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# EMBEDDING ETHICAL AGENCY IN INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION: THE PROFESSIONAL MASTER OF EDUCATION

## *Integrando la cuestión ética en la educación inicial de maestros: el Máster Profesional en Educación*

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**INTRODUCTION.** This article is a companion article to the preceding one: “Shaping a New Ethical Landscape in Teacher Education”. It offers a systematic account and a critical review of a new departure in the professional education of teachers in Ireland. In particular, it explores how the teacher education rationale developed at the National University of Ireland Maynooth has been advanced in a new key and embedded carefully into practice. The opportunity to do so arose as the main teaching qualification for Irish secondary teachers became a Master’s level programme: the Professional Master of Education (PME). **METHOD.** The methodology is that of a critical case study. It seeks to identify illuminating insights for broadly comparable cases. It focuses in particular on pioneering initiatives that directly engage the practitioner’s ethical capacities in the learning experiences provided in the new Master’s programme. There are three main parts, followed by a *Résumé* and Conclusions. The first part examines the concrete curriculum innovations necessary to bring the strengthening of ethical capacity to the core of the programme. The second and third parts examine more closely the main features of the new programme and examine the feedback gathered from the first cohort of students. The Conclusion provides an appraisal of the significance of the new directions charted by the PME in the context of the challenging demands democratic society now makes on teachers. **RESULTS.** The results show that the students have very largely embraced the challenges of the new programme and have willingly embarked on initiatives that strengthen their ethical capacities as practitioners. **DISCUSSION.** Throughout the article the discussion reviews the promise of the new emphasis on ethical capability, not just for this cohort of students but for the field of teacher education itself.

**Keywords:** *Pedagogic practice; Critical-creative, Ethical agency, Initial teacher education, Democratic, Dialogic.*

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## A New Approach to Ethical Agency

Efforts to strengthen teachers' ethical awareness and capacity through professional learning were underway in the Department of Education at the National University of Ireland Maynooth for over a decade before Ireland's Teaching Council, in a historic development, laid out a new structure for teacher education programmes in 2011. The article 'Shaping a New Ethical Landscape' in this volume reviews the rationale underlying these efforts and their main ingredients (These ingredients are summarised in the paragraph below). The new *Criteria and Guidelines* for teacher education published by the Teaching Council in 2011 reflect in large measure that rationale. Undergraduate programmes were extended by a year, in most cases from three years to four. Postgraduate programmes were extended from one-year diploma to a new two-year programme called the Professional Master of Education (PME). This article will focus specifically on the PME programme for secondary teachers at Maynooth. It will review its work in refining and consolidating among teachers' ethical orientations for professional thought and action that are qualitatively different from those promoted by most conventional teacher education programmes. It should be noted at the start that the PME commenced in August 2014 and is now provided nationwide in Irish universities. It serves as the main route of entry into secondary teaching in Ireland.

To begin with, initiatives like those developed in our department during the first decade of the new century, and described in 'Shaping a New Ethical Landscape', became central features of Year One of the PME programme. These include: (a) integration of the foundation disciplines into two complementary modules — 'Teaching as a Critically Reflective Practice' and 'Teaching, Learning and Assessment'; (b) extensive use of formative assessment, linked to team-work exercises by the student teachers in video-analysis of their own work; (c) an

action research project by each student teacher on developments in his/her own practice; (d) a new approach to the appraisal of work in school placements, with an important element of self-assessment by the student teachers. In the rationale underlying these changes, teachers are viewed not as researchers *per se*, but as practitioners with a critical research capacity in reviewing their own practice. There are some strong resonances here of 'process models' associated with the work of Jerome Bruner (1960) and of Lawrence Stenhouse (1975). Equally strong are influences from the work of John Elliott in promoting action research in teacher education (Elliott, 1993, 2007). There is however less a concern in our work with elucidating a theoretical model than with cultivating ethical orientations that arise from viewing education as a practice in its own right (Hogan, 2010, 2011). The rationale for that work is primarily, but unobtrusively, a Socratic one. This is less a matter of methods or techniques of dialogue than of a commitment to a spirit of open and critical enquiry. Its guiding inspirations spring more from the open *agora* than the more restricted academy. This kind of Socratic spirit is memorably exemplified in the early Dialogues of Plato such as Gorgias, Protagoras, Apology and Republic Book 1. The rationale itself is continually developing moreover. For many years it has been furnished with insights from authors like Hans-Georg Gadamer (1975) and Richard J. Bernstein (1983) into the pervasive presence of unacknowledged influences in all human efforts to understand anything new. No less important are the constructive arguments of such authors on how encounters with inheritances of learning might fruitfully and defensibly be pursued through dialogic engagement in pluralist circumstances.

