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Embedding Global Citizenship into Secondary Initial Teacher Training through the use of Virtual Schools: some lesson

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Abstract

This paper reports on the initial phases of a project that was designed to embed Education for Global Citizenship as a feature of the secondary provision for teacher training at the Cass School of Education, University of East London. In planning the project it was decided to build on recognised strengths of our provision – the 'virtual schools' initiative and our partnership relations. Both were recognised as strengths by Ofsted in their 2008 inspection of the work of the Secondary Group at UEL. The project sought to weave Education for Global Citizenship around the framework of these virtual schools using the strong partnership with school based colleagues to support this initiative.

 Those who focus only on teaching techniques and curriculum standards and who do not also engage teachers in the greater social and moral questions of their time, promote a diminished view of teaching and teacher professionalism that has no place in a sophisticated knowledge society [Hargreaves A, 2003, p151].

All routes into secondary teaching in England are constrained by a policy 'busyness and pace' (Hodgson and Spours, 2008) that have come to characterise becoming a teacher in recent times. One may, therefore, express some sympathy for teacher educators who feel under pressure in the delivery of their core subjects when preparing teachers. However, compliance to the specifics can easily stultify the creativity that is such an essential element to teaching. Those constraints, while considerable, can become justifications for not embarking on more imaginative teacher education curriculum initiatives.

It is clear that London, and East London in particular, presents a unique context for education. London is a global city and in many ways discussion of Global Citizenship is a discussion around being a citizen of London, how we live in the city offers a chance to 'laboratise' the way we live in the world. It goes without saying that this

offers up a range of challenges and opportunities, but it needs to be made explicit that this presents a moral imperative to engage with these challenges.

As we sit at the centre of the Thames Gateway development and right next door to the rapidly growing Olympic Park, thoughts of regeneration are never far from our mind-nor is the sound of building work very far from our ears! It is clear that education is within the regeneration agenda, in some cases only in as much as the effect of 'good' schools on land prices, and that the problem of the negative interaction between area disadvantage and educational attainment have been long standing concerns of both national and local policy. It is also evident that the London context adds a level of complexity to this because of the size and fragmentation of the education system within the city. The Secondary Team within the Cass School of Education at UEL conceptualises its actions within a social entrepreneur model and sees its partnership as being one way in which this fragmentation maybe diminished. We aim to work with schools to tackle aspects of disadvantage through working to redress balances within the teaching workforce, by offering partners access to pupil and staff enhancements and at core by securing the teaching workforce for this area.

Partnership

The UEL Secondary Partnership was originally set up in the six east London boroughs and over 7 years has increased the number of partner schools to over 100. The Ofsted inspection of the secondary ITT provision at UEL for 2007/08 noted, among the key strengths, "strong and effective commitment to inclusion and to schools in east London and the region" and "the exceptionally strong and cohesive partnership". This strength derives from the range of relationships that UEL as a whole maintains with schools, and from recruitment patterns that mean that "the vast majority of trainees come from London or its immediate environs". It is reflected in "the profile of successive cohorts and their success in gaining jobs in the partnership amply demonstrate the course's commitment to east London and its schools."

This project was part of our commitment to our core mission. It provided us with the opportunity to develop our trainees' knowledge and understanding of an important area, but was, through its structure, also able to support the development of this area within our partner schools.

Prior to introducing the project to trainees, the project team identified mentors and other interested practitioners from schools who would be willing to take part in the development of this project. The aim was that this group be involved in developing a briefing for cross-curricular tasks incorporating global citizenship into ITE and that they would provide feedback for subsequent development of the resource bank. The work of this group would be facilitated through a series of meetings supported by a wiki that was developed during the year. It was also hoped that this would support the work of those mentors, offering up 'pairs of hands' to develop materials. It was decided that these goals could be best served by the utilisation of the Virtual Schools project which involved all trainees and was already embedded in our ITE programmes.

