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**The Role of Initial Teacher Education in the Development of Interculturalism in
Irish Primary Education**

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Abstract

This paper examines how the views of teacher education students in a College of Education in South Western Ireland have developed during their three-year programme. The survey took place in May 2003 and examined first year and third (final) year students in the Bachelor of Education programme. The survey examines the personal and professional beliefs of the students and analyses the difference in scores. The paper then moves on to look at various aspects of how teacher education can affect the appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes of intercultural issues as they relate to the education of all students.

Key Words: Interculturalism, education, initial teacher education, primary schools, diversity.

Introduction

The role of initial teacher education in the development of an Irish society that sees difference not as something to be feared but rather as an opportunity to develop cannot be overestimated. It is in the primary school that children begin to develop their perception of what is socially acceptable. As the 1937 Constitution of Ireland rightly states in Article 42.1 '...the primary and natural educator of the child is the Family...', however it is at school that children truly begin to assimilate the correct

and the incorrect modes of social interaction. These modes are influenced extensively by the child's interaction with their peers and in a more subtle manner by the atmosphere created by the teacher in the classroom. As such the role of initial teacher education is of vital importance in creating primary school teachers who are not only aware of the issues in relation to diversity but who are more importantly capable of dealing with these issues in a sensitive and progressive manner.

Instruments

'The instrument that was administered to the preservice teachers was the Personal and Professional Beliefs about Diversity Scale (Pohan & Aguilar: 2001). The scales were selected for a number of reasons. Firstly, the scales incorporate multiple aspects of diversity and thus constitute a comprehensive and in-depth measurement instrument of attitudes towards diversity. Secondly, validity and reliability measures for the scale are acceptable.

The Personal Beliefs About Diversity Scale (Fig. 1A) consists of 15 items relating to 7 diversity issues: race/ethnicity, gender, social class, sexual orientation, disabilities, language and sexual orientation. The Professional beliefs About diversity Scale (Fig 1B) is made up of 26 items relating to 7 diversity issues: race/ethnicity, gender, social class, sexual orientation, disabilities, language and religion. Both scales have likert response format; participants responded to statements choosing one response from a choice of five options (1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= undecided, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree).'(Leavy :2003)

Education is the Key

"Education is either part of the solution or part of the problem" (Tormey, 2003: 1). Nowhere is this more relevant than in the area of intercultural education¹. In a society, which is faced with the challenge of progressing from its predominantly monocultural past, education has an intrinsic role to play to ensure that this challenge is seen not as an obstacle but as an opportunity. As such the response of initial teacher education courses are of vital importance .No amount of curriculum material or initiatives can

¹ The term 'intercultural' can be defined as the 'interaction and interchange of values, lifestyles and symbolic representations between individuals and amongst groups' (Ghosh and Tarrow,1993: 81). In some instances the term 'multicultural' shall be encountered as it is the common term in North America and it will be taken to imply the same as intercultural.

make a significant difference unless the teachers possess the relative knowledge, skills and attitudes to implement them effectively. 'The medium is the message' (McLuhan, 1964:53).

The purpose of this paper is two fold. First, to look at the personal and professional beliefs of teacher education students at the beginning and the end of their programme of study, and to examine the reasons and implications of the findings. Secondly, the paper deals with the recommendations of various educational theorists and how these can be applied in our education system.

The survey, designed by Dr. Leavy, deals with personal and professional beliefs of teacher education students. Both professional and personal beliefs of students were examined as 'previously held beliefs about teaching often serves as a filter through which all that is encountered in their education course is filtered' (Pohan, 1996:63). The survey was administered, by Dr. Leavy, to 286 first year teacher education students in the 2002 – 2003 academic year and I administered the survey to 119 third year students in 2003. The following is a comparison of the findings of both surveys,

Results

Personal Beliefs

The bar chart in Figure 2 illustrates that the only question in which the first years scored higher than the third years was in question ten (the settled value education more than travellers). This decrease in tolerance could be seen as a result of the third years having encountered children from the travelling community and perhaps experiencing problems with attendance. However Jackson (1986) would maintain that teachers who are from a different culture to that of their students are unable to make a "presumption of shared identity" and as a result may have difficulty in interpreting student's behaviour (Noordhoff and Kleinfeld, 1993: 28.).

