

Preparing future English teachers: The use of personal voice in developing English student teachers' identities as language teachers

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ABSTRACT: This article will examine the dynamic process which occurs for secondary English student teachers whilst working for their Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) at London Metropolitan University and will use extensive data in the form of English student teachers' voices to do this. It will explore the impact of an innovative language teacher education programme, which focuses on developing student teachers' knowledge and understanding of language through a cross-subject dialogue with modern languages. It will show how this contributes to the development of a language teacher identity and the relationship between this and previously held notions of English subject identity. It will suggest that through participation in the language teacher education programme, English student teachers are able to begin the construction of a personal theory as a language teacher in preparation for their roles as early-career English teachers.

KEY WORDS: Language education, subject English, student teacher, identity, cross subject dialogue, personal voice, holistic.

INTRODUCTION

The PGCE English course at London Metropolitan University is unique in a number of respects. Firstly, it specifically aims to prepare student teachers for the linguistic and cultural diversity existing within London secondary schools and secondly, it includes as part of the curriculum an innovative course in language teacher education. It is the impact of this course in language teacher education that this article will examine.

In the current climate, the Initial Teacher Education curriculum provided for English student teachers needs to fulfil many demands. Recent national policy documentation, mainly in the form of the KS3 National Strategy (2001), has placed an increased emphasis on English teachers being sufficiently knowledgeable about the structures and forms of the English language to work with the many varieties of text now considered as part of the English curriculum. Providers of Initial Teacher Education have had to decide not only *how* they are going to develop their student teachers' knowledge about language but also *what* they are going to develop, since traditionally this is an area of subject knowledge about which student teachers have felt less confident. An article by Turner and Turvey (2002) discusses an approach focusing on the development of student teachers' knowledge of grammar. It focuses on a small scale research project in which two student teachers, one whose subject is English and the other French, explore the teaching of grammar through university-based sessions, classroom observation and cross-subject reflection. It discusses planning for language development and teaching language across the curriculum whilst proposing ways forward for government policy. At London Metropolitan University the overall aim is to develop student teachers' holistic understanding about language.

ENGLISH AS A DISCIPLINE AND SUBJECT

This lack of confidence in knowledge about language can be explored through an examination of students' perceptions of "English" as a subject. The work of Colin Evans is interesting here. In his book *English People* (1993) he considers the nature of students who chose to study English at degree level and describes a range of English degree courses offered in higher education. He discusses the different ways in which English is constructed as a subject at university level. He states how in his research he expected English students, whom he terms "English people", to be not very good at languages, but that this expectation was proved false: "My initial hypothesis (prejudice) that English people were not good at languages was disproved" (Evans, 1993, p. 21). Instead he characterises students who follow English as having "an overriding interest in literature (which as I showed in *Language People*) linguists tend not to have" (Evans, 1993, p. 33). The problem, as he sees it, is the relationship between language and literature and the way these two areas have become institutionalised and he refers to the work of Protherough, "One subject or two?" (Evans, 1993, p. 227) which also discusses whether English includes the study of language or literature. Evans goes on to suggest that it is perhaps a difference in students' and teachers' perceptions and or experiences of a discipline that lead to institutionalised difference as subjects rather than those intrinsic differences in discipline. Thus the institutionalisation of English need not consist mainly of the study of literary text but could include the study of language.

These arguments have enormous implications for providers of Initial Teacher Education. Students who want to be English teachers are arriving to start their PGCE courses with specific views of what constitutes the subject English which have been gained through their own experiences of the ways in which their schooling and degree studies have constructed the subject of English. However, what is taking place at London Metropolitan University is that an alternative construction of the subject English is made possible to student teachers, through the delivery of a "new" subject "language teacher education" which will impact on their construction of their own subject identity.

ENGLISH STUDENT TEACHERS AND SUBJECT KNOWLEDGE

The subject knowledge experience of English student teachers at London Metropolitan University confirms Evans' thesis that English students have "an overriding interest in literature." When asked the following question at the beginning of this current academic year, "What was your understanding of the subject English before you came on the PGCE course?" the majority of student teachers responded "...using definitions which identified English as including: creativity, text, self-expression and English as a tool for communication" (Burley, 2003). A typical response stated: "English to my knowledge has mainly been concerned with literature past and present" (Burley, 2003). Those students who included issues of language within their definition did so by focussing on language as a tool for communication rather than as an area for study, "English is the most spoken language in the world and so is a tool for communication" (Burley, 2003).

