This paper is based on my work as a teacher educator on our University’s Primary PGCE course. As part of a number of aspects on social justice within the course, I present a day’s teaching on the links between Poverty and Education. As one of four rotating elements of a 40-credit M-level module, this day is presented to groups of around 20 student teachers. In this ‘Reflective Practitioner’ module as a whole, issues related to teacher identity, and the role of schools in reproducing the dominant cultures of society are explored. Within my day’s teaching (based on a number of texts read by the student teachers beforehand) we discuss such themes as justice, poverty and class, the relationships between poverty and educational attainment, and the role of teacher expectations. The extent to which the links between poverty and attainment are structural is discussed, but approaches taken by schools which aim to counteract the impact of poverty, are also explored, based on both research and student teachers’ experiences.

Much of the teaching on this day is dialogic in character, and explorations of issues related to poverty are, of course, political, and can be contentious. Large differences between students’ levels of interest and understanding can be apparent, and wide-ranging views are often expressed, all of which can either enhance or compromise the dialogic space (Wegerif, 2010) in which change can take place. Group dynamics add another level of complexity, as do reflections on my own role as teacher educator: to what extent can and should my stance be neutral during these discussions?

In the paper I will explore such issues, relying in part on discourse analysis of data gathered during some of my teaching sessions on Poverty and Education. I will present a range of student teachers’ views related to this topic, and explore how these views are expressed and built on during the discussions. Where relevant I will also discuss if there is any evidence of perspectives being changed during the interactions and the processes involved in this, and explore my teacher educator’s role.