There were substantial increases in questions four (increase of 0.15), eleven (increase of 0.32), twelve (increase of 0.15), fifteen (increase of 0.24) and sixteen (increase of

0.14). The increase in these areas could be seen as a natural by product of students increased exposure to different cultures, belief systems etc. and of attending a third level institute situated in an increasingly diverse city. Also these increases can be seen as a consequence of the students studying such subjects as sociology, which make them more aware of the reasons behind some of these issues. However on closer analysis these increases are not that prominent.

The results can be categorised in to three groups. High tolerance of 3.5 or greater, midrange tolerance of 2.5 to 3.5 and low tolerance scores of 2.5 or lower. Analysis of the data shows that third years have no items in the low tolerance while first year's posses one (women in poverty because of males), with this question being placed in the mid range category for third years. Excluding this question the results follow a similar pattern. It must be taken into account that first years had eleven items in the high tolerance range and therefore there was not much scope for increase. First years had 6.25% of answers in the low tolerance category, 25% in midrange and 68.75% in the high tolerance category. In comparison, third years had 0% in the low range category, 25% in midrange and 75% in the high tolerance range. A table containing the categorised mean scores can be seen in Fig 3.

Professional Beliefs

Let us turn our attention now to a comparison of the scores in relation to professional beliefs. The average scores for professional beliefs display some interesting results, with the first years scoring higher on 1/3 of the items. The differentiation was most notable in questions five and twenty two. Question five (money for gifted programmes) displays a decrease of 0.24 between first years and third years. This discrepancy could perhaps be seen as a result of the focus in special educational needs on the requirements of children with disabilities rather than children who are gifted. This generalising, that special needs relates only to disabilities, may well be viewed as symptomatic of the manner in which the topic is approached (see Noordhoff and Kleinfeld, 1993:29).

Item twenty two (teachers should have experience of diverse backgrounds) reveals a drop 0.3. This drop could be viewed as result of two beliefs; firstly undergraduates

neering the end of their course may believe they are sufficiently prepared and aware to deal with this issue or secondly they believe that having an understanding of diverse backgrounds will not benefit *all* students. The first of these viewpoints presents a lack of cultural awareness, for if teachers are not aware of 'their own socialization biases' then they may fail to perceive the value and importance of intercultural awareness (Ponterotto et al, 1998: 1003). The second perspective may be seen as similar to that of the viewpoint of special educational needs, that is to say, the belief that interculturalism is only important in relation to those students who possess diverse backgrounds.

The most notable increases took place in items two (increase of 0.39), ten (increase of 0.71), eleven (increase of 0.32), fifteen (0.4), eighteen (0.59) and item twenty one (increase of 0.26). Item two (middle-class classrooms) displays a developing understanding of the sociocultural nature of education furthermore the increase of 0.4 in item fifteen (monocultural education) highlights again the fact that students are becoming more aware of the dominant class bias in the education system. Items ten and eleven (representation of ethnic minorities and the Travelling community) further reinforce this view point, these increases could also be as result of the third years being more experienced in teaching and encountering a variety of schools; the same reasoning may be applied to item twenty one (SPED, Travelling community). See Fig 4 for a comparison of the scores.

As with the personal beliefs the results can be categorised in to three groups: High tolerance 3.5 or greater, midrange tolerance of 2.5 to 3.5 and low tolerance scores of 2.5 or lower. First years had 29.63% of answers in the midrange tolerance category and 70.37% in the high tolerance category. Third years presented figures of 25.93% in midrange tolerance and 74.07% in the high tolerance category. Neither first nor third years had any item in the low tolerance category. This is illustrated in figure 5.

