Integrating Rights in a Secondary PGCE – A Case Study
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Abstract
In the first part of this paper I argue that the adoption of a Rights Respecting dimension in Initial Teacher Education is valuable in principle because it provides an ethical framework for teaching and also provides a pragmatic response to evolving policy agendas about the children’s workforce. Having outlined the ways in which London Metropolitan University’s Secondary PGCE course has integrated children’s rights and Fullan’s model of the ‘teacher a change agent’, I move on to consider the evidence about the impact of these developments. My analysis draws on data from student questionnaires, a student focus group, assignments, university tutor interviews, and colleagues’ publications on this theme. I outline four themes which arise from the data relating rights to pupil behaviour, inclusion, teacher identity and the links between school and university. I argue that developing a more explicit focus on rights has promoted a greater criticality throughout the programme, and in turn this has enabled student teachers to develop significant insights into how to achieve rights respecting classrooms in which the technical efficiency of classroom practice is aligned with a coherent ethical stance.

Teaching as a political activity and the challenge for professional training
In our struggle to articulate a model for professionalism within our own initial teacher education (ITE) programme at London Metropolitan University we have introduced the notion of the teacher as ‘change agent’. Michael Fullan argued that in order to undertake the complex role of the teacher within systems of education which all too often lead to a ‘sense of inconsequentiality’ (Fullan, 1993) one must remain aware that teaching is at its core a moral profession, and that to enact one’s moral commitment one must also prepare to become an agent of change. Thus for him the key to maintain the clear moral commitment that often motivates new entrants to the profession, is to equip them with an understanding of how they can exercise agency within a larger system.

Fullan’s model requires teachers to pay attention to four sets of competencies. Firstly teachers must develop mastery, or a technical competence in their work. Secondly, teachers should be prepared and able to inquire into practice and to generate new understandings to inform their subsequent development. Thirdly, teachers must be able to collaborate, in order to build alliances with others and to develop through professional relationships with colleagues and others. Finally, and echoing his initial commitment to the moral dimension to education, Fullan argues it is essential that teachers remain conscious of their vision for education, as this will provide them with the stability and certainty with which they can judge the changing context and policy agendas and continue to pursue their own role in providing meaningful educational experiences for young people.

Children’s Rights and Education
Reflecting as a group of teacher educators on Fullan’s model it is reasonable to ask ourselves what vision could we articulate that would both enable us to commit morally to the ITE programmes and provide a sufficiently robust and inclusive moral vision for the students who attend the university. Narrow and partisan political
agasendas are clearly unsuitable for such a task and yet it is important, as Fullan reminds us, not to deny the essential moral dimension to our work in education. Our starting point in this project is the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the vision of education that flows from a commitment to this document. This provides us with a normative framework which both resonates with government policy and provides a critical perspective from which to critique that policy (Alderson, 2008; DCSF, 2009; Osler & Starkey, 2005). As teacher educators we feel we need to engage with the UNCRC afresh, rather than rely solely on the previous or current administration’s interpretation of it. What follows is an account of our intellectual re-engagement with children’s rights as we seek to orientate our courses to the shifting policy landscape of teaching in secondary schools.

The rights embodied in the UNCRC are partly aspirational and conditional on contextual circumstances. They are therefore limited and one of the important limiting factors is the necessity to balance rights between people. On this reading rights are social, i.e. an individual claiming his or her rights simultaneously accepts and acknowledges the equivalent rights of others, which leads logically both to a sense of how one’s rights are limited and to an associated sense of obligation to others (Alderson, 2008:18). This acknowledgement that rights are not simple commodities to be given or taken, indicates what fertile ground the UNCRC provides for adults who are employed by the state to further children’s rights. Rather than provide a prescription for action, the UNCRC provides an ethical framework (Osler & Starkey, 2005: 35-7), the principles of which provide a challenge to deep and critical reflection on the nature of one’s professional work.

There are three partly overlapping kinds of rights all of which have implications for education (Alderson, 2008: 17). Firstly provision rights relate to necessary services to which children are entitled, and clearly education is one of these areas of provision. On this view schools provide the institutional means for achieving this right (at least for most children), and teachers are employed as agents of such institutions to provide the front line services. This much is simply to re-state an already existing institutional arrangement in rights-friendly language, but the challenge comes from appreciating that these institutional arrangements have to meet the educational rights of all children, and this links to a more challenging agenda for inclusive education (Stubbs, 1998). Once one has grasped the significance of this entitlement, the practical day to day task of differentiating classroom activities effectively moves beyond a simple question of technical teaching strategies and is powerfully linked to broader issues about school structure, the roles of schools in reproducing existing inequalities and the potential role of the teacher in mitigating against the worst excesses of these tendencies. By engaging with the fundamental question of whether schools and classrooms operate in ways which meet all children’s entitlement to an education, or maintain inequalities in provision which are predictable, one is led to the political question of whether such practices can be interpreted as ‘coincidence or conspiracy’ (Gillborn, 2008).