When asked about areas of subject knowledge with which they felt less confident, English student teachers frequently mentioned their lack of knowledge about language and of English as an abstract system. Data from two cohorts of student teachers from three and four years ago revealed that a significant number of those who had English degrees were able to identify “language as a system” as an area of subject knowledge in which they lacked confidence, whilst recognising that this was an important area within English as a subject. One student teacher, when asked to identify “gaps” in subject knowledge at the beginning of the course, wrote, “Confidence in grammar and its application to the National Curriculum” (Burley, 2003). Significantly, only one student teacher went beyond grammar to include the study of language as part of the subject English and an area requiring further personal subject knowledge development. Additionally, as an exercise in eliciting subject knowledge at the beginning of the PGCE English course, student teachers are asked to write a critical response to “Strange Fruit” by Seamus Heaney. Once they had done this they were given an analysis of the poem from both a literary and linguistic perspective (Bleiman, 1999) and asked to compare their response with that presented by Bleiman. The majority of students found that their own analysis had relied on literary terminology and become aware that 1) the study of language was more than the study of grammar and 2) the study of English was more than the study of literature.

In previous work carried out at London Metropolitan University (Pomphrey and Moger, 1999) the uncertainty felt by a number of English student teachers when explaining the structure of their first language was discussed in detail and one of the main conclusions was as follows. “Our findings gave a good deal of support for our hypothesis that English with media students seemed to experience a higher degree of anxiety (than Modern Languages students) over explicit knowledge about language” (Pomphrey & Moger, 1999, p. 235). The authors placed their findings in the context of the UK education system, where the English language maintains an unquestioned status as the medium of everyday communication and of the majority of teaching and learning activity in the school curriculum. This has made it difficult to study English as a language in a sufficiently objective way, particularly for those for whom it is a first language and a teaching subject. The authors suggested how “in order to be able to look at language structures in an abstract way one needs to be able to stand back a little from everyday usage” (Pomphrey & Moger, 1999, p. 235). This perhaps links with the findings from Cameron (1997) who gave her University colleagues, both subject specialists and linguists, a grammar test closely linked to the one produced in 1996 by the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority to assess school teachers’ knowledge about grammar. Apart from causing many colleagues acute anxiety, Cameron reported that they found it difficult to apply prescriptive language rules to a variety of patterns of language and identified “a heritage of insecurity about grammar” (Cameron, 1997, p. 4).

Thus, for a number of reasons, some of which have been outlined above, it seems that many student teachers feel ill equipped to work with language and the language objectives contained within the KS3 National Framework for English, and have developed and continue to develop their subject knowledge in a rather random way, building up fragments of content related knowledge with perhaps no reference to an overall understanding and view of language. Such a situation can give rise to student teachers planning lessons which are driven by an objectives-based view of language

rather than a holistic understanding of the way language operates. It can be argued that if student English teachers were given time to develop and understand language, they would feel empowered to work *with* the national language and literacy curricula rather than *from* them. The implication of this is that English student teachers need to not only consider and develop a personal view and position about language but also a view of language as part of the subject English and as an area which is open to investigation.

Fundamentally student teachers need to begin to create a new and different definition of their discipline and how this could be applied as a subject within the school curriculum. Intrinsic to this new definition are their perceptions of themselves as future English teachers and an awareness of the implicit relationship between their discipline/subject identity and their personal identity. “The key to knowing your discipline ... is knowing your core, your essence, your principle of coherence.” (Evans, 1993, p. 161) Any reworking of discipline/subject identity to include the development of a personal philosophy about language education will also involve shifts in personal perception of identity in relation to the discipline and subject.

PREVIOUS WORK ON LANGUAGE: BRINGING ENGLISH AND MODERN LANGUAGE TOGETHER

At London Metropolitan University student teachers on the PGCE English with media/drama and PGCE Modern Languages courses follow a language teacher education programme as part of the PGCE secondary programme. The overall aim for delivering this programme to the two subject areas is to enable the active transfer of knowledge and understanding about language to be discussed and debated. Bringing the two disciplines and subject areas together into a “new” subject area which is entitled “language teacher education” is a radically different approach to teacher education. However, the programme *does* build on a body of previous work that has looked at language education more holistically and in some cases, like Evans, challenged the notion of keeping these two subject areas separate. Halliday produced a new and imaginative approach to language with *Language in Use* (1971) and the *Bullock Report* (1975) went beyond its brief and considered the place of language education. More recently the work of the LINC (Language in the National Curriculum, 1990/2) project produced teaching materials, which broadened the notion of language education from that offered by the Kingman model (1987). Further work has been carried out by Hawkins (1988) as part of the “Language Awareness” movement (Brumfit, 1988; Stubbs, 1991). As recently as 1999 Hawkins stated that he wanted to reaffirm the views he expressed in 1974 that teachers of English and foreign languages should be brought together. “I proposed a new subject, ‘language’, to be taught as a bridging subject linking English and the foreign language in the curriculum” (Hawkins, 1999, p. 124).