Discussion

Our attention now turns to the question of whether teacher education can affect the appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes of intercultural issues as they relate to the education of all students. There have been numerous arguments put forward both for and against the effectiveness of intercultural courses. Finney and Orr (1995: 327-333)

found that while the majority of teachers gained something positive from an intercultural course they were unable to identify the sociocultural, economic and political contexts of discrimination and dominant culture privilege. Indeed Ahlquist (1992:89-105) would go so far as to say that many trainee teachers possess varying levels of resistance to change and it is likely that this resistance shall prevent them achieving the requisite understanding of the issue of diversity. However in many instances intercultural courses have not achieved their potential as they have been either 'sporadic, fragmentary, or optional extras' (Phuntsog, 1995:10). Indeed Noordhoff and Kleinfeld (1993:29) have argued that such an approach may actually contribute to teachers over generalising and forming stereotypes of diverse groups. So what then is required if initial teacher education programmes are to imbue essential inter cultural dispositions?

Institutional and Programmatic Principles

Zeichner, Grant et al. (1998: 163) outline three categories under which this question should be examined, institutional and programmatic principles, personnel principles and curriculum and instruction principles. Under institutional and programmatic principles they hold that 'the mission, policies and procedures of the institution reflect the values of diversity and multicultural education', this is to ensure that the institution declares its commitment to inter cultural education (Zeichner, Grant et al., 1998:63-64). Institutional commitment to interculturalism relates to the provision of adequate funding, time, faculty development and the recruitment of staff with expertise in this field. However the institution must go further than this, it must not only preach intercultural ideas it must practice them. Teachers teach as they were taught as such interculturalism must not be viewed in isolation but must rather permeate the climate and culture of the institution. This should not be restricted merely to the education section of the college but also the academic subjects should attempt to consider topics from different perspectives. In this way the institution can move away from a fragmented approach to 'changing all parts of the educational process to make them responsive to cultural diversity' (Fox and Gay, 1995:66).

Personnel Principles

Under personnel principles institutions should examine their admission requirements and also ensure that staff are 'committed to and competent in multicultural teacher education (Zeichner, Grant et al, 1998: 165). In relation to admission criterion it could

be argued that the system currently in place in Colleges of Education contains traces of institutional discrimination as the requirement of honours Irish contributes to the creation of a monocultural teaching population which is at odds with the increasingly diverse ethnic compositions of our classrooms. The current emphasis on academic achievement underestimates various other strengths that an individual may bring to the teaching profession. Perhaps the re-introduction of interviews could play a role in developing a diverse teaching group. Haberman's (1995) interviews are an example of interviews that attempt to detect teaching candidates with firm potential to succeed in urban schools (Ibid: 165)

Curriculum and Instruction Principles

Under curriculum and instruction principles Zeichner, Grant et al state that an intercultural programme should begin by helping prospective teachers become more aware of their own identities (Ibid: 165). The importance of this awareness has been encountered previously when we examined some of the possible reasons for the drop in item twenty two (teachers should have experience of diverse backgrounds) of the professional beliefs. This self-knowledge is required if teachers are to be effective in an intercultural society. This development of self-awareness should not be restricted to students as Melnick and Zeichner maintain that a 'systematic staff development' is necessary so as staff may learn about 'various aspects of teacher education for diversity and ways to infuse it into their institution' (1998:91). To become 'agents of change' students should be encouraged to play an active role in the governance and operation of their own teacher education programs' (Zeichner, Grant et al, 1998:168). Finally any intercultural programme should allow room for fieldwork and interaction with the community. As seen in the survey, programmes which are too theory based may lead to over generalisation of a groups culture.

Conclusion

'The medium is the message' (McLuhan, 1964:53) and in the present time the message is not being delivered as effectively as it could. The research has shown that certain improvements are occurring in teacher beliefs and attitudes to diversity. However, there is much more that could be achieved. Paulo Freire believed that human completion is achieved through praxis where praxis is "the action and reflection of men upon their world in order to transform it" (1972:52). Man's activity is theory *and* practice. At this time, I believe there exists only theory in our teacher training

institutes. The challenge now presenting itself is to combine this theory with practice and by doing so to act upon and transform education such that it becomes part of the solution.