For us then, a commitment to provision rights entails a critical reflection on the nature of inclusion. Teachers have to understand their role in the classroom as a facilitator of learning, and this requires them to hone their teaching skills. However, they should also understand their role within the broader structures and processes which operate to include and exclude, and which place restrictions on them and their students. Echoing Freire (1996) and Fullan (1993), we have to work with our student teachers to help them to develop a critical consciousness about the nature of the education system so that they can begin to envisage themselves as change agents within it.
The second kind of right embodied in the UNCRC is protection rights, and these relate to the need to protect children from neglect, abuse or discrimination. In the first decade of the 21st century, official government statistics indicated that of the 11 million children in England, each year between 50-100 died from neglect and abuse; 25,000 were on child protection registers; 60,000 were ‘looked after’ by local authorities; and 3-4 million were deemed to be ‘vulnerable’ (Alderson, 2008: 50). Schools have named members of staff responsible for child protection and clearly entrants to the profession need to understand how the system works and what role they may play within such a system, for example passing on a concern if they have spotted signs of possible neglect. As well as being prepared to deal with these less common issues there are day to day problems relating to bullying and oppression, with children occupying the roles of victims, perpetrators and bystanders. Whilst tackling in-class bullying is an obvious manifestation of this issue, which most teachers are prepared to deal with, there is a need to move beyond the immediate manifestations of such violent acts, and to consider hidden bullying, such as that exemplified through cyber-bullying, and deeper examples of prejudice, such as homophobia. In this regard protection from harm becomes a more expansive and complex issue than simply the archetype of protection from physical harm. One moves towards a more subtle and critical requirement to establish a psychologically safe environment, which requires a high level of alertness in the classroom and a willingness to reflect critically on one’s own stance.

In this regard teachers benefit from professional education which supports them in exploring their own position in relation to these issues, and to develop a more conscious stance about their role. Pearce provides an illuminating account of how difficult the journey to full political and professional consciousness can be for a white middle class woman attempting to teach inclusively in a multicultural urban school (Pearce, 2005) and Epstein and her colleagues illustrate how well-meaning teachers continue to marginalise young lesbian and gay people when hetero-normative assumptions remain un-surfaced and un-challenged (Epstein, O’Flynn, & Telford, 2003). Au (2009) illustrates in his critical discussion of Freirean pedagogy that one of the most significant principles established by Freire’s view of the world is that we can come to know about the experiences of others (i.e. people who are ‘Othered’ through processes of oppression) and we can therefore tackle this in our teaching.

The third category of rights in the UNCRC relates to participation rights and in relation to education the most significant of these relates to article 12, which requires young people to be given the opportunity to express their view, and to have those views taken into account. As Alderson points out, in practice this often comes down to young people being consulted or being given the chance to make decisions, and she outlines four types of involvement ranging from (1) being informed, (2) expressing a view, (3) influencing the decision-making, and (4) being the main decider (Alderson, 2008: 91-2). In reality this desire to promote participation has wide implications for teachers and article 12 has influenced a whole range of initiatives in schools to promote school councils (Whitty & Wisby, 2007), student voice and consultation (DCSF, 2008; Flutter & Rudduck, 2004), student researchers (Fielding & Bragg, 2003; Kellett, 2005a, 2005b) and student observers1. The development of student voice relates to recent policy in England on personalisation in education, which is often characterised, at least in part by greater student autonomy. One government sponsored policy paper envisages children and their parents as service-users whose ‘choice’ and ‘voice’ can be used to drive excellence in provision

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1 Staff from the Initial Teacher Education programme at London Metropolitan have recently been involved in training young people (11-18 years of age) to observe their teachers and provide feedback on aspects of their teaching.
(Leadbetter, 2004) and this resonates with broader models of welfare reform in which these two mechanisms are seen as essential in driving up standards in all public services from welfare and health to housing and education (Coffield, 2007; PMSU, 2006).

For us, this commitment to participation rights raises interesting issues for student teachers about how they can explore student voice in their own teaching, without subverting these into mere extensions of managerialist approaches, i.e. how can they retain the emancipatory dimension to such practices within often restrictive hierarchical institutions. More practically from the student teacher perspective we have to tackle how they can manage the dual imperative of promoting student autonomy whilst rising to the challenge of behaviour management, which is a perennial problem in many English classrooms (NUT, 2010).

So far then, taking the UNCRC as a starting point we have arrived at three principles, which we have sought to incorporate into our teacher education programme:

1. Teachers need to be prepared to understand the processes that include and exclude learners, from the classroom to the system level.
2. Teachers must be prepared to critically reflect on their own values and beliefs in order to engage fully with the need to create positive and inclusive learning environments.
3. Teachers should recognise the potential in young people to develop greater control over their education and to develop appropriate methods to enable them to form and express their opinions about it.

In addition to these considerations, the UK government has been pursuing what it calls a "quiet revolution" in children's services in recent years (DCSF, 2009: 8) through its Every Child Matters (ECM) policy framework. At the heart of ECM is a commitment to five rights-based objectives: (1) economic well-being; (2) being healthy; (3) enjoying and achieving; (4) staying safe; and (5) making a positive contribution. Under ECM schools were, until recently, directed and funded through a government Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and they are locally coordinated within integrated local authority structures for Children’s Services. Within schools, there are now more additional staff and alternative professionals working as mentors, counsellors and home-school liaison workers, as well as named individuals with responsibility for liaising with other professionals, such as social workers, the police and health care professionals, to coordinate casework for individual children. Whilst the practice still tends to lag behind the rhetoric, there is no doubt that these structural changes represent significant developments for schools and the professionals who work within them and therefore pose a challenge to ITE providers.