Not surprisingly then the rationale for the PME seeks to provide learning experiences that bring to light hidden assumptions and presuppositions. Especially important here are assumptions that tend to confine pedagogical attitudes and practices in unquestioning

routines. Such routines may well be effective in producing examination results but they may frequently be more conformist than creative and may also be mis-educational or unconsciously invidious. The later work of Dewey makes a strong contribution to this rationale, particularly his concise restatement of core themes in *Experience and Education* (Dewey 1938/1995). Also important is the work of Stephen Brookfield (1995) on becoming critically reflective teachers and other sources like Freire (1973, 1998) and Bakhtin (1981). Central to such a rationale however is the building of a learning *ethos* that is as inviting as it is challenging. Bakhtin rightly emphasises how it is never enough to simply understand the other's perspective. An active engaged understanding of others' meanings and stances means incorporating those perspectives into one's own frame giving it new inflections and nuances. Also, more important for this rationale is the need to prove fertile and fruitful in the 'agora' of professional practice than any urgency to gain theoretical credentials in the academy. As already indicated, its own credentials spring from long-standing traditions of critical thought.

The picture sketched above contrasts strongly with traditional patterns of teacher education, the student teachers now taking a more active and responsible hand in their own learning and exercising greater ethical agency and autonomy. In Year One of the new programme, placement in schools takes place on two days of the week and the other three days are spent on campus. In Year Two the reverse is the case: three days on placement and two on campus. Year Two of the programme sets out to:

- hone and develop skills in curriculum planning, subject knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge and related methodologies;
- develop imaginative strategies that promote individual and shared learning;
- develop collaborative models of planning coherent, differentiated and integrated teaching programmes which

are informed by ongoing individual and collaborative reflection on professional practice;

- apply knowledge of the individual potential of pupils' dispositions towards learning, varying backgrounds, identities, experiences and learning styles to planning for teaching, learning and assessment;
- develop pedagogically-thinking, research-informed, research-active practitioners.

The new features introduced in the postgraduate diploma programme during the first decade of the 21st century — prior to the introduction of the PME — placed a strong and continuing emphasis on nurturing the student teachers' ethical agency; particularly their capabilities in critically interrogating their own practice and making improvements in that practice that are both defensible and promising. Importantly, these elements had originally been designed to bring the students to a qualification standard; namely to accomplish those levels of proficiency that would enable the graduates to commence their professional careers as teachers. Now however they had to be recast, in some degree at least, as Year One elements of a two-year Master's course; namely as preparatory learning experiences for a further year of full-time professional education. This presented both a challenge and an opportunity. The main challenge was to ensure fruitful progression while avoiding any replication, or reversion to transmission-based learning. The learning experiences provided would enable a wide range of practical materials that could not be accommodated in the Year One to be included. However, they would have to be included in ways that steered clear of a 'learning about' approach; that is to say, in ways that cultivated further the student teachers' reflective capacities, their interrogative capabilities and their readiness to take courageous educational initiatives. As explained in the next section the main opportunity, and challenge, was to avail of the extended placements in Year Two to

promote, in complementary ways, the merits of a Lesson Study approach on the one hand, and a practice-based Master's dissertation on the other.

Provision also had to be made in Year Two for a diverse range of modular inputs on themes such as 'Perspectives on Inclusive Education', 'Educational Leadership', 'Restorative Practice', 'Junior Cycle Reform and Assessment', 'Quality Teaching and Learning', and 'Advanced Special Education Needs', among others. These modules reflect current policy priorities in Ireland, and present challenges that might readily be dealt with, but essentially bypassed, by taking a traditional 'learning about' approach to them. Similar challenges were confronted in the need to provide a programme of professional studies which investigates a range of specialised topics, including 'Building Effective Relationships with Parents', 'Dealing with Critical Incidents', 'Wellbeing and Mindfulness', in addition to a module on 'Understanding Self in Interactions'. As suggested in the previous paragraph, an important feature of these modules is that the students are expected to bring to them the kinds of critical ethical orientations promoted continually from the start of Year One. This means that the various elements are encountered less as information to be received and mastered than as a range of perspectives, policies and strategies to be critically examined and reviewed. Such critical interrogation engages the self-understanding, not just the intellect, of the student teachers, helping to sharpen and refine their emergent ethical orientations, capacities and identities as practitioners.

