WHAT UNIVERSITIES BRING TO INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION: PARTNERSHIP MODELS TO PROMOTE CRITICAL REFLECTION AND PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Pete Sorensen
University of Nottingham, Nottingham, UK

This paper presents a re-analysis of data gathered from a series of research studies conducted collaboratively within a number of HEI-school initial teacher education partnerships over a ten year period. The aim was to identify distinctive characteristics of the structures and practices that were associated with the development of teachers as critical reflective practitioners, with a collaborative, enquiring stance towards their professional development. Such teacher attributes were chosen as they are highlighted as important by a vast array of research in the fields of teacher education, as reflected in the findings of the recent BERA-RSA Inquiry into research and teacher education (e.g. Burn and Mutton, 2013).

The original research studies focused on:

- the development of practice in the use of technology to support learning;
- the development in practices to support the teaching of particular aspects of a subject;
- the use of paired and multiple practicum placements;
- the use of enquiry approaches to learning to teach.

Common to each of the 22 studies was a focus on how particular structures and practices had influenced learning. In this paper, I take an interpretivist perspective, with each study serving as an individual case within a collective case study. The data generated varied between cases, but involved faculty tutors, mentors and student teachers, and included the use of questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, lesson observations, field notes and examination of artefacts. The analysis of the collective case involved constant comparison leading to the identification of common themes and issues.

The outcomes lend empirical support to the view that close partnerships between schools and universities do indeed support the development of critically reflective practitioners. Within such partnerships the use of paired or multiple placements of student teachers in the school practicum and enquiry based, collaborative approaches emerged as distinctively influential practices that are crucial to the production of ‘professional teachers who are scholars of educational research’ (Winch, Oancea and Orchard, 2013:7) and hence have the potential to transform practices (Zeichner, 2009). The analysis also revealed that a number of obstacles to learning and change recur across cases, many associated with the pressure to negotiate ‘official discourse’, performativity and high stakes accountability agendas. The implications for teacher education policy and practices are discussed in relation to the themes emerging from these cases and a climate in which successive governments have raised questions about the role of universities in teacher education (Furlong, 2013).