Case study methodology
At London Metropolitan University our secondary PGCE course team has been developing the Rights Respecting PGCE for two years and although individual tutors have prepared reports on individual projects within the programme this is the first attempt to reflect formally on that process in an overall report. The case study aims to combine an element of evaluation (Yin, 1994) with Bassey’s (1999) story-telling approach to educational case study. Through focusing on the experiences of university tutors and students it aims to capture some of the perceptions of participants, rather than setting out to tell any objective single account. Through allowing a variety of stories to be told the case study will demonstrate the complexity of achieving change and illustrate the various ways in which change impacts on participants (Ball, 2006 / 1993).
Data about the student experience

This case study draws on a range of data sources. First, in order to gain an overview of the student teachers’ experiences on the course we included three relevant questions in the general end of course evaluation survey. This survey was open to all students on the course and in 2009-10 110 students responded to these questions (127 students participated in the survey out of a potential number of approximately 160 eligible students); in 2008-9 72 students responded (76 participated in the survey out of approximately 160 eligible students). The shift in numbers completing evaluation questionnaires is a result of our transition to on-learn surveys in 2008-9 and in our first year our response rate was relatively low. The three questions were:

- What did you find most useful about our attempt to promote a Rights Respecting PGCE? For example, were there lectures or workshops you found particularly useful or effective?
- What advice would you give the course team about promoting a Rights Respecting PGCE more effectively in the future? For example, would you add more workshops, arrange alternative experiences? It would help if you could be as specific as possible.
- Do you think your teaching promotes and respects children’s rights? Please give examples in your answer, e.g. what were you able to implement on school experience related to the rights theme?

In addition to this student data one small focus group was held with five volunteers during the final week of the 2009-10 course. This group was also joined by an education officer from UNICEF UK, who had been working on the programme. The group was run in a relatively unstructured way for 50 minutes, with occasional questions or prompts from the facilitator.

Although the course team has not conducted a thorough analysis of the assignments of students during the past two years, I am required to double mark all Masters level work (40 students this year) and so I am able to draw on my knowledge of these assignments as a supplementary source of data about how students have engaged with the Rights theme.

Data about the tutor experience

For this paper I have conducted two staff interviews (approximately 40 minutes each) with the Modern Languages tutor and the Citizenship tutor. I have also revisited a range of conference papers from these two tutors, and the Science and English tutors. These papers all reflect on Rights Respecting projects within their subject teaching on the PGCE.

- The MFL and Citizenship tutors’ paper (Bhargava & Smith, 2010) evaluates a cross-curricular project they ran in partnership with a local secondary school, exploring the potential of a rights focus to develop language and citizenship learning.
- The Science and English tutors’ paper (McCallum & Brook, 2010) considers how the concept of ‘voice’ has been implemented in both their programmes.
- In addition I have drawn on other papers on Science (Jerome & Brook, 2009), Citizenship (Jerome & Bhargava, 2009) and English (McCallum, 2010; McCallum & Jerome, 2009).

These papers provide a useful supplement to the small number of interviews I was able to conduct, as they all share some of the tutors’ experiences and thoughts about the development of the PGCE.
Case study context
The Secondary PGCE programme at London Metropolitan recruits approximately 180 student teachers a year, across seven subjects. Each course is run by one member of staff and so the course team consists of only eight people (seven tutors plus the programme director). This makes it relatively easy to discuss and resolve issues and implement change. In the spring and summer terms of 2008 the course team met with representatives from several human rights organisations to discuss the possibility of incorporating a Rights Respecting approach into our programme. This was implemented in 2008-09, reviewed informally by the team at the end of that year and slightly revised for 2009-10. The first year’s experience enabled the tutors to identify a simple model to describe the ways in which we are seeking to use a rights focus to extend our practice and lend coherence to the programme. The model includes the following three dimensions:

1. Knowledge about rights,
2. Rights as pedagogy,
3. Rights as a values framework for the children’s workforce.

This model was shared with the student teachers during the second year of the programme as one way in which we could provide a clear model for how the Rights Respecting theme could be linked to the course overall.

There are several practical strategies we have adopted across the course to embed the rights theme and promote the model of teacher as change agent. Here we note some of the key features, to provide a snapshot of the experiences student teachers encounter during their training.

Portfolio Assessment
We have developed a new structure for a portfolio assignment which explicitly promotes the model of the teacher as change agent. The portfolio is described as a ‘patchwork text’ and embodies the four characteristics of the teacher as change agent: (1) it includes reflections on the technical dimensions of teaching, (2) inquiries into practice, (3) collaboration on reflection and reflection on collaboration, and (4) the articulation of a personal vision.