Refining in incremental ways the intellectual and communicative expertise of teaching practitioners in pedagogic content areas is a key priority in Year Two. In this regard, student teachers are provided with a range of opportunities to engage with their teaching subjects in differing ways: subject-specific, subject-related, generic and cross-curricular. Working at a more advanced level than in

Year One of the programme, student teachers undertake dedicated specialised methodology sessions with a host of leading subject-specific experts. They are also provided with opportunities to engage in subject-related ways with their teaching subjects through a series of 'TeachMeet' events. These formal scheduled periods provide opportunities for student teachers to meet and share good pedagogic practice, innovative resources and ideas, as well as personal insights and/or dilemmas. They recognise the significance of professional community and prioritise a form of engagement where teachers and students are bound up in discursive spaces that are dialogic and critical-creative to varying degrees. To support this work, generic methodologies treat varying pedagogic content knowledge areas such as Junior Cycle reform and assessment, differentiation, Key Skills and educational technology. More particularly, as two leading features of the Year Two programme are Lesson Study and the Dissertation, it is worth reviewing each of these in turn now.

### **Pedagogically-thinking Practitioners: Lesson Study, Zoom Events and Discretionary Module**

A traditional criticism of teacher education programmes is the 'common sense' view that 'what is taught in education classes is disconnected from teachers' work in the classroom' (Koteawala, 2012: 67). This view runs contrary to the entire thrust of the Professional Master of Education programme. More specifically, the criticism is countered by the opportunities provided for student teachers to engage in detailed and sustained professional learning through scheduled engagement in Lesson Study. Although the Japanese origins of this approach were not associated with an action research discipline, they have become much more closely associated with action research in the last decade, as evidenced for instance in the research studies that have been

published in the *International Journal for Lesson and Learning Studies* since its inception in 2013. In fact a version of Lesson Study had already been incorporated in Ireland's 'Project Maths' initiative, a nationwide professional development initiative for mathematics teachers in Ireland (Brosnan, 2014). In the PME at Maynooth, Lesson Study enables groups of student teachers to work together in cross-curricular teams to target an identified area for development in their students' learning. Using existing evidence, the student teachers are tasked to collaboratively research, plan, teach, record and review a series of lessons. Through ongoing critical discussion and reflection, students track and refine their interventions, bringing to light practices and attitudes that enrich, or indeed harm, the learning environment, but which might routinely be passed over by teachers during a busy teaching day. Such attitudes and practices moreover may have both immediate and longer-term consequences for the quality of their students' learning. The Lesson Study exercises conclude with large poster exhibition of student teachers' work at the end of each semester. The research literature is predominantly positive on the merits of Lesson Study, but one of its reported drawbacks is the amount of time it takes during the busy daily and weekly schedules of schools (Posch, 2015). We have been largely able to overcome this drawback by building Lesson Study into the full-time schedule for Year Two.

Where practitioners with an already-attuned reflective capacity engage regularly in Lesson Study, attention can concentrate fruitfully on the process aspects of learning as well as on the substantial contents of what is being studied. Again, this recalls something of the process model recommended by Stenhouse (1975), but it is important to stress the pedagogical approach here avoids presenting a model, theoretical or otherwise. Rather, it seeks to bring into being a particular kind of learning *ethos*; one with recognisably Socratic

features. Such a learning ethos is more consistent with the conversational pull of an open-ended enquiry than with the conceptual requirements of theory, whether theory is to be understood in a strict or looser sense. A crucial point to note is that a learning ethos of this kind engages more powerfully with the participants' ethical sensibilities than is likely to be the case in a prescribed course of professional ethics. The learning that takes place in such an ethos is, moreover, less an instance of student teachers constructing knowledge than one of deepening their self-understanding and refining their ethical and communicative capabilities as practitioners. What the Lesson Study exercises generate then is not so much theory that can thenceforth be regularly applied to practice; it is more a yield of insights that seek to be worthy candidates for the discerning attentions, and the deliberative actions, of teaching practitioners *as such*.

