Post-Primary) and also in the new M.Ed. specialist option in Pastoral Care which began in 2010 and which now has over 20 students enrolled on a part-time basis. Modules here focus on bullying, child protection and mental health issues.
- Development of the area of English as an Additional Language within the B.Ed. course, including a new link with the Inclusion and Diversity Service (placement for students and input into course)
- The further development of the B.Ed. alternative placement programme (now for *all* year 4 B.Ed. students) through which partnerships have been developed with a wide range of special schools, charities (e.g. Cruse Bereavement Care), behavioural centres., Alternative Education Providers and prison education.
- The development for 2012 of a new part-time introductory CPD course in SEN for serving teachers, classroom assistants and parents run in conjunction with Mencap NI.

As a result of undertaking this project the project team is now in the process of scoping the wider views and perceptions of Newly Qualified Teachers across Northern Ireland and in the South West of England in order to gain further and more detailed information regarding the initial stages of being a teacher. The team has also initiated a survey of the perceptions that PGCE, B. Ed., and B.A (Early Childhood Studies) students have of “early childhood disability”, which it is hoped will inform our own practice, and through dissemination by publication and conference papers that of others. It is intended that staff from the project will present at the next annual Educational Studies Association of Ireland conference in March 2012 and the annual TEAN conference in Birmingham in May 2012 on the findings of our ESCalate project combined with those of our more recent data gathering in regard to “perceptions of childhood disability”.

Outputs

Journal articles

Purdy, N. and MacBlain, S. F. (Under review) Every NQT matters: supporting beginning teachers to meet pupils’ diverse needs. *European Journal of Teacher Education*.

MacBlain, S.F. and Purdy, N. (2011) Confidence or confusion: how well are today’s Newly Qualified Teachers in England prepared to meet the additional needs of children in schools? *Teacher Development*, Vol. 15, 3. 381-394. ISSN 1366-4530.

Fisher, A., MacBlain, S.F., Purdy, N., Curry, A., MacBlain, A.D. and Russell, K. (2010) Re-examining the culture of learning in Initial Teacher Education: engaging with the new demands of the 21st. century, *Critical and Reflective Practice in Education*, Vol. 2. 92-102. ISSN 2047-2544.

Geens, W., James, S. and MacBlain, S. F. Journeyman to Master: The Changing Shape of a PGCE Primary Course, *The International Journal of Learning*, Vol. 16, 8. 629-640. ISSN 1447-9494.

James, S., Jarrett, K. and MacBlain, S.F. (2010) Meeting the Every Child Matters agenda and the challenge for employers: a tale of two cities, in Haslett, S. and Pinder, J. (2010) *Regeneration and Learning: Continuity, Change and Community*, (Proceedings of the Regeneration and Learning Conference), 2010. Caerleon: University of Wales, Newport. ISBN 978-1-899274-39-0

Conference presentations

MacBlain, S.F., James, S. and Jarrett, K. *Meeting the Every Child Matters and the Challenge for Employers: A Tale of Two Cities*, Paper presented at the Fourth Annual Learning, Teaching and Research Conference, University College Plymouth, St. Mark & St. John, March 2010;

MacBlain, S.F., Jarrett, K. and James, S. (2009). *Meeting the Every Child Matters agenda and the challenge for employers: a tale of two cities*, Paper presented at the 5th. Annual ESCalate conference, Glyndŵr University, Wrexham, May, 2009.

Geens, W. and James, S. (2009) *Journeyman to Master: the changing shape of a PGCE Primary course*, Paper accepted for the 16th. International Learning Conference held at Barcelona University, Barcelona, July 2009.

MacBlain, S.F., James, S., Jarrett, K. (2009). *Employability of Student Teachers*, Paper accepted and presented at the annual Learning, Teaching and Research Conference University College Plymouth St Mark & St John April 2009.

Future planned dissemination activities

It is hoped to present the completed project at the following conferences:

- The *Educational Studies Association of Ireland Conference* in Cork, Ireland, 29th. to 31st. March 2012
- Presentation at annual *Tean Conference* in Birmingham, 18th. May 2012
- First Biennial International Conference “*Redefining the Contours of Learning, Teaching and Research in the 21st. Century*”, University College Plymouth, St. Mark & St. John, July, 2012.

Expenditure Profile Submitted to ESCalate

Summary

Faced with growing numbers of pupils with special needs head teachers are increasingly charged with the challenge of employing Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) who require not only different types of professional skills and knowledge sets but also the necessary personal qualities to respond effectively to the increasingly diverse needs of their pupils. This small-scale qualitative study undertaken by University College Plymouth, St. Mark & St. John and Stranmillis University College explored the experiences of NQTs and their head teachers in schools in inner-city Plymouth and Belfast. Findings revealed similar perceptions among NQTs and head teachers. Head teachers, in particular, recognised the value not just of academic qualifications but also of highly developed personal and social skills in NQTs which they saw as central to the formation of positive relationships with pupils, parents and colleagues and which support NQTs in coping with the challenges of meeting a wide range of diverse needs. The findings have implications for how NQTs are prepared for their professional careers and for the support they receive in their first years of teaching and have already impacted greatly on the practice of both institutions at the heart of the study resulting in significant changes to undergraduate and postgraduate programmes within, for example, the area of special needs and/or disability. It is important, therefore, that Initial Teacher Training (England) and Initial Teacher Education (Northern Ireland) providers do not assume that non-academic personal skills (for instance resilience and coping strategies, assertiveness, communication, confidence and sense of humour) are left to chance or serendipity but rather that they should offer a much greater focus in the preparation for entry to the teaching profession. It is these same teachers who are being prepared to develop such personal skills and personal capabilities in their pupils. This study is timely in that it comes at a time of much proposed change in the future recruitment and preparation of teachers in the UK.