

RESEARCH TOPIC

The DEIS Placement: Challenging pre-service teachers' beliefs about educational disadvantage

Irish society has become more diverse with a striking increase of 143% in the number of non-Irish nationals living in Ireland between 2002 and 2011. Added to this, UNICEF reports a ten percent increase in child poverty since 2008. These factors impact on all Irish primary schools but particularly those serving communities designated as disadvantaged – DEIS schools. Preparing a predominantly homogeneous population of prospective teachers to work in increasingly more diverse classrooms is a challenge facing Irish pre-service teacher educators. Research shows that pre-service teachers have enduring beliefs about diversity and disadvantage which can be difficult to challenge. One approach used by teacher educators to prepare pre-service teachers for diverse classrooms is school-based placement. There is conflicting evidence in the literature about the efficacy of school-based placements in challenging student teachers to re-examine their beliefs about diversity and disadvantage. Much of the literature finds that these placements do in fact challenge pre-service teachers' earlier-held beliefs, often resulting in changes to those beliefs.

However, other literature finds that placements in diverse contexts simply confirm the unquestioned beliefs of pre-service teachers. This paper describes part of a study carried out with pre-service teachers in the final year of a three year teacher preparation programme. It examines their beliefs about educational disadvantage, before and after a three week placement in DEIS schools. Situated in the mixed-methods paradigm, this study was informed by Bourdieu's concepts of Habitus, Field and Reflexivity. These concepts were used to interpret participants' responses in reflective journals and interviews. It examines the discord experienced by many pre-service teachers between their earlier-held beliefs and their experiences on placement. Following The DEIS Placement, all pre-service teachers reported changes to their beliefs about educational disadvantage with 73.6% stating that their beliefs had changed significantly. Further, all participants in this study stated that the DEIS placement helped prepare them to work in DEIS schools.

(Please see overleaf for further details of this study)



Researcher Profile

Dr Patricia Slevin is the Director of School Placement in Marino Institute of Education. Patricia holds both an M. Sc. and an Ed. D. from Trinity College Dublin. Her doctoral thesis used a Bourdieusian-informed framework to analyse student teacher learning on placement in DEIS schools (Schools serving communities designated as disadvantaged). Patricia's areas of research interest include student teacher learning on placement, educational disadvantage, the development of school-institute partnerships and leadership in education. Patricia was Naughton Fellow at the University of Notre Dame du Lac, Indiana between April and July 2015. She is currently a Research Fellow with the Research in School and Education (RISE) Research Group in the School of Education, Trinity College Dublin.

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The DEIS Placement: Challenging Pre-service Teachers' Beliefs About Educational Disadvantage



An associated College of The University of Dublin, Trinity College

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London International Conference on Education, 2015



Context



- Although the term 'educational disadvantage' is frequently used in educational discourse, there is no internationally agreed definition for the phenomenon
- Communities designated as 'disadvantaged' in Ireland are served by schools known as DEIS schools
- Poverty is a key indicator of Educational Disadvantage (Kelleghan, 2002)
- UNICEF reports that the rate of child poverty in Ireland has increased from 18% to 28% in the last six years (UNICEF, 2014)
- Educating a predominantly white, female, middle-class teaching population to successfully work in diverse and disadvantaged communities is challenging
- There is conflicting evidence as to the success of practicum in challenging pre-service teachers' beliefs about diverse and disadvantaged communities

What it says in the literature



- There is contrasting evidence in the literature as to the efficacy of placements in diverse contexts in shaping pre-service teachers' beliefs
- Much literature demonstrates that placement can change pre-service teachers' attitudes towards disadvantaged schools for the better (Groulx, 2001)
- However, other studies find that such placements can selectively reinforce pre-service teachers' negative perceptions about these schools (Erickson, 2009)
- Pre-service teachers have internalized beliefs about teaching to which they cling tenaciously (Causey, Thomas, & Armento, 2000)
- These beliefs can be challenged when there is a clash between what the pre-service teacher believes and what they experience on practicum (Mills, 2012)
- Before placement some pre-service teachers believe that pupils in schools serving communities designated as disadvantaged
 - have lower ability levels and cannot be taught effectively
 - come from homes where education is not prioritised.
 - have parents who are less involved in their education than those in other areas (Proctor et al, 2001)

The DEIS Placement



- In an attempt to challenge the beliefs of pre-service teachers about educational disadvantage, the DEIS Placement was introduced in Marino Institute of Education in 2007
- This placement is compulsory for all pre-service teachers on both undergraduate and post-graduate teacher preparation programmes in the institute
- Pre-service teachers spend a three week practicum in DEIS schools – those serving communities designated as disadvantaged
- This study was carried out to interrogate pre-service teachers' beliefs about educational disadvantage and the efficacy of The DEIS Placement in challenging those beliefs

Research Questions



1. What were pre-service teachers beliefs about Educational Disadvantage pre-placement?
2. Did these beliefs change after placement?
3. Did pre-service teachers believe that The DEIS Placement challenged and/or changed their beliefs about Educational Disadvantage?
4. Did pre-service teachers believe that The DEIS Placement contributed to their preparation to work in DEIS schools?