Specifically, the student teachers can focus here on the nature and the consequences of the participative, the collaborative and the interactive in learning itself, and on how these can work to shape the teacher's own professional understandings. They become progressively more proficient in the language, the communicative capability and the critical thinking skills necessary for serious lifelong professional learning (Hammerness, Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). The activity typifies a pedagogy of investigation (Lampert & Ball, 1999), with valuable opportunities to examine *a priori* assumptions, and to refine conceptual and practical tools. It also allows the student teachers to identify and to confront many unacknowledged ethical issues in professional practice; for instance, biases that might have become quietly lodged in teachers' attitudes and actions, but that might be gendered, or class-based or otherwise exclusionary. Engaging with pedagogic research during the course of Lesson Study activities also assists students to develop expertise as critical consumers of research, so as to act decisively

in research informed ways. The work of Toom *et al.* (2010: 333) illustrates that doing so develops 'autonomous and reflective teachers who are capable of using research in their teaching'.

It is worth reviewing the feedback received from the student teachers on the Lesson Study exercises in the light of these comments from the research literature. The following are some representative comments from that feedback:

- 'Lesson Study has had an impact on my practice as I am aware of new methods and strategies and the importance of regularly evaluating how I teach'.
- 'Lesson Study was interesting as it highlights importance of co-operation and co-operative learning'.
- 'Lesson Study should be a bigger component of the year as it has a collaboration within your subject which I think teachers lack overall'.
- 'These meetings [for LS groups] 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'.

Reviewing the feedback we have gathered to date, what can be stated with conviction is that the opportunity for student teachers to work with others in cross-curricular Lesson Study has had many benefits, including:

- sensitising the student teachers to issues that are frequently overlooked, and enabling them to read their learning environments with more sensitivity and discernment;
- working in cross-curricular teams and inviting critique in a systematic way from colleagues;
- providing criteria-informed assessments of their own teaching;

- coming to view teaching and learning as a jointly-undertaken ethical engagement that can progressively disclose more genuine possibilities (incl. vocational), and a more authentic sense of identity, than can be accomplished by transmission models of teaching;
- enhancing one's pedagogical relations with one's own teaching subjects;
- taking pedagogic leadership initiatives as distinct from acquiescing in inherited practices and attitudes.

The Lesson Study approach is complemented by 'Zoom Events' and a Discretionary Module. Where Lesson Study brings a more searching focus to the daily routines of practitioners in planning, teaching and evaluating, Zoom Events allow for a concentrated critical review of selected educational themes, topics and issues. These are one-day/half-day events that direct rigorous attention to significant thematic areas such as Social Justice, Literacies, Arts Education, Wellbeing, Development Education, Team Teaching. Far from 'learning about' the issues in question, the Zoom Events make their own unique contribution to a critical learning community. They are double-edged, in that they both nurture an ethical capacity and *presuppose* such a capacity on the part of participant teachers. Like the Lesson Study exercises, the Zoom Events link directly with the Irish Teaching Council's recently published draft document on teachers' professional learning *Cosán* (2016). This recommends that teacher education should 'foster a culture of 'powerful professional learning based on teachers' active engagement in their own learning, for their benefit and that of their students' (p. 3). Both the Lesson Study exercises and the Zoom Events afford important opportunities to the student teachers to hold their personal and professional values and practices up to the light and reflect deeply on the kind of teacher they wish to be; the values they stand for and the kind of world they wish to build.

They also promote more concretely the new practitioners' sense of self-direction and pedagogic agency.

Such agency is a feature which permeates all aspects of the PME programme and particularly so in the Discretionary Module, where student teachers are tasked to initiate new and substantive professional educational experiences. They are invited to demonstrate high levels of critical reflection and independent engagement with the set experience and to provide clear evidence of thinking about and/or implementing newly-gained knowledge in applied ways. They must also participate in collaborative engagement with others and show evidence of how these engagements influenced their thinking and/or subsequent professional actions.

Many innovative projects which nourish a strong professional ethic have emerged from the student teachers' participation in the Discretionary Module. For example:

- Collaboration with Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) on developing short course on climate justice.
- Design and implementation of an Equine Assisted Therapy programme for children with additional needs.
- Design of Wellbeing and Mindfulness programme for Senior Cycle students.
- Establishing a Primary Language Learning Support Programme.
- Design and implement Preventive Education Intervention Programme with Juvenile Liaison Officers.

