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Building a curriculum and pedagogy for professional teacher educators: what does it take and make to be a good teacher educator?

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Background

While research on teachers and their work is increasingly well documented (see for example Hyland 1993,1994,1998, Ecclestone 1998,2002) studies of teacher educators and their entry into,and careers paths within, the profession are less evident (see for exceptions Murray, Swennen and Shagrir 2009, Swennen and Van der Klink 2009, Noel 2006). All of the limited studies conducted to date have pointed to significant problems encountered by teachers and academics in the process of becoming a teacher educator. Swennen and Van der Klink (2009) showed how beginning teacher educators experience high levels of stress and insecurity during their first years in the profession and argued for the development of more planned and structured career paths into, and through, the profession for beginning teacher educators. Biesta (2009a 2009b) highlighted how the history of education particularly in the Anglo-Amercian tradition has in effect hindered the development and recognition of education as a discipline. He outlined how Education has variously been framed as an incoherent amalgam of other disciplines including, theology, psychology, sociology, philosophy, the humanities and management. In this contested area some have gone as far as to try remove knowledge and knowing from education altogether in an endeavour which cast education (or more accurately 'training') solely in terms of tightly prescribed batteries of 'skills', which it is assumed can simply be 'delivered' and measured in terms of predictable outcomes.

This paper reports the outcomes of a three year research study funded by the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS), as part of the Centre for Excellence in Teacher Training (CETT) policy initiative in Post Copulsory Education and Training (PCET) sector. Each of the eleven organisations awarded CETT status was asked to identify and focus upon a unique area of research and practice in the field of teacher education. The Centre of Excellence at the University of Sunderland (SUNCETT) offered to explore as its specialist area of research theoretical issues and practicalities in 'Raising the Professionalism of the PCET Teacher Educator Workforce.

Influenced by Dewey (1916, 1933) and Biesta and Burbules (2003) this work has ed to the development and validation of a Master of Arts Degree for Professional Teacher Educators which recognises and aims to address, shortcomings in their professional development identified above. It maps the course of our journey and tells the story of how we have attempted to negotiate our way through theoretical and practical issues in this field of study.

Research Questions

What do teacher educators need to know?

What makes a good teacher educator?

How should teacher educators go about what they do?

Methods

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Frame

Biesta illustrated how the work of Hirst (1966) provided a strong rationale for the Anglo-American constructions of the field of educational studies which 'deny any autonomous disciplinary status to education theory and locate all of the rigorous work within the fundamental disciplines. This makes the study of education a study of the 'phenomenon' of educational theory to which educational theory has no cognitive contribution to make which in turn is the reason for it lacking disciplinary status amongst other disciplines' (2009:6). Biesta demonstrated how this particular theoretical conception of education studies extended into the social organisation of the field across the Anglo-American world. Biesta argued educational theory mediates between the contributions of philosophy, history, psychology, sociology etc and educational practice and therefore cannot simply be taken to be a derivative of factual knowledge because factual knowledge can never provide a sufficient justification for what ought to be done. For Biesta the principles of educational theory cannot stand or fall on the validity of the knowledge contributed by philosophy, history, psychology, sociology because they do not and cannot ask educational questions about education. Biesta identified that what was at stake between Anglo-American and Continental constructions of the field was the very question of disciplinarity. While the Anglo-American construction conceived education as an interdisciplinary field, in contrast the very thing that was aimed at in Continental constructions (and in particular 'geisteswissenschaftlische Padagogik) was to make a strong case for the autonomy of Padagogik, the academic study of education as a discipline. Of particular importance here is the idea that while the identity of a discipline of education can therefore be characterised as objective in that it is focused on education as the object of study, the identity of Padagogik can best be characterised as normative

interest in education i.e. how we should best go about it. Although Biesta brought to light important differences between these two different constructions of the field he noted at least one remarkable connection between them in that both acknowledge that the 'central question generated by the theories of the 'science' of education are normative questions' which aim to generate guidelines about the right way of action in educational practice.

In concluding the case for the recognition of education as a discipline Beista drew attention to the inability of other disciplines to capture the reality of education and educationally relevant aspects of the world we inhabit.

Research findings

Through this Master of Arts degree we aim to enable teacher educators to use the disciples as resources and to encourage them to ask educational questions of other disciplines and about the discipline of education itself so that in turn they will be disposed to enable and encourage their own student teachers to ask educational questions about the subjects and disciplines which they teach. This paper will explore how the work of Dewey and Biesta might be translated into the programmes and practices of intial and coninuing professional development for professional teacher educators