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An action research project to promote the teaching of culturally and ethnically diverse history on a secondary Postgraduate Certificate of Education history course

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Background

There are concerns that many young people from minority ethnic backgrounds are not well served by the education system (e.g. Archer, 2008; Gillborn, 2008). Although the cause of these failings is complex evidence suggests that a combination of factors including the nature of the curriculum and teachers' pedagogical approaches and expectations contributes to this failure. Initial teacher education courses therefore have a role in addressing such concerns. As a consequence this raises questions about the role of teacher educators, and the extent to which trainees, especially those from essentially white, middle class backgrounds, are helped effectively in their attempts to teach young people from diverse backgrounds.

Research Questions

As the project was a piece of action research, different questions emerged during the study, however the main questions which shaped the research were:

How can I develop my own confidence and awareness of diversity within my history training?

How can I develop the confidence of trainee history teachers to promote diversity within their own teaching?

Methods

An action research approach was adopted. During the reconnaissance stage a literature review was conducted, interviews were carried out with eight experienced history teachers and questionnaires and 'scenario' interviews were carried out with five trainee history teachers. Self-reflection was used to focus on my own experience of diversity and the extent to which diversity featured within my training course.

During the two subsequent action cycles, two cohorts of trainee teachers were the subject of intervention. In both cohorts, six trainees agreed to participate (making a total of twelve students) so I could monitor any changes in their attitudes and dispositions. Thus trainees were questionaired and interviewed during their training year (twice with the first cohort and three times with the second cohort).

Frame

Due to the action research nature of the project, a theoretical framework emerged from the data. Thus a 'confidence-continuum' was devised to analyse trainees' positions and a model of 'tensions' was developed to explain their positions.

Research findings

The research shows that it is possible for trainees from white backgrounds to embrace diversity, although this varies by individual and is dependent on the learning context. It provides new frameworks and models for understanding these positions. It provides examples of practice to move trainees forward in their ability to incorporate diversity into their work.

