PROMOTING REFLECTION ON THE DIGITALISED CULTURES AND SPACES OF SCHOOLING

Sara Bragg
University of Brighton, Brighton, UK

The University of Brighton School of Education is one of the largest sites of ITE in the country. In this project we aim to bridge its cultures of research and practice, by bringing together lecturers, with active researchers and with student teachers on ITE courses, for a series of discussion and workshops.

The key principles of its process (following Thomson 2013) include: shared commitments; decentring expertise; respect for diverse ‘voices’; and a desire to generate genuine “research middlework” in investigating and representing a topic.

The broad focus is on the ‘digitalised cultures and spaces’ of schooling - challenging issues that deserve to be considered away from enculturation into institutional routines, and where ‘research’ perspectives often differ markedly from practitioner-oriented ones. These include:

- The implications of computational or digital practices for professional work and identities, such as the increasing centrality of data and software systems to processes of teaching and school improvement; the mundane use of surveillance technologies such as CCTV and what this means for student-teacher relationships (Hope 2009); how ‘digital’ metaphors of networks, nodes and so on are permeating how we think and talk about learning (Loveless and Williamson 2013).

- ‘Digital childhoods’ – young people’s media cultures and relationships with screens, social media, new technology and gaming – in schools, how schools respond (e.g. often by excluding them, and by constructing both children and teachers as ‘at risk’ from their supposed refiguring of professional and intimate boundaries). This aspect is being considered also as part of another research project in which the PI is involved with colleagues from the University of Sussex and the Open University: Face 2 Face: tracing the real and the mediated in children’s cultural worlds (09/2013 – 08/2014).

Project participants will consider these issues in the light of research and contemporary practice in schools. Our ultimate aim is to generate vignettes and other toolkits or teaching materials in different media that help to highlight some of the dilemmas, contradictions and issues associated with various aspects of digital cultures. These vignettes will allow actions and contexts to be explored; help clarify people’s judgements; and provide a less personal and therefore less threatening way of exploring complex or sensitive topics.