Rationale and Development of the Virtual School Project
The UEL Virtual Schools project started in 2007-8 with Secondary PGCE trainees and now involves all Secondary ITE trainees (PGCE and GTP). The trainees are allocated on the first day of their training programme to a 'virtual' secondary school, each one with its own set of background information and data, and each school is given 'space' in which ideas, issues and problems can be discussed face to face and on an e-learning platform (a wiki). Each school is 'staffed' by approximately 15-18 trainees taken from the 11 secondary specialist subjects offered at UEL. This is seen as a way of addressing another common issue for secondary ITE providers, that is that secondary trainees value their specialist subject sessions highly, sometimes viewing the General Professional Studies (GPS) sessions as a less important and relevant part of their training. Trainee evaluations have routinely revealed that subject sessions are more highly rated than GPS sessions.

In September 2007 the current Professional Standards were introduced and their focus on 3 new aspects: the children's agenda (ECM), personalised learning and new professionalism including teamwork and collaboration needed to be reflected in the UEL GPS programme for 2007-8 onwards. In revising the GPS sessions, it was

decided that there should be an attempt to embed these themes coherently throughout the GPS programme, using the Virtual Schools project as the mechanism for achieving this. The new National Curriculum frameworks were implemented from September 2008 with an emphasis on cross curricular collaboration. The Global Citizenship Project was identified as a way of further developing dialogue between different subject groups and pedagogies and again the Virtual Schools could provide a 'realistic' context for this work. With the advent of the Virtual Schools Project, all Secondary ITE trainees sit together with other members of their 'School' in GPS sessions. Pre, in-session and post-session tasks are explored by the Virtual School staff group (trainees) working collaboratively both face to face and on-line.

It was clear from early on that the participants were engaging in the project as a form of role play and the Virtual Schools were providing a safe place for trainees to explore their future roles and take risks. The trainees were thinking and acting in role as teachers in a pretend school and were developing collaboratively the language of the professionals they were training to become.

The Global Citizen Project

The project was launched with our trainees at a core session on Global Citizenship in October 2008, this was supported by sections on this topic within their 'virtual school'. This introduction made clear that young people in schools are eager recipients of the eight concepts of the global dimension (Conflict Resolution, Social Justice, Values and Perceptions, Sustainable Development, Interdependence, Human Rights, Diversity and Global Citizenship).

In a 2006 poll conducted with over 2,300 students aged 11-16, on behalf of the Department for International Development, 83% wanted to know more about what is happening in developing countries, 56% thought they should learn about these issues in school and 66% were concerned about poverty in developing countries (MORI, 2006). A captive audience awaits in schools but, as in the case of mainstream subject areas, there is a danger of falling into the trap of delivering these themes in ways that seem divorced from the complexities, ambiguities and tensions that make up the lives of young people. In evaluating the success of 'Global Citizenship' as a cross-curricular theme in ITE it is important to acknowledge

this trap and two of its victims - those trainee teachers who prior to the project considered Global Citizenship irrelevant to their subject areas and those ITE subject tutors who believed that 'Global Citizenship had little to do with their roles as teacher educators. We will return to both later in this paper.

At the introductory Core session, which was run in conjunction with the Humanities Association, trainee teachers in each virtual school picked one of four themes ('Journeys', 'Conflict Resolution', 'Sustainability'; and 'Identities'). These themes would inform work on the virtual schools for the year and underpin the Global Citizenship Day. A subesquent briefing in December required them to decide:

- What activities will their pupils do during the day?
- What resources will they create to support those activities?
- Who will be doing the activities (e.g. whole of KS3? All year seven?)
- How will the day be run (e.g. suspended time table?)?
- What human resources are required (e.g. collaboration between teams, outside speakers etc)?
- What physical resources will you need on the day (e.g. DVDs/Flipcharts etc)?
- What physical resources will your 'virtual pupils' require (e.g. scissors, glue, ITC labs etc)?

With varying degrees of success each virtual school worked collaboratively on these questions between the December briefing and the Global Citizenship Day in February. On February 12th all secondary trainee teachers were brought into the main lecture hall at the start of the day and briefed. Their 'mission' was to:

1. Fill out an 'activity' plan for the day (5 hours worth of activities and resources for year 7/8/9 pupils) based on the December briefing day.