When taken together, the Lesson Study, Zoom Events and Discretionary Module elements comprise a singular form of reflective learning, and in an advanced as distinct from a more rudimentary key. In short, as confluent elements of a critical and collaborative learning ethos, they promote in teachers the capacity to become their own best critics and develop greater levels of professional agency and leadership.

## **The Year Two Research Dissertation**

Since the pioneering work of Stenhouse (1979), the notion of teacher as researcher has become a central theme in educational research internationally (Elliott & Norris, 2012). Finland has advanced a contemporary variant of this theme more so than most countries, as shown in a study published by Westbury, Hansén, Kansanen and Björkvist (2005). Here they argue that student teachers 'should be able to undertake their own research ... an ability and readiness to read the professional and research literature critically' (478). Such an aspiration is now officially supported in Ireland. For instance, Section 2.7 of the Irish Teaching Council's *Criteria and Guidelines* for initial teacher education (2011: 23) states:

*Programmes of ITE should provide a sound basis for a process of lifelong learning. ... Student teachers should have opportunities to engage in research as the foundation of their practitioner-based enquiry stance in the future.*

Section 3.2 of that same document (2011: 27) requires student teachers to:

- engage in data gathering and critically analyse and evaluate relevant knowledge and research;
- think critically, analyse, and solve problems, as an individual and a member of a team.

What is encouraging for us is how this rationale for national policy on teacher education echoes the rationale developed in our university's education department in recent decades. Reflecting this shared rationale in Ireland, a central pillar of the PME is the Master's Dissertation. In keeping with the collaborative emphasis of the programme moreover, the dissertation is a group exercise rather than an individual one. Much could be said about the significance of this innovation for higher education more widely. It must suffice to remark

here however that the dissertation as a group exercise springs directly from the rationale for the PME programme as a whole: it marks a promising way of embedding qualities that should serve the teachers well in their further development as their own best critics. One of the modules provided in Year Two is devoted to supporting work on the dissertation. For the dissertation, the students work in teams of 4 to 6 to complete a 10,000 word research project on important issues in professional practice. The dissertation is not a 'case study' in any strict epistemological sense, but a critical research assignment on issues in professional practice. It is intended primarily as an exercise to enhance and refine the students' critical skills to work together on the issue they have selected for investigation. Many pertinent themes, the probing of which raise ethical issues in direct ways have emerged from group dissertations. For example:

- Transition from Primary to Secondary School.
- Minority groups in second level education.
- Cyber bullying.
- Social Media.
- Special Education Needs.
- Inclusion / Exclusion.
- Emotional well-being.
- Active learning pedagogies.
- Restorative Practice.

Following submission of the dissertation each team is invited to attend a group viva examination which assesses the team's depth of engagement with the specified topic, as well as the group's breadth of engagement with the chosen field of study. The emphasis in this assessment is dialogic and interrogative, with opportunities for students to discuss and defend differing perspectives on meaning and interpretation. Consideration was given to recording these vivas, but in view of the fact that it was an open conversation, it was decided not to. We are however aware of the richness of

these kinds of dialogic experiences and we are actively considering ways in which to capture this data in more systematic but unobtrusive ways in future.

There are two key aspects to the support module for the dissertation: (1) Introduction to different research methods and (2) research as process (e.g. forming groups, how to conduct group research, conflict resolution, etc.). In relation to the former, all students attend certain generic sessions, such as 'Writing Good Research Questions', 'Research Ethics' and 'Searching Databases'. They also attend the following topics as a carousel or as co-timetabled options with three topics per session.

- Observational Research.
- Action Research.
- Documentary Research.
- Narrative Enquiry.
- Case Study Research.
- Interviewing / Focus Group Research.
- Visual Research.
- Using questionnaires as secondary sources.
- Using Questionnaires as primary sources.

The dissertations were submitted for the first time in April 2016. As regards the actual work of undertaking the research, the social and the interpersonal dealings of the groups emerged as a particularly significant matter, with students identifying the multiple voices, perspectives and subjectivities they encountered within and across teams. Members of many teams spoke of how individuals' diverse discursive backgrounds, their varied ontological positioning and multiplicity of their previous experiences made the research task more challenging, but for the most part also rewarding. This was especially evident where students, through engagement with others, identified previously undetected biases or prejudices and set about tackling these. This reflective and corrective work, which is essentially Socratic in character, occurred in varying degrees in all teams. It is worth taking one team as an illustrative example, not least,

as it is a team where things did not go so well, especially in their early experiences of working together.