Theoretical Framework



- ✓ Informed by Bourdieu's concepts of *Habitus and Field* (1977, 1990)
- ✓ Used these concepts to interpret pre-service teachers' reflections
- ✓ Provided opportunities for pre-service teachers to reflect on practice and experiences and to find moments of conscious awakening.

Overview of the study



Situated within the mixed-methods paradigm, this study used a Case Study Approach drawing on both quantitative and qualitative data. In keeping with Bourdieu's reflexivity, each research tool was designed in light of data gathered at earlier stages.

Data Collection:

Participants completed questionnaire surveys pre and post placement. They completed reflective journals during placement and ten randomly selected participants completed individual semi-structured interviews after placement. These interviews were based around four themes which had emerged from the earlier stages of the research.

Pre-Placement Questionnaire	n=97
Post-Placement Questionnaire	n=95
Reflective Journals	n=61
Semi-Structured Interviews	n=10

What pre-service teachers said

We had heard it all before in lectures but when you find yourself lecturing with these children... It becomes real. That's why the DEIS placement is vital... vital for us as future teachers in DEIS schools.

I would have had a negative expectation of this teaching practice. I was completely unaware of the difficulties that some children faced every day. I was shocked by just how much the children needed me on an emotional level at times.

I really felt that this placement was extremely important as I did not realise how many preconceived ideas I unconsciously had and I was happy to be afforded an opportunity to challenge these ideas



Findings

This research found that:

1. Prior to the placement, some pre-service teachers had negative beliefs about pupil ability, pupil behaviour and parental engagement, in keeping with the literature
2. Most pre-service teachers reported their beliefs about educational disadvantage had changed following the placement
3. For a small number of pre-service teachers placement confirmed and reinforced their previously held beliefs
4. All participants reported that The DEIS Placement played a role in challenging their beliefs about diverse and disadvantaged communities.
5. All pre-service teachers believed that The DEIS Placement contributed to their preparation to work in DEIS schools

'one catalyst for the turbulent process of dispositional change is the clash that is experienced when there is a mismatch between their habitus and the structure and norms of the institutional field. That is, it is when pre-service teachers experience rupture to the 'way things are' in new and unfamiliar contexts that effort is required to make sense of themselves
(Mills, 2012, pp 275-276).

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The author acknowledges the Governing Body of MIE for funding this research and the Naughton Fellowship at Notre Dame University, Indiana which facilitated invaluable time for the completion of this poster.

About Marino Institute of Education

Marino Institute of Education (MIE) is a Dublin-based teaching, learning and research community committed to promoting inclusion and excellence in education. It has a long and proud involvement with education, specifically initial teacher education (ITE), dating back over 100 years.

MIE's academic programmes are validated, quality assured and accredited by Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dublin. MIE is an Associated College of Trinity, and this relationship has deepened through the development of a joint academic strategy to promote closer and more extensive collaborations in teaching and research, including joint activities between the two institutes. Through the implementation of this joint academic strategy the strengths of Trinity will be leveraged with those of MIE, to enhance existing relationships and promote new synergies.

In the last decade, the academic mission and scope of MIE's activity has been re-envisioned to encompass a deeper understanding of education in and beyond the classroom, to incorporate the continuum of teacher education and the education of specialist education practitioners at early years, primary and further education levels. This is allied with a commitment to education studies encompassing non-traditional education settings and the wider education environment in a pluralist context.

MIE's Mission

MIE is a teaching, learning and research community committed to promoting inclusion and excellence in education. The dignity and potential of each person are central to our life, work and service.

MIE's Vision

MIE will be a centre of global consequence, in teaching and research in the field of education. Through collaboration and technology, it will extend its geographic boundaries and create momentum for the delivery of new, high quality, innovative programmes in education. MIE will build critical mass for world class research in partnership with others, and will foster university-school-community links that contribute to sustainable improvement and renewal across the entire education system.

MIE will extend its commitment and expertise in the area of inclusion by continuing to conduct research and providing education programmes to empower the socially disadvantaged. MIE will lead national and international dialogue regarding the opportunities and challenges pertaining to pluralism and diversity in education settings.