A Study of Pre-service Teachers' Development through use of Action Research and Lesson Study

Dr. Rose Dolan

Dr. Anthony Malone
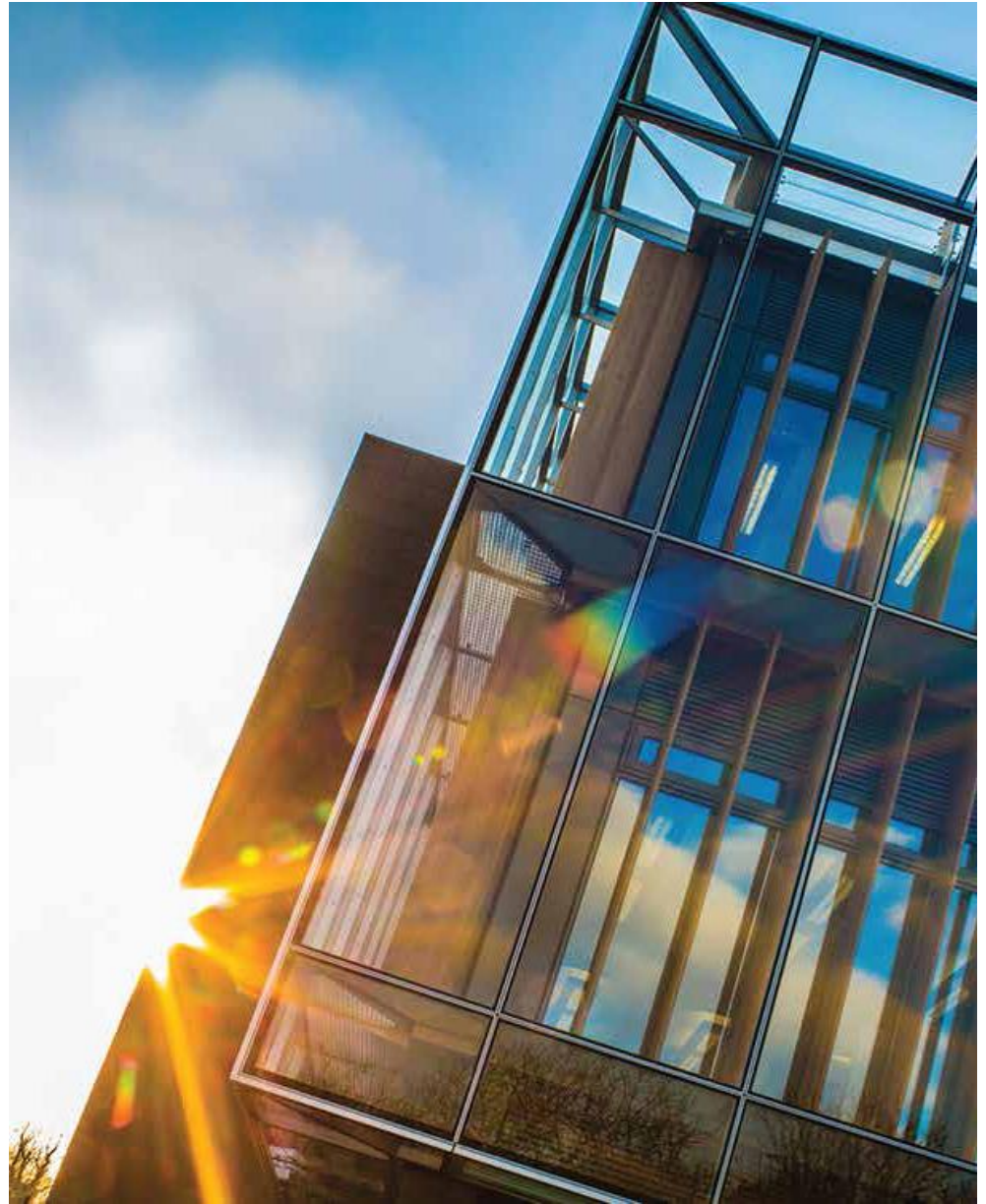
Introduction

Outline of Presentation

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Research Focus and Background:

This presentation describes the results of pre-service teachers' research into their pedagogic practice through engagement action research and lesson study projects.

Research activities are required components of a two-year postgraduate initial teacher education programme in a university in Ireland.
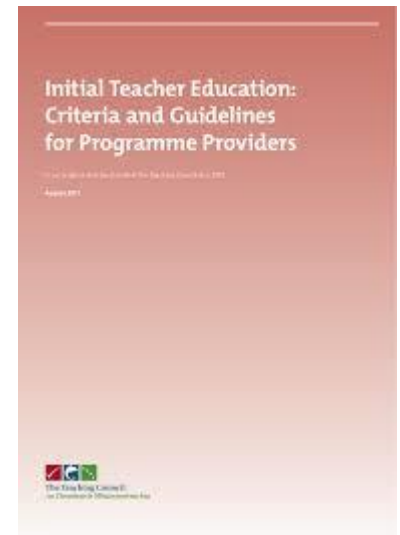
Background and context

- Period of reform in ITE

- Move from 1-year to 2-year PME course (consecutive)

"In all areas of study there should be provision for
...the development of student teachers
as researchers and lifelong learners" *(p.11)*

"Student teacher should have opportunities to
engage in research as the foundation
of their practitioner-based enquiry stance in the future" *(p.23)*

ITE Criteria and Guidelines (2011) Teaching Council

Initial Teacher Education:
Criteria and Guidelines
for Programme Providers

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Conceptual frame

- Toom et al (2010) stress the need for "reflective teachers who are capable of using research in their teaching … able to base their pedagogical decision-making on a theoretical foundation."