Members of this team uncovered all kinds of biases and levels of intolerance when working with others within the team. The difficulty first manifested itself in the manner in which they communicated with each other, which was in the main through social media. One student set high expectations for those other students in the team and would send online messages late at night, expecting a quick turnaround response. Other members complied with this expectation in the hope that it would 'keep the peace. ... I didn't want conflict'. But another member of the team refused to do so on the grounds that they had many other competing demands in their lives and that conceding to unrealistic time demands afforded the more demanding member a level of authority in the team which 'simply wasn't fair'. The team did not deal effectively with the issue, with the result that they temporarily disbanded. Following significant interventions by their research supervisor the team re-formed, but now with a greater understanding of each other's preferred ways of working. The process of re-formation required them to focus on important matters of inclusion, of voice and of listening. Through this experience, a new kind of leadership grew within the team. One of the initially quieter members emerged as particularly strong. This person took up a more central position and secured agreement on the rules and norms that proved necessary during the production of the dissertation.

This case example, minor versions of which were evident in other groups, revealed valuable perspectives on broader matters concerning division of labour, role identity and agency within the group structure. Learning to resolve or manage the differing perspectives in a just manner deepens one's ethical understanding and helps to build a strong sense of professional ethics. Such perspectives however, arising as

they did from experienced workplace tensions, would be far less likely to be encountered in traditional forms of professional training.

The feedback from most teams mentioned the beneficial consequences of working in research teams. Students characteristically 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'. Other representative responses highlighted how working with others required team members to focus on important matters of inclusion, voice and listening. For their part, supervisors and tutors spoke of how they were required to work with their teams to develop for themselves systematic strategies to enable the less powerful to be heard (Chambers 1997, 2002). Supervisors also reported that working in the research teams requires the students 'to flatten out hierarchies and open up spaces that promote a sense of equality' (Chappell and Craft, 2011: 364).

The research activities for the dissertation also gave the student teachers an experience of working in initial ways as professional learning communities (Hord, 2007). Within such communities, they could develop important critical and communicative skills of consensus building, but in ways that were monitored and supported by the research supervisors. Learning in such communities helped to disrupt uni-directional, monologic socialisation patterns. Instead, as Engeström puts it (2001: 137), 'the object and motive of the activity are reconceptualised to embrace a radically wider horizon of possibilities'. The main implication of this is that former framings of our teachers (understandings and interpretive perspectives) are potentially unmade and learners themselves are transformed, or partly so, in their conceptual and professional capabilities for engaging in the world of teaching. This is not a form of learning characterised by passivism, compliance or one-way transmission, and not 'something done for students or to them' for their own

good (Engeström, 2001: 34). Dewey had long argued for educational experiences of this kind. His late work, *Experience and Education* (1938/1995), presents a concise restatement of his key educational arguments. It highlights the merits of more participative, community-based learning environments that enable and prepare teachers to play active, purposeful roles, as needed in a democratic society.

These kinds of scheduled group research activities can particularly serve to open up new imaginative landscapes, enabling newly qualifying teachers to develop and exercise their ethical agency. Again, such endeavour is consistent with Dewey (1938/1995), who saw the goals of education as advancing humans' abilities to understand, articulate and more significantly to act democratically and decisively within their social milieu. Writing very much in the tradition of Dewey, Burbules and Rice (1991: 409) highlight the significance of these kinds of democratic, dialogic principles. For them the opportunity to work in these ways:

*Offers paths both to establishing intersubjectivity and consensus, and to creating a degree of understanding across (unresolved) differences... Dialogue can also serve the purpose of creating partial understandings, if not agreement, across difference.*

Of course, the collaborative research work on the dissertations is not purely for the purpose of creating opportunities for dialogue, important though that is. It is fundamentally about the fruits of this kind of engagement which, by its own nature, is challenging, but also democratic and transformative. There is a deeply rooted moral and ethical imperative at work here. That ethical imperative is properly realised in an enhanced professional capacity with attributes like the following:

- It is able to reason, individually and collectively, for robust, informed position(s) based on evidences that are available.

