

**0307**

## **Integrating Rights in a Secondary PGCE - A Case Study**

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### **Background**

London Metropolitan University has a long history of widening participation and the pursuit of social justice. Our teacher education programme reflects this commitment by combining a focus on urban education with a diverse in-take of students. In 2007-08 the team of tutors who run the secondary teacher education programme began work on a new project to develop this historic commitment by embedding children's rights into our programme in a much more consistent, coherent and conscious way than we had in the past.

In the early stages this project had a very pragmatic appeal as it was evident that the children's rights agenda provided a robust framework in which we, as professionals keen to resist the pressure to become mere policy implementers, could interpret the welter of policy directives and 'advice' emanating from government departments and QUANGOs. This fits readily with Fullan's (1993) model of the teacher as change agent, constantly aware of the need to strive for technical excellence, but pursuing this through reflective inquiry in collaborative relationships, and with reference to our own personal (and institutional) vision for education and for our roles as teachers and teacher educators. In addition to using this framework to empower ourselves as teacher educators, we wanted to use this opportunity to refocus on supporting our students to see themselves as change agents as well.

From the outset of the planning process it was evident that, aside from the practical benefit of unifying diverse policy strands, one of the most valuable aspects to this project was the quality of conversations we were having as colleagues. Discussions have ranged from the purpose of teacher education and the nature of pedagogy; to the often uneasy relationship between inclusion and the standards agenda in schools and the cynicism in some quarters of the profession that school students already know enough about their rights and too little about their responsibilities. We also had to think about the nature of rights themselves and the ways in which this agenda might be interpreted in a multicultural university working in partnership with schools serving diverse communities in London. Here we were particularly aware of the academic and political arguments about the alleged cultural specificity of the notion of individual (and especially children's) rights, and the countervailing pressures to recognise alternative traditions, collective rights and therefore different cultural expectations and constructions of childhood.

### **Research Questions**

This paper presents a case study of the development of the Rights Respecting PGCE over the first two years. In particular it focuses on:

- The experiences of the course tutors and their assessment of the impact it has had on their work and their course development.
- The perceptions of student teachers, especially how they relate the rights theme to their own identity as teachers and their school experience.

The case study aims to provide some evaluation of the ways in which the rights perspective has impacted on the programme and identify key issues for future consideration.

### **Methods**

The case study will draw on primary data collected at London Metropolitan University from September 2008-July 2010. The following strategies have been / will be used:

- Interviews with tutors.
- Analysis of reports and papers prepared by tutors on aspects of their work in relation to rights.
- Analysis of evaluation data from students, collected at the beginning and end of the PGCE course, through the course intranet site.
- Interviews with a sample of students.
- Analysis of student assignments with a focus on children's rights.

## **Frame**

The case study aims to combine an element of evaluation (Yin, 1994) with Bassey's (1999) story-telling approach to educational case study. Through focusing on the details of experiences of people running and training on the PGCE course it aims to capture some of the perceptions of participants, rather than setting out to tell any objective single account. Through allowing a variety of stories to be told the case study will demonstrate the complexity of achieving change and illustrate the various ways in which change impacts on participants (Ball, 2006 / 1993).

Discussions among the tutors at the end of the first year identified a simple model to describe the ways in which we are seeking to use a rights focus to extend our practice and lend coherence to the programme. The model includes the following three dimensions:

- (1) Knowledge about rights,
- (2) Rights as pedagogy,
- (3) Rights as a values framework for the children's workforce.

This model was shared with the student teachers during the second year of the programme. The final case study will investigate the extent to which this model resonates with participants in the second year, and will consider whether it could provide a useful structure for future developments.

## **Research findings**

Teacher educators in England are constantly responding to policies and directives from government and London Met staff have sought to use the model outlined above to provide a stable framework within which we can interpret these changes. Through our on-going evaluation of our practice we hope to contribute to broader professional discussions about the future of ITE. It is significant that we have embarked on this work as the evidence emerges from UNICEF and others on the impact of rights respecting schools, as this offers the prospect of tying together emerging models of effective pedagogy in the school and teacher education in the university sector.