2. Produce 'Real' resources to support the planned activities for the day.

3. Prepare a 10 minute presentation 'selling' the day's activities to other virtual schools, partnerships and UEL teaching staff.

Each virtual school was allocated a base-classroom in which they worked with one of the nine citizenship teachers acting as advisors to the groups. The day culminated with presentations taking place in three areas of the school with each virtual school presenting to three other schools, Senior members of staff at UEL and the partnership teachers. The finished resources were posted up on the Virtual School sites by May 2009.

Evaluation

Evaluation of the project to date has been based on the feedback received from 111 evaluation forms that were filled out by the trainee teachers and the nine citizenship teachers from our partnership schools at the end of the day. These evaluations showed overwhelming support for the project to run next year. There were a number of improvements suggested from both the trainees and the mentors involved, these are detailed below. Many trainee teachers referred to 'creativity' as being a feature of the day. In part, this was felt to be due to the opportunity to work with trainee teachers from different subject areas. This was instrumental in exposing the trainees to new teaching ideas, styles and approaches, although it must be said that the impact here was largely from the ideas presented at the end of the day. One specific example is that it would appear that different disciplines use ICT in different ways leading many to comment on the insights into imaginative use of ICT teaching they took away with them. A number of benefits were identified. A number of trainees commented that despite being introduced to 'citizenship' on their courses and in the schools in which they trained many felt that the day had produced a greater awareness of what citizenship means and its relevance for their practice. Although initially problematic for some trainees, the pressure of having to create resources and activities under limited time conditions forged creativity and working relationships, fostering a group dynamic and professional attitude which, for some trainees, was akin to working in real schools. Some trainees commented on the benefits the project had for creating significant evidence for Standards Portfolios

Suggested improvements to the project from trainees and mentors:
- Many trainees felt that project should run over two days. While for some, the time constraints clearly motivated the groups to deliver by the end of the day –

others felt that they would have gained from a day of just preparation and a day where they could witness the presentations from all 12 schools.

- The realisation of the significant benefits of working in the virtual school came too late for many trainees. If the project ran earlier in the year this would cement relationships in the virtual schools and allow the virtual schools to play a more formative role in overall ITE provision.

- While many trainee teachers felt that benefits had been gained from the project' many felt that their work should be recognised by being formally assessed. It was also felt that being assessed would 'up' the level of participation of the virtual school members.

- Trainees and partnership mentors commented on the sizes of the virtual schools. Dividing a cohort of over 180 trainee teachers into twelve virtual schools for the day meant that despite the schools being 'cross-curricular', large group sizes meant that some trainees reverted to smaller subject groupings during the day thereby diminishing the cross-curricular nature of the work. In some cases group dynamics also affected by the dominance of certain members.

- It was universally felt that Citizenship specifications should be given in advance of the day's activities. Initially the decision was made to filter these through during the day rather than giving these to the schools in advance. This decision was made on the basis of not wanting to limit the creativity in ideas by restricting trainees to any specifications. However trainees commented on how useful they were in channelling that creativity.

- Many trainee teachers felt that greater provision of resources (e.g. lap-tops, laminators etc) would have enhanced the day. While ICT provision was backed up with a bank of extra lap-tops, issues arose with the robusteness of wireless connectiivity. Nevertheless, the large sizes of the groups meant that there were elements of frustration experienced by trainees as and when they were preparing their resources.

Conclusion

It is anticipated that given year-on-year funding the mentor input will continue and that the above points will also continue in an annual cycle. It is intended, however, that:

1. The baseline for the production of resources will be those that are produced in the previous year. In this way, year-on-year enhancement will take place.

2. There may also be scope for publication of these resources with all participants in the project being credited in the final product. This point should be achieved after 3 cycles of the project.

3. If year-on-year funding is not available then a number of these activities will continue due to the embedded nature of the process which should emerge after the first cycle (although level of mentor involvement might be compromised).

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