



Special issue: Studies on Aspects of Teacher Preparation

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This special issue of the Journal presents a number of papers that focus on aspects of teacher preparation. It is now widely recognised that teachers are the most powerful determinants of pupil achievement, and that the quality of an education system depends on the quality of its teachers. Those countries that are considered to have high-performing education systems, such as Finland and Singapore, have invested significantly in their teacher education programmes, and teaching is a highly prized profession. Two publications, namely *Teachers Matter* (2005) and the *Common European Principles for Teacher Competence and Qualifications* (2005), brought an often invisible and largely ignored section of higher education into the public arena. Since then there has been an international wave of reform in teacher education and preparation, where teacher education has become more regulated, and the content, nature and purpose of programmes have been revised. Research and scholarship in the area of teacher education has also increased over this period and papers in this issue illustrate the rich seam of research being explored by teacher educators, in Australia and in Ireland.

The first paper in this issue by Carolyn Maxwell examines ‘Teacher Education on Dyslexia: An Analysis of Policy and Practice in Australia and England’. This paper explores the impact of inclusive policies on teacher preparation and the increased expectations on newly qualified teachers to identify students who are struggling with literacy, differentiate their teaching approaches to cater for each child’s needs and ensure that they are responding to the emotional wellbeing of students in their classes. This paper focuses

on the preparation of teachers to support students with dyslexia, and examines the extent to which student teachers in Australia and England are prepared to understand dyslexia and how best to support students' needs.

The second paper examines 'Student Teachers' Interpretation of Leadership in Educational Contexts' and considers student teachers' perspectives and interpretations of leadership in primary schools in Ireland. The authors, Margaret Nohilly and Eilís O'Sullivan undertook research with two cohorts of student teachers during the final year of a four-year undergraduate programme. 'Teacher as leader' is the focus of the students' programme in their final year and the paper highlights the student teachers' experiences of leadership while undertaking school or professional placement, a core component of their university programme. It presents the students' perceptions of their potential to contribute to distributed leadership within schools while completing their final placement and afterwards on appointment to teaching positions.

Student teachers as researchers forms the focus of the third paper, where Aimie Brennan presents research she conducted as part of the pilot of the Student Teacher Educational Research (STER) project. Responding to Irish Higher Education policy (2016), the project established new forums for student teacher research dissemination that encouraged and promoted collaboration amongst student teachers during initial teacher education. STER provided the opportunities for student teachers to present their research at conferences and to publish their work in an on-line journal, which was managed by the students themselves. STER provided student teachers with an opportunity to share their research in a student-led learning community, and participants gained a greater appreciation for the potential of educational research to influence practice.

The final paper also comes from within the Irish context and is titled, 'Mentoring and Assessing Student Teachers on School Placement: Integrating Theory and Practice'. This paper, authored by Kathy Hall, Regina Murphy, Bernadette Ní Aingléis, and Vanessa Rutherford, examines the extent to which School

Placement maximizes opportunities for integrating theory and practice in student teachers' professional learning. The paper is based on a four-year longitudinal study and emanates from a larger project (Hall et al, 2018), commissioned by the Teaching Council of Ireland. This important paper briefly summarizes the current policy in Ireland against relevant international literature on school placement. The main part of the paper analyses evidence on mentoring and assessment, and the respective roles adopted by Higher Education Institution (HEI) tutors and school-based staff, highlighting some alignments and tensions in these roles. It discusses the variability of experience and the implications for maximising the fit between theory and practice in the experience of the student teacher.

Each of the papers brings fresh research to aspects of the work of initial teacher education. Informed by current international literature, they illustrate the importance of subjecting changes in teacher preparation to rigorous interrogation and review, and that this research will influence the shape of teacher preparation processes into the future. In a period of seismic changes in teacher education, it is important that teacher educators undertake such research projects, and disseminate their findings in a manner to influence the debate around the purpose and value of teacher education. The papers in this volume contribute to the growing body of research in the field of education and illustrate how teacher education is responding and adapting to current tensions, changes and expectations of teaching and the wider education landscape.

References

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