- It is willing to revise position(s) in light of the reasoning of others and the consideration of contrary evidence.
- It is capable of detecting and appropriately signal haziness in one's own thinking and the thinking of others.
- It exercises critical skills of discernment and editorial discrimination between what is relevant and what is not.
- It manifests an ability to present a sustained coherent account and marshal argument and perspectives in multimodal ways.

The dissertation exercise also creates valuable spaces to practise higher-order qualities like analysis, evaluation, judgement and informed action during one's education as a teacher. Pratt (1991) referred to these as 'social spaces where cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other' (34). In spaces such as these students are critically enabled to read the world, to question it, to resist it and to better understand the parts they play and can play as educators for the betterment of all. Freire (1970, 1973) and Bakhtin (1981) extend our thinking here further, holding that things do not exist in themselves but only in their relations with others. So interpretive, critical stances are never purely personal, precisely because one's own experiences are always implicated in those of others. Both Freire and Bakhtin also rightly emphasise how it's never enough to simply understand the others' perspective. An ethically engaged understanding demands incorporating the perspectives of others into one's own frame, therein giving it new inflections and nuances.

Many of the PME students spoke of how liberating but challenging this kind of work is. It has not been the norm in professional courses in universities in the past. A characteristic comment from a PME student was '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'. Of course, liberation and

freedom are inextricably linked with personal responsibility and this needs to be viewed in the context of the community and taking responsibility for all forms of exclusion. It is most certainly not about the individual doing whatever one wants, whenever one wants. 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.

## **Résumé and Conclusion**

It is early days yet for the Professional Master of Education programme. The second cohort of students is now in the second semester of Year Two. It should prove enlightening to compare their feedback with that received from the first cohort. What we know from the feedback from both cohorts to date however is that where the relationship between individuals is inclusive, venturesome and dialogic then there is always the possibility for reciprocal learning and mutuality in the pedagogic experience. This remains equally true whether such individuals are pupils, or students, or student teachers, or university lecturers, or research supervisors. PME students have repeatedly reported how the opportunity to engage in collaborative ways with their peers and tutors opened up opportunities for meaningful co-cooperative engagement, exploration and speculation — key pedagogies associated with developing the teacher's ethical agency. As described earlier in relation to both Lesson Study and the dissertation, group members spoke tellingly of exposure to a considerable diversity of teaching styles and strategies across similar and differing subjects.

Clearly, the necessity of working in these ways demands something new and distinctly different of student teachers as professional learners. What has emerged most dramatically for us as teacher educators is the contrast

between (a) identifying and confronting the often unacknowledged issues of professional practice during one's own professional formation and (b) learning about the ethics of professional practice in a more formal and traditional way.

Despite some criticisms — mainly about having to push regularly beyond the comforts of the familiar — the majority of students found their experience of the PME to be relevant, challenging and rewarding. Of course, these kinds of engagements offer resources and conceptual frameworks that can be subsequently built upon. They can be integrated into classroom practice so teachers can become more sure-footed in creating the kinds of classrooms needed to support more inclusive and more sustaining learning environments.

This paper has recurrently emphasized the significance of democratic community as a powerful metaphor for teachers' professional learning. In such learning communities, participants are bound up in particular discursive spaces that are dialogic and critical-creative to varying degrees. Moje (2008) suggested that a key barrier to building nurturing learning communities lies in the taken-for-granted knowledge that teachers often bring with them, and in the unquestioned beliefs teachers have about their discipline, their students and their learning. Such views have implications for how individuals are socialized into occupying particular social and pedagogic positions and particular identities (Gebhard, 2004), often in ways that diminish rather than enhance professional capacity and ethical agency.

In the case of our own university, the extension of the one-year postgraduate diploma to a two-year Professional Master of Education has provided welcome opportunities to enhance the ethical learning of student teachers. The core of the programme now embodies learning activities that are democratically dialogic,

challenging and flexibly designed to meet the diverse needs of the student teachers. These activities also stimulate and support the student teachers to analyse, reflect, think critically and communicate clearly. This focus on the critical-creative is significant and embodies an approach that seeks symbiotic

balance in the tension between healthy scepticism and openness to new knowledge; something that should itself be a hallmark of all higher education. It is what Freire refers to as remaining 'epistemologically curious' (Freire, 1998: 96). That is the greater challenge and indeed greater goal that lies ahead.