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Figures

Figure 1A

Personal Beliefs About Diversity Scale

1. There is nothing wrong with people from different racial backgrounds having/raising children.
2. Ireland's immigrant and refugee policy has led to the deterioration of Ireland.
3. Making all public facilities accessible to the disabled is simply too costly.
4. Accepting many different ways of life in Ireland will strengthen us as a nation.
5. It is not a good idea for same sex couples to raise children.
6. The reason people live in poverty is that they lack motivation to get themselves out of poverty.
7. People should develop meaningful friendships with others from different racial/ethnic groups.
8. People with physical limitations are less effective as leaders than people without physical limitations.
9. In general, white people place higher value on education than do people of ethnic minorities.
10. In general, white people place higher value on education than do members of the travelling community.
11. Many women in our society continue to live in poverty because males still dominate most of the major social systems.

12. Since men are frequently heads of households, they deserve higher wage than females.
13. It is good idea for people to develop meaningful friendships with others having a different sexual orientation.
14. Society should not become more accepting of gay/lesbian lifestyles.
15. It is more important for immigrants to learn English than to maintain their first language.
16. In general, men make better leaders than women.

Figure 1B

Professional beliefs About diversity Scale

1. Teachers should not be expected to adjust their preferred mode of instruction to accommodate the needs of all students.
2. The traditional classroom has been set up to support the middle class lifestyle.
3. Gays and lesbians should not be allowed to teach in public schools.
4. Students and teachers would benefit from having a basic understanding of different (diverse) religions.
5. Money spent to educate the severely disabled would be better spent on programmes for gifted students.
6. All students should be encouraged to become fluent in an international language.
7. Only schools serving students from diverse cultures need a racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse staff.

8. The attention girls receive in school is comparable to the attention the boys receive.
9. Tests, particularly standardized tests, have frequently been used as a basis for segregating students.
10. People from ethnic minorities are adequately represented in most text books today.
11. People from the Travelling community are adequately represented in most text books today.
12. Students with physical limitation should be placed in regular classrooms whenever possible.
13. Males are given more opportunities in maths and science than females
14. Generally, teachers should group students by ability levels.
15. Historically, education has been monocultural, reflecting only one reality and has been biased towards the dominant (European) group.
16. Whenever possible, second language English learners should receive instruction in their first language until they are proficient enough to learn via English instruction.
17. Teachers often expect less from students from lower socioeconomic class.
18. Intercultural education is most beneficial for students from diverse cultures.
19. More women are needed in administrative positions in school.
20. School personnel improperly place large numbers of students from ethnic minorities in special education classes.
21. School personnel improperly place large numbers of students from the Travelling community in special education classes.

22. In order to be effective with all students, teachers should have experience working with students from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds.
23. Students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds typically have fewer educational opportunities than their middle-class peers.
24. Students from the Travelling community typically have fewer educational opportunities than their middle-class peers.
25. Students should not be allowed to speak a language other than English or Irish while in school.
26. It is important to consider religious diversity in setting school policy.
27. Intercultural education is less important than reading, writing, arithmetic, and computer literacy.

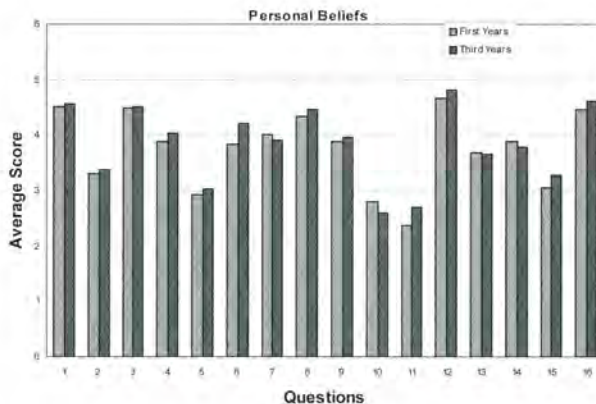


Figure 2. A comparison of the mean scores of first years and third years in personal beliefs.