Inclusion theme in Professional Studies
All students are introduced to historically established and currently reproduced patterns of inequality in education. A series of lectures, experiential workshops and discussion groups examine equality issues relating to ethnicity, class, gender, English as an Additional Language, Special Educational Needs, refugees, and sexual minorities. This strand is now discussed in relation to children's rights.

Rights Respecting Pedagogy
Our lectures on learning include both theory / research informed answers to the question, ‘how do children learn?’ and ethical answers to the question, ‘how should we teach?’, drawing on a series of pedagogical principles directly derived from the UNCRC (Osler & Starkey, 2005).

Student Voice
All student teachers attend workshops which are run by school students. This gives them an experience of being taught by the people they are preparing to teach and helps to illustrate, through experiential learning, that children are capable of independence and formulating and expressing views on learning and teaching.
Cross curricular initiatives
We are seeking to ensure all students use the rights theme as the basis of cross-curricular collaboration, to help them to think about the broader applications of the rights framework outside of their own curriculum area.

Rights in Professional Studies
Our Professional Studies programme starts with a keynote lecture from the head teacher of a rights-respecting school, who outlines the principles which guide her management of the school. This is followed by an interactive workshop introducing all students to the UNCRC. Links are made to the UNCRC in all other lectures, wherever possible, including: personalisation, classroom behaviour, assessment, and policy.

Curriculum Studies
In addition to the whole PGCE programme outlined above, each course leader runs at least one workshop relating their subject focus to children’s rights.

Discussion of findings
The student on-line evaluations reflect a broadly positive response to the rights theme. The following table provides a summary of the types of responses:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Negative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1)What was useful about the Rights theme in the PGCE?</td>
<td>2008-09</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2009-10</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Does your teaching promote rights?</td>
<td>2008-09</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2009-10</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The responses to both questions tended to focus on individual elements of teaching. There was no consensus about which aspects of the course were felt to be most positive, and almost every Professional Studies topic was mentioned by at least one student. The following section identifies four broad themes emerging from these responses. The few respondents who commented negatively on the rights dimension to the course tended to focus on the way we had incorporated it in the course rather than questioning rights directly. Only one student teacher in the second year evaluation directly questioned the value of children’s rights, asserting that, “there is far too much emphasis on children’s rights and far too little on their corresponding responsibilities” (Student 105, 09-10 evaluation). This is a frequently heard refrain in schools (Howe & Covell, 2010) and it is significant that only one student raised this as an issue. Far more were able to conceptualise rights with a positive connection to responsibilities and respect, which Howe and Covell refer to as one of the defining features of schools which are able to fully integrate rights education. This issue was most evident in the discussion relating to behaviour.

Theme 1: Classroom behaviour
In some ways it is not surprising that this was mentioned by many students as the Professional Studies programme includes two lectures from a very popular behaviour consultant, who has always presented practical and well-pitched sessions with positive strategies for behaviour for learning. In response to the changes in the course he has begun to use the language of rights and responsibilities more overtly in his presentations, and some evaluation responses demonstrated that student teachers are connecting pupil behaviour with the rights agenda.
“In my relationship with the pupils I taught I tried to involve them in decision making and it wasn’t based on me holding all the power and not them. Respect was one of the class principles my year 7 class came up with and behaviour management focused around respect: we respect others and don’t talk when they are; I respect you, you respect me. When I did use sanctions I used a restorative justice approach and spoke to pupils about how we could sort out the problem together.” (Student 30, 09-10 evaluation)

This reflects the good practice identified by Howe and Covell in their evaluation of the large scale introduction of rights education in Hampshire schools. They argue that some schools try to make responsibilities a priority in their teaching because of the perceived need to establish effective behaviour management, whereas in practice the most powerful learning is rights-driven. Once rights are understood, children are able to make the connections to their own and others responsibilities, as they conclude: “a focus on responsibilities does not promote responsibility in children. A focus on rights does” (Howe & Covell, 2010: 101). This was echoed by a student teacher in the end of year focus group who argued that perhaps the answer to the accusation that children know too much about their rights is to give them an opportunity to think about other’s rights as well as their own, and that the answer lies in this expanded understanding of rights.

Other students go further than using rights to formulate a classroom charter, and are able to articulate how rights informs their broader approach to relationships in the class:

“The revised National Curriculum further enables us to ensure students’ rights are respected - particularly with its emphasis on giving students the opportunity to have more say over HOW they learn as well as WHAT they learn. This is something I tried to focus on in my lessons - giving students ownership over the work and endeavouring to make them independent learners.” (Student 44, 08-09 evaluation)

Clearly pupil behaviour is a key concern for teachers (NUT, 2010) and for student teachers in particular this is often the major concern at the start of their training. These responses indicate that two important developments are happening during the course, at least for some student teachers. First, they are able to develop positive rather than punitive approaches to regulating pupil behaviour in the classroom. The second point, which is linked to the first, is that the student teachers are able to expand their understanding of behaviour to incorporate the broader notion of establishing productive relationships in the class and devising activities that build such positive relationships.

