

# Exploring Teacher Education Students' Views & Experiences in the Context of Increasing Student Diversity in Post-primary Education

## Authors

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## Purpose

This action research project aims to explore student teachers' views and experiences in the context of increasing student diversity in post-primary education by **engaging a small group in active discussion about, *inter alia*, identity, equality, inequality, diversity, interculturalism, and social justice**, links between theory/research and their developing pre-professional practice and experiences.

## Rationale

Research has found that teacher education student populations are homogeneous in nature, being predominantly of the majority social and ethnic groups, and have little to no experience of diversity; and this is particularly the case in Ireland (c.f. Leavy, 2005; Devine, 2005). Many teacher education students have not previously considered questions of equity, equality, and diversity to any significant extent. In this context, responding to the reality of modern-day classrooms (particularly in designated disadvantaged schools and in schools with increasing numbers of minority ethnic students) is a challenge for which many, if not most, teachers are ill-prepared.

A useful and powerful starting point for examining diversity issues in educational contexts has been found to involve student teachers reflecting upon their own identity in terms of social class and ethnicity (Santoro & Allard, 2005; Allard & Santoro, 2006) and upon their views and experiences as developing professionals.

[PGDE – Post Graduate Diploma in Education]

## Methods

### 1. Questionnaire – PGDE 2007/'08

- Completed by 203 of 236 student teachers
- Exploring **background characteristics** (e.g. age, experience teaching, first language, ethnicity, route to higher education, disability, ethnicity,

### 2. Diversity Seminar Group (DSG) formed

- 10 PGDEs **volunteered** to join DSG
- DSG to **meet** 7 times over the academic year, for **1.5** hours each time, to explore and discuss key themes.
- DSG sessions were video-recorded to facilitate transcription. The group collaboratively designed the

### 3. Self-evaluation of Participation in DSG

- Participants will **reflect** and comment upon their developing thinking re. diversity in the particular context of having participated in the DSG



Some DSG Participants, February 2008

## Diversity Seminar Group (DSG) Themes

<b>Session I</b>	Introduction & Design of DSG sessions (October, 2007)
<b>Session II</b>	Participants' Educational Autobiographies (October, 2007)
<b>Session III</b>	Working Class Educational Experiences (November, 2007)
<b>Session IV</b>	White Privilege & Racial Stereotyping (November, 2007)
<b>Session V</b>	Questions of Identity (January, 2008)
<b>Session VI</b>	Segregation in & Privatisation of Irish Education (February, 2008)
<b>Session VII</b>	Teaching for Diversity & Social Justice: Philosophy & Classroom Strategies (March, 2008)

## Outcomes to Date

1. Questionnaire results available (basic demographics, full PGDE cohort)
2. 6 of the 7 DSG seminars conducted. Final session to be held March 6<sup>th</sup>, 2008
3. Transcription on all sessions being conducted
4. Analysis & report Autumn 2008
5. Potential publications tracing the development of participants' ideas

## ...& Future Plans

1. Review of process and potential development of DSG as core part of PGDE with future cohorts
2. More formal collaboration with teacher educators in other institutions

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