THE IMPACT OF STUDENT TEACHER’S RELIGIOUS EDUCATION SUBJECT KNOWLEDGE, EXPERIENCES AND ATTITUDES AND THEIR PREPAREDNESS FOR WORKING WITHIN THE FIELD OF ‘RACE’ AND ETHNICITY.

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The national student survey suggests that student teachers feel unprepared to deal with issues of ‘race’, and unable to work effectively with children with EAL (English as an additional language). Several studies have investigated this issue but often with little reference to the student’s previous knowledge and experiences. This project seeks to reflect on the prior knowledge and experience a PGCE (professional graduate certificate of education) cohort of primary student teachers bring to their education course (with particular reference to Religious Education) and the students’ appraisal of their attitudes and standpoint towards the end of their course.

Working within the interpretivist paradigm, in the first stage of the project, I devised a questionnaire and the participants self-assessed their subject knowledge of the six world religions on a four point Likert scale ranging from ‘good subject knowledge’ to ‘no knowledge’. These questionnaires provided data from ninety seven student teachers’ perceptions of their own cultural and religious knowledge, their experiences of religious education, the influence of family and friends, their experiences at school and their attitudes towards diversity. Consent was obtained, anonymity assured and ethical guidelines adhered to in all stages of the research.

Findings suggest that student's religious education subject knowledge, their own personal beliefs and those of close family and or friends had an impact (either positively or negatively), on their confidence in teaching RE and exploring issues of diversity in the classroom. Stage two of the research (under review) discusses the findings from semi structured interviews with a small sample from the cohort.
The presentation will include discussion of a framework which can be adopted by teacher educators to facilitate student teachers teaching for, and about, diversity in the classroom more effectively. This includes appraisal of student teacher mindset, managed teaching and learning strategies and an understanding of critical multiculturalism.