- Problem setting: name and frame (Schon, 1983)

- Hunting the assumptions that underpin our practices (Brookfield, 1995)

Action Research and Lesson Study – compare and contrast

Engagement in processes of AR and LS provides opportunity to build important skills of enquiry, critical reflection as well as building professional commitment to solution focused professional stances.

Both are premised on the notion of: Acting, Reflecting, Revising and Revitalizing.

AR: Action Research as Practical-Based inquiry. Seeks to: Understand, Evaluate in pursuit of Change and Implement and Review Practical Actions

**LS: Involves groups of teachers identifying a pedagogic dilemma faced by learners and collectively planning a research lesson to address the challenge.
The group then teaches the lesson and critiques it (<u>in evidenced ways</u>) before planning the next lesson (which is linked in iterative ways to the earlier lesson(s).**

Context PME 1 and 2

PME 1

Each student teacher is tasked to individually identify a pedagogical dilemma and to undertake detailed reconnaissance from which they plan and implement a course of action. They are asked to address the following three questions:

1. What is your self-identified pedagogical dilemma?

2. What assumptions about teaching and learning were challenged during your engagement with this project?

3. What were the pedagogic benefits and challenges for you in conducting this research?

PME 2

Year 2 requires student teachers to exercise greater levels of professional responsibility and autonomy. They undertake Lesson Study in self-selected, subject-specific and cross-curricular groups.

They work together to identify an overarching, shared pedagogic goal common to all.

Each group sets about researching, planning, teaching and critiquing (in evidenced ways) a number of study lessons (iteratively linked) based on the agreed pedagogic dilemma.

Methodology and data analysis

- Qualitative data were gathered from students during their first year of the programme over the course of semester 2 (February-April) 2015.

- Further qualitative data were gathered from the same cohort in April 2016 when they had completed the lesson study component of year 2.

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Selection of Topics Year 1

Pedagogical Concerns / Dilemmas
Assessment – for and of learning
Increasing pupil engagement in the lesson – active strategies
Planning for different abilities– differentiated lessons
Developing Higher Order Thinking

Selection of Topics Year 2

In Year 2, there was a tendency for groups to identify topics that were more generic than those specifically relevant to methodological studies. Of the 27 groups that were formed 4 chose topics specific to their methodology, i.e.

- Jazz improvisation
- Media literacy
- Historical images
- Visual resources in Geography

Many topics were grounded in a desire to teach differently, with an epistemological focus less on the technical (Grundy 1982) and more so on the practical and emancipatory. A core focus of students' work was on improving pupil learning and not singularly on improving teacher performance.

Selection of Topics (cont'd)

From Yr. 1 to Yr. 2 only 6 people (n 104) chose the same topic in AR as in LS

It seems students didn't repeat the choice of topic in year 2, showing that where there is free choice, even though there was no formal assessment benefit, students didn't opt for an easy choice e.g. repeat last year's topic but rather chose something that was of benefit to classroom teaching and learning.

Remaining 23 groups identified and worked on topics that were more transversal and generic, i.e.: questioning, peer assessment, AfL, closing lessons, active learning, collaborative learning, inclusive education, higher order thinking, scaffolding learning.

Findings Year 1

Challenges to Student Teachers' Assumptions:
a. About pupils' abilities and dispositions
b. About pedagogical strategies
c. About learning processes
d. About learning environments
Self Reported Benefits and Challenges:
a. For the pre-service teacher (benefits)
b. For the pre-service teacher (challenges)
c. For the pupil (benefits only)
d. For the relationships of learning (benefits only)

Findings Year 2

<u>Year 2</u>:

Students highlighted the social, community benefits associated with these kinds of experiences.

"These meetings helped to build camaraderie amongst our group and improve communications. In fact, it enabled a 'community' feel, a place where I belonged but I had a right and responsibility to attend, be present and contribute."

The social and the interpersonal emerged as particularly significant with students identifying the multiple voices, perspectives and subjectivities they encountered within and across groups.

Findings (cont'd)

One student noted how "Space is permitted for discussion and every voice is given the opportunity to be heard. I feel all voices are regarded as important enough to be listened to."

Many other students concurred and highlighted how working with others required them to focus on important matters of inclusion, voice and listening.

The emphasis here is on the individual becoming as autonomous as possible within a collective autonomy. It is necessary for us all to learn that our autonomy only has legitimacy if it respects the autonomy of others.

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Findings (cont'd)

Certainly, the necessity of working in these ways demanded something distinctly different of them with some objections. Students typically noted how they were much more "comfortable working alone." One Student noted: "It's very different to what I'm used to and generally here and in life I do a lot of things by myself and I'm responsible only for myself. I have to work differently here."

Despite criticisms, the majority of students found their experience to be challenging yet rewarding.

Insights

Hopes / Aims in view / Guiding principles:

Reason, individually and collectively, robust, informed position(s) based on evidences that are available.

Revise / appraise position(s) in light of the reasoning of others and the consideration of contrary evidence.

Detect and appropriately signal haziness in their own thinking and the thinking of others.

Exercise discernment between what is relevant and what is not.

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