“I also tried to remain fair and consistent, but most of all, approachable, realising that there is a trust in the classroom that has to exist, in order to get the best from the students... This was down to the tuition I had received at university.”(Student 112, 09-10 evaluation)

This overcomes the dichotomy one often finds in the way behaviour is discussed, which can be separated from decisions about teaching and learning. In this particular case the establishment of trust proved to be of great significance as one of her pupil’s disclosed she was thinking of suicide, and she was able to alert the school to provide support. This general approach to promoting positive relationships is also illustrated by students who reported:

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2 Students are referred to by a student number (in this case the student is 30th in the spreadsheet of evaluation responses) and their year of study.
“I try to include discussions and an active sharing learning environment where children feel safe to express their opinions and to talk about things.” (Student 31, 09-10 evaluation)

Another student provided an example of the small actions that enact these good intentions:

“I have been strict on behaviour when words have been used by pupils which are offensive which some staff at my school were tolerating.”

(Student 33, 09-10 evaluation)

A maths student in the focus group at the end of the year illustrated how he had taken into consideration his knowledge of how frequently a difficult child is excluded from lessons when teachers follow behaviour management guidelines. He argued that his own approach to dealing with one particular boy was influenced by the overarching priority he accorded to the boy’s right to education. Therefore he pursued short term ‘time-out’ from class followed up by individual conversations and relationship building, rather than the use of the on-call teacher to remove him from the class.

One of the staff interviews did indicate a potential pitfall for student teachers, especially in Citizenship. The course leader felt that some of his students were struggling to find the right balance between their conscious attempts to be a ‘rights respecting teacher’ and the need to address behaviour problems as they arose. As a consequence he felt that some of them had still to find a way to combine this broad approach with the kind of teacher interventions that were sometimes necessary in fraught moments. For him this is a teaching challenge for the forthcoming year and he hopes that it might be remedied by being more explicit about how to manage this balance and being more open about how to use (and explain) sanctions when they are necessary. He also discussed the need to encourage student teachers to use their commitment to a rights respecting framework in the class as a starting point for their own (self-critical) evaluations of their practice, and thus avoid the danger of “lip-service” to the rights agenda.

The Modern Languages tutor also drew attention to behaviour in her discussion of rights in the PGCE. She recounted a lesson where she felt a student teacher failed to respect his children’s rights and created an environment in which children were intimidated and felt psychologically unsafe. She contrasted this with another lesson where the student teacher had taken the time to get to know the pupils and had incorporated this knowledge in the lesson, thus leading to an inclusive lesson in which pupils were engaged and enjoyed their learning. Reflecting on the comparison she concluded:

“That’s the bit we need to say to the trainees...It’s not about being soft, it’s not about not daring to tell anybody off... it’s about making them enjoy learning and enjoy coming to your lesson and feeling comfortable in it.”

(Modern Languages tutor interview)

The role of the rights respecting classroom in planning to teach comes to the fore when tutors think about how to prepare student teachers for tackling controversial issues (for example in McCallum & Brook, 2010). I invited the Citizenship tutor to discuss the role of teaching responsibilities, taking as an example, the responsibility to be respectful of other’s opinions. He was clear that whilst this should be explicitly taught as the general rule, one has to be prepared that a successful discussion of controversial issues may present more complex issues.

“In real political life people get emotional and don’t think about their responsibilities to listen calmly... the House of Commons is an example of that... but I think it’s naive to think (and that’s why in reality it never
happens) that you can... have the rights respecting framework for managing classroom discussion and all class discussion will naturally, if you teach children enough... they'll get into that approach to listen carefully.” (Citizenship tutor interview)

Here there is a sense that the rights and responsibilities framework that might normally be promoted has become itself the focus of critical analysis. As he says, in a Citizenship classroom, with serious political engagement, and an honest exchange of diverging political opinions, one must acknowledge that simply abiding by rules is not possible, nor ultimately desirable.

“Some contributions might be extremely inflammatory and I’m not really sure I’d like to see children sitting there, you know, quite politely listening to someone who might come out with that. I would like children to get quite angry and passionate about that and that might actually lead to a behaviour issue, if someone stands up and says... ‘what you’re saying is abhorrent... and I don’t want to hear it’... I’d be happier... for a child to stand up...” (Citizenship tutor interview)

Here then the rights respecting framework is far from providing a straightforward list of things to do and things to avoid. Instead of providing a clear and categorical way to approach classroom relationships it is seen as a set of principles which provide the backdrop to more nuanced decisions which can only be judged in the context of that classroom, on that day, with those children. This is identified by this tutor as a key challenge and he believes that if this complexity can be grasped by students, they can use the rights framework more critically. The alternative, which is to use rights in a more simplistic and formulaic way, is more likely to lead to superficiality.

**Theme 2: Inclusion**

Some of the student responses, especially in relation to the question about their own teaching, referred to an aspect of inclusion. This often focused on equality of access in general:

“All students had the right to a decent education, I tried to promote conditions under which that could occur and I endeavoured to deliver the curriculum to the best of my ability.” (Student 82, 09-10 evaluation)

Sometimes students mentioned specific dimensions:

“...teaching science inclusively with regards to religious beliefs, safe working environment...” (Student 67, 09-10 evaluation)

“Working with refugees and asylum seekers - making the extra effort to meet the needs of pupils with EAL, they want to learn, but need that extra support.” (Student 28, 08-09 evaluation)

Given that so much of the professional studies programme on the PGCE is concerned with aspects of equality (and inequality) the emergence of this theme is not surprising. Some students are able to go further though and start to relate inclusion to notions of student voice.