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## Resumen

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### *Integrando la cuestión ética en la educación inicial de maestros: el Máster Profesional en Educación*

**INTRODUCCIÓN.** Este artículo es complementario a uno previo titulado: “Dando forma a un nuevo paisaje ético en la formación de maestros. Una experiencia irlandesa en un contexto internacional”. Se ofrece una revisión crítica y sistemática de un nuevo punto de partida en la educación profesional de los profesores en Irlanda. En particular, se explora cómo la base de la formación de maestros de la Universidad Nacional de Irlanda Maynooth ha sido desarrollada de nuevas formas e incorporada a la práctica. La oportunidad para hacerlo surge debido a que el máster Maestro Profesional de Educación (PME) se convierte en la principal cualificación para profesores irlandeses de secundaria. **MÉTODO.** La metodología es la de estudio de caso. Se trata de identificar ideas clave para casos ampliamente comparables. Se centra, en particular, en iniciativas pioneras que directamente implican la capacidad ética del profesional a través de experiencias de aprendizaje proporcionadas en el nuevo programa de máster. Hay tres partes principales seguidas de un resumen y unas conclusiones. La primera parte examina las innovaciones concretas del currículo necesarias para llevar el fortalecimiento de la capacidad ética al núcleo del programa. La segunda y tercera parte examinan minuciosamente las principales características del nuevo programa, así como la retroalimentación obtenida de la primera cohorte de estudiantes. La conclusión ofrece una evaluación de las nuevas orientaciones trazadas por el PME en el contexto de las demandas desafiantes que la sociedad democrática hace en la actualidad a los maestros. **RESULTADOS.** Los resultados muestran que los estudiantes han asumido en gran medida los retos del nuevo programa y han emprendido voluntariamente iniciativas que fortalecen sus capacidades éticas como profesionales. **DISCUSIÓN.** A lo largo del artículo, la discusión enfatiza en el desarrollo de la capacidad ética, no solo para esta cohorte de estudiantes, sino también para el campo de la propia formación docente.

**Palabras clave:** *Práctica pedagógica, Creatividad crítica, Capacidad ética, Formación inicial de maestro, Democracia, Diálogo.*

## Résumé

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### *L'introduction de l'agence éthique dans la formation initiale des enseignants: le master Professionnel en Education*

**INTRODUCTION.** Cet article fait suite à l'article précédent “Shaping a New Ethical Landscape in Teacher Education”. Il fait un compte rendu en apportant un regard critique sur les nouvelles directrices sur la formation des futurs enseignants en Irlande. En particulier, il explore comment à l'université de Maynooth une nouvelle rationalité dans la formation des enseignants a été développée et imposée progressivement dans la pratique. L'opportunité s'est présentée alors que la qualification pour devenir enseignants dans le secondaire en Irlande est passé au niveau du Master (Master Professionnel en Education ‘PME’). **MÉTHODE.** La méthodologie utilisée repose sur une étude de cas. Elle cherche à mettre en valeur des exemples qui pourraient illuminer d'autres cas similaires et comparables. Il se concentre en particulier sur les initiatives qui engagent directement les capacités éthiques des étudiant lors de leur apprentissage dans le

nouveau programme de Master. Il comprend trois parties principales, suivies d'un compte rendu et d'une conclusion. La première partie étudie les changements réels qui se produisent dans le programme d'études, de façon à renforcer la capacité éthique dans le cœur du programme. Les deuxième et troisième parties se penchent plus précisément sur les principales caractéristiques du nouveau programme d'études en analysant le feedback provenant de la première promotion d'étudiants. La conclusion nous apporte une évaluation de l'importance des nouvelles lignes directrices du programme d'études du PME, dans le contexte difficile auquel les sociétés démocratiques doivent faire face et qui s'impose aux enseignants. **RÉSULTATS.** Les résultats montrent que les étudiants ont accepté les défis que le nouveau programme d'études présente en s'impliquant avec intérêt dans les initiatives qui renforcent leur capacités éthiques en tant que professionnels. **DISCUSSION.** Tout au long de cet article le débat souligne l'importance de mettre en relief la capacité éthique, pas seulement pour cette promotion d'étudiants mais pour l'ensemble des enseignants en formation.

**Mots-clés:** *Enseignement, Créativité critique, Agence éthique, La formation des enseignants, Démocratie, Dialogique.*

## **Author Profile**

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