

Critical and Reflective Practice in Education

Editorial: Developing and Sustaining Learning Communities

This is the second issue of *Critical and Reflective Practice in Education* and comes at a time of significant change in the field of education throughout the United Kingdom. These changes, brought about by the election of a new coalition government, fall at the same time as the global economy impacts upon the lives of many throughout the world. The chosen articles for this edition all add to the theme, "Developing and Sustaining Learning Communities", which has, arguably, taken on a much greater significance since the major economies of the world have come face to face with the new measures of austerity.

The article "*A Case Study of Cross-Curricular Dialogue as a Part of Teacher Education in the CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) Approach*", offers a study, which forms part of a large project on teacher education in the CLIL approach to teaching in Spanish secondary-education schools. The study departs from the assumption that professionals working on interdisciplinary environments, such as CLIL education, need to have an informed appreciation of the perspective of a complementary discipline; instead it explores the view that cross-curricular dialogue is a tool for obtaining information about what makes it difficult for professionals from different teaching praxes and epistemological traditions to reach agreements about what language and what content to teach and how to integrate these when planning CLIL activities. It is a fascinating and absorbing article.

"*Teachers' reflective practice via video enquiry: the usefulness of peers, teacher mentors and video as a method to enhance the enculturation and reflection of pre-service teachers*" describes a collaborative project between Stranmillis University College (HEI), Belfast and

Lumen Christi College, Derry in Northern Ireland. The aim of the project was to investigate the merits of engaging students with teacher mentors at the school, who would facilitate an observational and reflective role in relation to the students' first-time teaching experience in the classroom. The article highlights the "richness in terms of reflection" that can be gained through analysis of video evidence. The authors explore what, in actuality, constitutes feedback, situated learning, reflective practice and collaboration in terms of the holistic approach to the development of pre-service teacher training in the United Kingdom and Ireland. This is a most interesting and rewarding piece of work, and a must for those involved in the training of teachers.

"*Developing and sustaining learning cultures in Higher Education*", considers a number of challenges facing those working in Higher Education in terms of developing a more critical approach to pedagogy. It looks at teaching and learning through the lens of the United Kingdom subject centre for education (ESCalate) and examines pedagogy in Higher Education as a means of cultivating critical, scholarly and research-informed approaches to the development of knowledge, skills and understanding. Of particular interest is the emphasis placed upon psychoanalytic paradigms to critique education. The article is very persuasive in calling for the use of a psychoanalytic perspective for exploring the challenges for those who seek to develop and sustain learning cultures for the benefit of students and staff. This is an intriguing and insightful piece of work.

"*Building and Sustaining a Learning Culture in Pre-Initial Teacher Training*" addresses what is a controversial, but very relevant, aspect of the teaching of Chemistry and how teachers are prepared to engage with their pupils. The article takes as its initial premise the view that the teaching and learning of science in many schools follows traditional lines, which has led to many pupils seeing science as a "dry" subject lacking interest. The article sets

out a response to this apparent dilemma by offering findings from a study carried out in the authors' university college, which sought to explore how a chemistry Subject Knowledge Enhancement (SKE) course (now known as the *UCP:Marjon ChEC* course) could work to facilitate change of a positive nature. The article offers an overview of this course, how it was set up and an evaluation of its impact upon students and is a must for all readers who left school with a less than enthusiastic view of Chemistry.

“Bridging the Pedagogical Gap between School and University: ‘A Small-Scale Enquiry into ‘Academic Preparedness’”, is based on a small-scale research project which sought to investigate the need to bridge the gap between transitions from school to university in terms of supporting new entrants to university courses with academic writing. The article also looked at the increased need in the university sector to consider student retention and progression, particularly from the first to the second year of degree courses. In 2008/9 “Academic Writing Sessions” were introduced within the authors' institution as a compulsory aspect of the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) degree course for all first year undergraduates. It was hypothesised at the time that these sessions would influence the standard of student writing, the students' understanding of the process and, perhaps even contribute to their overall progress through the course of their degree. Evaluation of the project resulted in a number of key findings. One interesting argument raised within the article is that assessment methods used in Higher Education do not always reflect the needs of the work place and of the students. The study also supported the view that university curricula should not be primarily skills-based, but should encompass what is known as the “Academic Literacies Approach” as a means of bridging the pedagogical gap between school and university. In all, seven key themes emerged from the project, which offer strong support for views expressed within the wider literature.

“Educational Relationships, Reflexivity and Values in a time of Global Economic Fundamentalism” uses a critical ethnographic approach to reflexively explore the impact of global change on local practices in a small Higher Education Institution in England. It explores how both teachers and learners are becoming unconsciously positioned in contradictory discourses which are driving changes in the identities of each, and their potential and actual impact on learning relationships and learning cultures at the local level. The article offers a view that if we fail to struggle to maintain a notion of values at the heart of learning and teaching relationships, there is little prospect of building sustainable learning cultures. The author offers a vision in her article of learners and teachers working together to challenge dominant discourses and to develop and sustain learning relationships built on a shared commitment to emancipatory educational values. This is a fascinating article, which is both perceptive and challenging. The reader is left in little doubt as to the importance of those underlying powerful dynamics of which we are all a dialectical part.

“Re-examining the culture of learning in ITE: engaging with the new demands of the 21st. century” argues that in the 21st. Century, it is now more vital than ever to engage Initial Teacher Training (pre service) students with their own learning. The authors suggest that university departments need to do more than deliver a mandated curriculum and a programme of ‘remedial academic writing’. Instead, tutors need to enact, through practice, a belief that ‘ability’ is not fixed; that ‘knowledge’ is uncertain, and that understanding is constructed through discussion & engagement. In this way they can better prepare their students for the challenges of working in schools in the 21st. century. The authors go on to suggest that examining the creation of ‘Learning to Learn’ environments, considering the role played by epistemology, and reconsidering the role of dialogue, are

powerful ways of positioning current practice, particularly, as student teachers and their tutors are all concerned with the business of learning, and more specifically, the teaching of children. This article draws upon the work being carried out by the authors, which is part of a three-year study supported by the ESCalate (Higher Education Academy).

Once again, CRPE offers a collection of critically reflective articles, which provide personal and professional insights

into life in universities in the twenty-first century. The Editorial Board would like to extend their appreciation and thanks to all contributors and reviewers for helping to build upon the first issue of Critical and Reflective Practice in Education.