In these responses, and building on the positive approach to behaviour noted above, students discussed how creating opportunities for pupils to express their views and beliefs created a more genuinely inclusive learning environment. Some respondents made general assertions about this aspect of their practice:

“I took part in sessions on the Learners' Voice and implemented ideas in my lessons and in my practice.” (Student 50, 08-09 evaluation)

But others made specific connections to classroom approaches:

“I use children's beliefs, backgrounds and cultures as an asset in the classroom. For example, during form time I had students prepare and deliver short presentations on religious festivals that were important to them. As a matter of course I always ensure that my students are clear
that their voice will be clearly heard in my classroom, within the bounds of good behaviour. I try to create a collaborative classroom where all can contribute, be heard and be valued.” (Student 57, 09-10 evaluation)

These responses only form a minority of the data but they do indicate that, by the end of the course, some student teachers are able to expand their notion of inclusion to incorporate a view of the learner as more able to foster valuable learning through their active participation.

Theme 3: Teacher identity

Clearly, a small minority of the students were largely unengaged with the rights dimension and sceptical about how it could relate to them. One student felt that that the dimension said nothing to his actual experiences of teaching:

“I found this to be the most problematic course, one which looked more like government propaganda than any realistic look at what happens in education.” (Student 52, 08-09 evaluation)

This response was from an older male student who also defined inclusion as, “a lot of hard work, especially for badly behaved pupils who had no interest in learning.”

Taken together these comments indicate that he was probably still going through a process of creating a positive self-identity as a teacher that incorporated the real demands of the role. Linking inclusion to ‘bad’ pupils, rather than to notions of ‘need’ or ‘entitlement’ implies a deficit view of learners, which is unlikely to foster further reflection on his own development needs and professional identity.

Whilst this student dismissed this element of the course as being unrealistic, the next student found it to be redundant for another reason:

“I did not find these lectures and workshops particularly enlightening, I think everything that has been said during these was mostly common-sense knowledge that should be crystal clear to every ‘wanna-be’ teacher.” (Student 85, 09-10 evaluation)

This was echoed any another student, who also asserted that this approach was simply part of who he was:

“...it is embedded instinctively into both my social and professional behaviour.” (Student 75, 09-10 evaluation)

Other students had been able to incorporate the rights dimension into their developing sense of professional identity. From their responses it is not always clear whether they had been prompted to think about this issue for the first time, or the course simply helped them to identify and describe this element of their beliefs in a way which related to their professional development. One student in her portfolio at the end of the first year of our Rights Respecting programme outlined how this dimension to the course had actually prompted her to think about this broader dimension. She said that the preparation for the course (the application, interview, admissions paperwork, responding to interview targets, general reading and moving house) had become a list of practical obstacles to overcome to start the course, but the introduction of the rights theme had prompted her to think again about the enormous responsibility she was about to undertake, and the ethical implications. In the limited space available in the questionnaires, such responses were echoed in the following answer:

“As Teachers, we are role models for groups of young people, who at times are quite impressionable. Through the lectures and workshops we were able to learn about and put into practice methods of integrating Rights into our lessons and teaching practice. If we act as responsible role models, this will help our students in being better citizens and... hopefully make better judgments in the future.” (Student 49, 09-10 evaluation)
Some of those for whom the rights dimension had become a critical dimension to the way they viewed their role also used it as a critical tool for reflecting on the ways in which schools operated in practice, to include and exclude. By way of example, in 2009-10, we had the first significant cohort of mathematics students choosing to complete their assignments at Masters level. It was interesting to note that of these six students, four undertook research projects that were framed by a rights agenda in some way. One of these students in his evaluation noted:

“As much as my teaching is developing in the way of a true dialogue between teacher and learner, I think it reflects a healthy respect for children’s rights. Unfortunately, some of the structures of secondary education, especially with regard to curriculum and exam board requirements do not adequately support a focus on children’s rights. For example, much of the time in KS4 is spent on getting through material, and teaching to exam specifications, rather than allowing enough time for exploratory talk.” (Student 78, 09-10 evaluation)

In his assignment he observed the experiences of students assigned to one of three groups in year 11 – those who had already passed the GCSE Maths at A-C level, those who had a very good chance of gaining a grade C at the end of the year; and those who had little chance of achieving grade C, either through poor behaviour and lack of engagement, or low predicted scores and achievement to date in line with their predictions. Through taking a simple focus on ‘access to a suitable education’ the student described how the first group had been sent to the library to effectively self-tutor AS maths, the third group had been re-organised into large classes and assigned to temporary / supply teachers and the middle group received intensive lessons by experienced specialist staff. This project clearly had a profound impact on how the student viewed his subject, himself and the role he might undertake in any future teaching job. It also reflected earlier academic research on streaming, maths and access to education (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000). What is significant in relation to teacher identity, is that he has started to think about how he will engage with the ethical dilemmas posed by school systems which appear to be at odds with his understanding of inclusion. In this I would say he is preparing to see himself as a ‘change agent’.