3 rd Years	1 st Years
<u>Low tolerance</u>	<u>Low Tolerance</u>
None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women in poverty because of males
<u>Midrange Tolerance</u>	<u>Midrange Tolerance</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Settled value education more than travellers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Settled value education more than travellers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women in poverty because of males 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same-sex couples with children
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same-sex couples with children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immigrants learn English rather than maintain 1st language
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immigrants learn English rather than maintain 1st language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immigration/refugee policy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Migration/refugee policy 	
<u>High Tolerance</u>	<u>High Tolerance</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friendship across sexual orientation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friendship across sexual orientation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accepting gay/lesbian life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poverty and motivation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friendships across race/ethnicity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whites value education more than minorities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whites value education more than minorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversity strengthens the nation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversity strengthens the nation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accepting gay/lesbian life
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poverty and motivation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friendships across race/ethnicity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessible facilities for disabled 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaders with disabilities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interracial couples with children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women as good in leadership role as

	men
• Leaders with disabilities	• Accessible facilities for disabled
• Women as good in leadership role as men	• Interracial couples with children
• Equity in wage payment for women and men	• Equity in wage payment for women and men

Figure 3. Means scores categorised into low, midrange and high tolerance attitudes towards diversity. They are ordered, starting with the lowest.

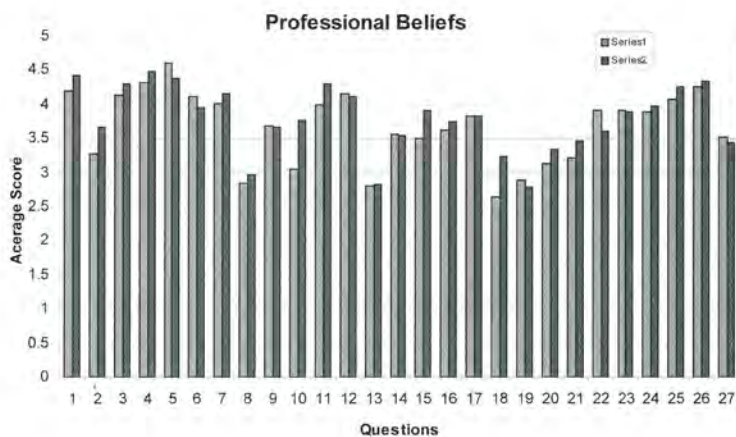


Figure 4. A comparison of the mean scores of first years and third years in professional beliefs. (Series 1= First Years, Series 2= Third Years).

3 rd Years	1 st Years
<u>Midrange tolerance</u>	<u>Midrange tolerance</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More women in administration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Males in maths and science
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Males in maths and science 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Representation of ethnic minorities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attention girls receive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More women in administration
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intercultural education, diverse students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SPED, ethnic minorities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SPED, ethnic minorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attention girls receive
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of intercultural education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SPED, Travelling community
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SPED, Travelling community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Middle-class classrooms
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intercultural education, diverse students
<u>High tolerance</u>	<u>High tolerance</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability grouping 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monocultural education
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience w/ diverse students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of intercultural education
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Middle-class classrooms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability grouping
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tests to segregate students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Second language instruction
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Second language instruction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tests to segregate students
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Representation of ethnic minorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lower expectations, SES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lower expectations, SES 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Representation of Travelling

	community
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fewer opportunities, SES 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fewer opportunities, Travelling community
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monocultural education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fewer opportunities, SES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fluency in international language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience w/ diverse students
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fewer opportunities, Travelling community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diverse faculty staff
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical limitations, regular classrooms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English only in schools
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diverse faculty staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fluency in international language
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English only in schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gay/lesbian teachers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gay/lesbian teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical limitations, regular classrooms
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Representation of Travelling community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrated classrooms
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Religion and school policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Religion and school policy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Money for gifted programmes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding of diverse religions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrated classrooms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Money for gifted programmes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding of diverse religions 	

Figure 5. Means scores categorised into low, midrange and high tolerance attitudes

towards diversity. They are ordered, starting with the lowest.