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Spaces to Think, Places to Work: Sustainable Practice in the PCET Sector.

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Background

This piece of work builds upon a report from a recent conference held by the University of Sunderland's Centre for Excellence in Teacher Training (SUNCETT), which focused upon how lasting and sustainable change in the Post Compulsory Education & Training sector could be possible. Such change was supported by the views of the two keynote speakers at this event, Professor Michael Fielding & Professor Frank Coffield, who explored the need for teachers in the sector to have better places, more time, and space in order to work effectively.

Feedback from training providers, teachers, teacher educators, and senior managers, from the north-east of England, who attended the conference suggested that they left with a renewed sense of hope and opportunity in acting for the change they wished for; that is, a more sustainable culture of pedagogical practice.

Of the discussions, presentations, and debates that took place at the conference three themes emerged that were the focus of the report: shared values and vision, democracy, and sustainability. The theme of **shared values and vision** was explored due to views expressed at the conference in relation to employees, employers, and learners regaining a sense of purpose, community and coherence in the sector. Building upon this theme, the notion of **democracy wa**s discussed due to a general consensus at the conference that conditions for dialogue and debate are currently limited in our institutions. As one audience participant remarked, 'I don't feel brave enough to take ideas back to college ... there may be repercussions'. The report concluded by attempting to 'unpack' the notion of **sustainability** with an exploration of what practices and attitudes might be desirable and attainable for the long-term stability and success of the sector. This paper aims to take up this latter topic in more depth.

Research Questions

This paper asks, 'what would sustainable practice look like in the PCET sector?' It aims to examine the conditions that support long-term stability and security for teaching practitioners, and the impact this would have on the teachers themselves, their learners, the organisations within which they operate, and the sector as a whole.

Methods

This research will build upon feedback from the conference noted above, as well as the research of both Michael Fielding and Frank Coffield. However, it will draw significantly on UK government educational policies in general, and policy aimed towards the PCET sector in particular, in order to examine how the focus, and rapid output of such policy, may or may not contribute towards a culture of sustainability. From this, issues regarding educational values and the purpose of education, will be explored as possible stable and enduring human elements in a rapidly changing world that would support a sustainable sector. Thus, literature regarding educational values and purposes will be drawn upon.

Frame

This paper will take a largely philosophical approach.

Research findings

This paper will conclude that a sustainable PCET sector (and perhaps all education sectors) is one that is beneficial for all parties involved (learners, teachers, managers, etc.), including policy makers and government; as well as perhaps a necessary one if the aims of education that we all seek are to be fulfilled.

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