This issue of teacher identity has also emerged in the reflections of tutors. This is evident in the Citizenship tutor’s account of teaching controversial issues (above, theme 1) and in the English tutor’s account of how he has developed a novel approach to conceptualising student voice through his subject (McCallum, 2010). Similarly, in my interview with the Modern Languages tutor I discussed a collaborative project she had undertaken with the Citizenship tutor (Bhargava & Smith, 2010). Their joint evaluation of the project ended up focusing more on the issues it had thrown up in relation to teacher identity than about rights. In particular they drew on Bernstein’s analysis of subject identity in schools to clarify the challenges this cross-curricular project had posed. In her own engagement with this, the tutor reflected:

“I identified myself as a languages teacher and I had to work really hard to really understand where my subject fitted into that [rights project]... I could do it on a really superficial level, I know I could talk about child poverty in wherever... but it’s still something that I’m working on really about how to make it run through the course and part of being a teacher.” (Modern Languages tutor interview)

This led her to think about how the role and purpose of languages may be taken for granted, especially given the high number of native speakers she recruits to the course, and the implications of this for teacher identity. She was also starting to explore how languages, culture and identity come together for her student teachers,
and plans to explore the possibility of connecting these issues through discussion of rights.

This tutor also sounded a note of caution about using rights as an ethical framework:
“...It’s too easy to take things for granted and I think it’s too easy to make presumptions about what people’s views are and I don’t know I can make a presumption that the people who are starting in September are necessarily going to agree... There are some people who would say ‘I’m in a classroom and I don’t...’ [sentence not completed]... So what we need to do is to say, ‘well this is what we represent’... I kind of think well you haven’t got a place in teaching if you don’t believe that... But I think we need to be more explicit about what we mean... The trainees are from such a range of backgrounds I don’t think we can make presumptions... People become teachers for so many different reasons.” (Modern Languages tutor)

Although in the end she comes down on the side of the argument that it is justifiable for us as teacher educators to espouse a set of values which goes beyond mere compliance with the Standards for Qualified Teacher Status, she is clearly somewhat uneasy about the overt ethical stance this requires, and the implications for our relationship with student teachers. This echoes the concerns of the minority of students who said in the questionnaires that they were uneasy with this development, and indeed she also discusses the realistic possibility of an additional group who simply go along with this framework, because they lack the confidence or motivation to rock the boat.

Theme 4: Connections to school practice

A final theme emerges from a relatively small number of responses in both years which referred to the lack of coherence between the messages being promoted on the course and the student teacher’s experience of schools during the year. Whilst the maths student discussed in the previous section clearly shows how this dissonance can be used as the stimulus to critical thinking and deeper engagement with the challenge of teaching, other responses indicated that they would like further help on how to manage this discrepancy. As one student put it, she would have appreciated:

“Some suggestion of what to do when your newly London Met-ised view on rights comes into contact with mentors or the management of your schools.” (Student 46, 09-10 evaluation)

It is noticeable though that only a few students complained that their schools seemed to be completely at odds with the agenda. Most of those who made related comments suggested ways in which we could amend assignments and directed tasks to ensure that they engaged with their mentors in discussion about the rights dimension.

Does a rights perspective make any difference to a PGCE?

As the evaluation progressed I began to wonder whether the adoption of a rights perspective actually made any significant difference to student teachers’ practice and understanding. Given that many of the student teachers’ responses identified specific issues which would always be taught in a PGCE, such as positive behaviour management techniques or aspects of inclusion, the question emerged, ‘what difference does our use of rights language make to the way these issues are experienced?’ In other words, was there any tangible value added by the use of rights language as an additional layer beyond the individual issues. It may simply be that as a course team we effectively used the rights agenda as a mechanism for refreshing our approaches to inclusion and other issues, and so what we were measuring was a broad level of satisfaction with these elements of the course.
In terms of developing a conceptual model for the development of professional knowledge, we seem to have imposed the following, and the question was essentially whether the top layer was helping in any way, or simply adding a vague and ill-defined patina.

![Diagram]

- Rights as a framework
- Generalisable mini-theories about: Inclusion, Behaviour, Progression etc
- Evidence about what works based on experimentation, reflection and guidance on school experience and in training workshops.

This question was reinforced by one or two comments in evaluations which were in no way representative, but which nevertheless seemed to raise potentially significant issues. One student in particular who was very thoughtful, impressively engaged with these issues and who I would have expected to embrace this dimension made the following comment in his evaluation:

“What I actually feel about it now is that it is an issue for government policy and I’m not sure that it is necessarily in the interest of a training programme to put it at the centre of its agenda.... Anyone who does not respect the rights of children has no business being a teacher, and I wouldn't quite understand why they would want to be.” (Student 82, 09-10 evaluation).

This echoed another response in relation to the question about whether the students’ teaching promotes children’s rights:

“Doesn’t all teaching?” (Student 127, 09-10 evaluation)

I addressed this issue in the focus groups and staff interviews.

