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448 words

The new 'PE with' Ebacc scheme – a positive step to support recruitment issues in priority subject areas or an insult to the profession!

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The topic of subject knowledge has been a hotly debated topic in the realms of initial teacher education (ITE) and recently geography educators have joined the conversation supporting claims about how a lack of subject knowledge, and lack of subject knowledge development in ITE, significantly disadvantages prospective teachers. Research suggests that a lack of subject knowledge impacts on trainee's classroom confidence; their ability to stretch and challenge students; and the overall quality of classroom teaching and learning in geography (Blankmann et al., 2016; Brooks, 2010; Mitchell and Lambert, 2015; Tapsfield, 2015).

It was therefore with a degree of hesitation, that in September 2018, following the introduction by the Department for Education (DfE) of a new secondary PGCE 'PE with' Ebacc subject scheme (DfE, 2018), I began work with the first cohort of PE with geography trainees. The trainees all had a PE degree and 'A' level or equivalent in geography, as well as being required to undertake a geography Subject Knowledge Enhancement (SKE) course during the summer term, prior to commencing their teacher training. Trainees were clearly motivated by their improved employability prospects, however it was evident that this was as a PE teacher, not as a geography teacher, negating perhaps the government's intention to plug the recruitment gap in priority subject areas and avoid the oversupply of PE teachers.

While keen to respond to the Geographical Association's guidance on secondary ITE provision (GA, 2016) this was simply impossible to achieve within the designated face to face teaching time, 20% of the core curriculum time, a mere 3 days! In determining course content the author has explored the necessity of spending quality time thinking about what it actually means to be a geographer; debating the views of others; and considering how critical this is in terms of shaping teaching, and, maintaining non-specialists personal motivation and engagement with the subject (Holbrey, 2019).

Her paper argues against the mechanisation of learning, and its associated pedagogical adventure, opting instead for an enquiry based approach to learning as advocated by Roberts (2003) which compels learners to 'live' through the experience in order to make sense of it. It reflects on the skill of the trainer in enabling metacognition, and bringing thinking into conscious awareness, leading in turn to a much more powerful learning experience before finally exploring Shulman's (1986) notions of pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) and the idea that subject knowledge and pedagogical knowledge cannot, and should not, be separated. On a pragmatic basis, the development of a non-specialists PCK must form part of their longer term professional development and only then could the 'PE with' Ebacc scheme offer a, small, viable solution to the current recruitment crisis in priority subject areas.

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