In the interview with the Citizenship tutor I asked what, if any, difference the Rights Respecting PGCE context made to the teaching of controversial issues. Clearly this would form part of any Citizenship teacher education programme, but he felt that,

“rights clarifies it... it provides an overarching framework that... gives them a way of thinking when you’re analysing the strengths and weaknesses and issues... it does provide you with a way of standing back and thinking both more broadly and deeply...” (Citizenship tutor interview)

Interestingly though, his response, which started off about controversial issues in Citizenship, ended up making a general point about the value of the rights perspective for other subjects. This made it possible to make an additional point about the ways in which the rights perspective was being used by students from all subjects to become more critical in their interpretation of school practices and of the role of the teacher within them.

When asked how (if) our rights agenda changed the way traditional course content was covered, the Modern Languages tutor felt that we needed to be much more specific about the implications of the rights agenda:

“If you want to achieve a group of teachers who are at ease with the term human rights classroom, then... I need to do more work to draw a link between what they would, I think, see as general professional attributes,
and the reasons why we know this is good practice. Because you’re moving away from what works in the classroom... it’s a morality you are imposing, and it depends how idealistic you are as a teacher as to whether that sits easily with you or not. So if you want a rights respecting classroom to be understood I think you need to do a bit more unpicking...”

(Modern Languages tutor interview)

When asked whether this additional layer merited the effort she acknowledged that there is a benefit to the rights agenda, although it wouldn’t necessarily be at the top of her personal agenda for developing the course. She thought, “there is a benefit to sending out trained teachers who have a strong idea and a strong identity about what their position is in the classroom and in the school. If you give people a strong identity which includes their responsibility to promote a rights respecting classroom it’s an advantage for them because it’s an added layer of what you are as a teacher.”

(Modern Languages tutor interview)

Here then the justification of the rights perspective is more conditional and pragmatic, and this creates another possible route for discussions with student teachers – the comparative advantage one might gain in the job market by being familiar with children’s rights and able to draw links between them and one’s professional role as a teacher.

I also asked the Citizenship tutor about whether the rights dimension had made any appreciable difference to the way we engaged with issues like differentiation, which would feature in any teacher education programme. He returned to the theme of criticality and referred to the maths student (student 78, 09-10 evaluation, discussed above in theme 3), who was in his professional studies group. He felt that for this student, his project on unequal treatment for year 11 maths students depending on their previous attainment had led to powerful learning.

“Understanding the issue, and also understanding it from a rights perspective, [potentially] enables him to have a dialogue with people who make that kind of decision and if you can couch it in those terms (and all too often it’s not couched in those terms, it’s an issue of expediency)... if you bring it back to rights... their rights to have an education, and they’re clearly not getting an appropriate maths education at this point... it makes it pretty powerful... it’s difficult to argue against rights.” (Citizenship tutor interview)

Here we can see the rights agenda merging with the model of teacher as change agent, as the tutor is explicitly reflecting about the lessons this student may have taken away from this experience for his future employment. As he put it, the evidence of the learning impact may not be seen for a while, but will ultimately manifest itself in this teacher either participating in departmental or whole school discussions about ability setting, deployment of resources etc, or at the least making personal professional decisions designed to mitigate the worst effects of such iniquitous school systems. In this the teacher is characterised as a change agent, and teaching is seen as a political activity – both themes of our Professional Studies lectures.

**Conclusion**

Two years into our Rights Respecting PGCE project it appears that the implementation is showing some successes. At the very least the evidence discussed above indicates that the majority of student teachers value this dimension to the course and can relate it to their classroom practice.

In addition there is evidence that some students are engaging with the theme to deepen their understanding of two previously significant elements of the course – behaviour and inclusion. The reflections discussed above indicate some students are
able to articulate a relatively sophisticated understanding of the inter-relationship between these two issues.

Furthermore, in the assignments referred to, and in the tutors’ reflections on them, it appears that for some students the rights dimension is providing a framework to promote criticality. In some cases this criticality is directed at the school and the unintended consequences of policies, in other cases students use the rights perspective to critically assess their own actions.

Members of staff have responded to the rights agenda in different ways and at different paces, yet the papers by course tutors (referred to above) and the interviews conducted for this report illustrate another, less anticipated, benefit to our programme review. The nature and quality of tutor collaboration has changed and the rights dimension is providing staff with a framework for discussing pedagogy. Of course this could be developed on the back of any theme we had chosen to pursue across the programme, but the discussions that have taken place within the team indicate that the rights agenda certainly has the scope for developing a shared language about the PGCE as a whole and also provides sufficient flexibility for subject specialists to develop their own subject contribution.

These glimpses of our programme indicate the small ways in which we have attempted to develop experiences which support the rights-respecting theme. The main point to emerge from student evaluations is that we should continue to develop this dimension and to embed it even more thoroughly in the different elements of the programme. Through staying true to our vision, through collaboration and through critical inquiry we aim to continue to develop our provision and in doing so to act in some small way as change agents, to promote the kinds of education outlined above. In this way our ultimate aspiration as teacher educators is to see ourselves as change agents and as facilitators of change agency in others.

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