A project conducted by the University of Southampton focused on the pedagogy of English and modern languages teachers and found key differences in the perceptions and practice of English and modern languages teachers in their treatment of knowledge about language, (Mitchell et al, 1994). This project report concluded that dialogue between the two subject areas was needed: “At present knowledge about language work in the classroom is varied, even idiosyncratic, as teachers seek to

make personal sense of unclear policy statements” (Mitchell et al, 1994). Brumfit (2001) has discussed the importance of language teachers gaining an understanding of, and autonomy in, working with language in order to contribute actively to the construction of language learning theory.

Against this background there is recent U.K national policy documentation: *National Literacy Strategy* (1998); *Language for Learning in KS3* (2000); and the *National KS3 Strategy* (2001). These documents, whilst recognising the importance of language in different subject areas, do not specifically make links between learning the first language and learning additional languages or between English and modern languages. It is in the light of this theoretical framework that the language teacher education programme at London Metropolitan University has been implemented.

THE LANGUAGE TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMME

The aims of the language teacher education programme are to:

- focus the student teacher’s attention on the nature and features of language;
- support the development of a language teacher identity through cross-subject dialogue;
- support the construction of a personal theory as a language teacher; and
- operate as a curriculum and pedagogical model.

This programme has been developed over the last few years and now consists of seven sessions, lasting two hours each, which are delivered to student teachers from both English and modern languages who work in a cross-curricular and collaborative way (for a fuller discussion of the programme see Burley and Pomphrey, 2002). The programme is also delivered jointly by tutors from both subjects who are thus giving student teachers the opportunity to witness the teaching process as a collaborative act. The organisation of the programme in this way aims to break down the traditional boundaries of each subject and begins to make links between the areas of knowledge contained in the two disciplines. The study of and discussion about language therefore becomes more actively holistic.

Underlying the programme are a number of concepts intended to support student teachers’ development of a personal philosophy about language education both within their own subject/discipline area and also on a wider scale. These concepts are reinforced through the opportunities to work with a linguistically diverse group of student teachers and focus on developing understanding of:

- the central importance of language diversity;
- the ways in which skills and knowledge can be transferred across language varieties;
- the consideration of all languages as abstract systems with universal characteristics;
- the fundamental relationship between language and individual identity;
- the role of language in interaction, particularly in social and cultural contexts and experiences;
- the value of a holistic approach to language teaching and learning;

- the relationship between language teaching pedagogy and learning of first and additional languages; and
- the importance of critical reflection on language teaching pedagogy.

The individual language teacher education sessions begin by focussing student teachers on their own language history, a task that involves considering notions about language diversity, and language and identity. It then develops by looking at the process of language acquisition both in the first language and in additional languages; learning in an unfamiliar language is also examined. The issues around languages as abstract systems are explored; more specifically student teachers are asked to make comparisons between different languages, particularly at word and sentence level. Text level work is considered in relation to different cultural and linguistic readings of a selection of adverts. In the latter part of the programme, after the student teachers have gained some experience of working in school, they are asked to engage in a collaborative planning task, which consolidates their knowledge and experience of working within the language education programme during the year.

THE USE OF PERSONAL VOICE

The language teacher education programme is currently in its fifth year of development. During this time extensive data about the programme has been collected for a variety of purposes – pedagogical, evaluative and for research. This data exists in the form of student teachers’ voices, both written and spoken, and thus provides a powerful picture not only of the effects of the language education programme but also of the personal and professional development of English student teachers. The use of personal voice, as research data, is promoted in the work of Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000) which studies the effects of second language learning on the (re)construction of self. They argue strongly that when working with individuals’ notions and perceptions of identity the use of personal voice is the most effective form of data: “...in the human sciences first-person accounts in the form of personal narratives provide a much richer source of data...” (2000, p. 157). This is particularly powerful when linked to the work of Roberts (1998) who advocates a social constructivist approach to language teacher education. By this he means an approach which uses reflection, interaction, analysis and evaluation when constructing a personal identity as a language teacher. He also emphasises the significance of the social context for the learning: “...a broadly social constructivist approach offers the most adequate framework for LTE (language teacher education) design. This is because it recognises the interdependence of the personal and social dimensions of teacher development” (Roberts, 1998, p. 4). The remainder of this article will use the personal voices of the English student teachers to show:

- how their knowledge and understanding about language has developed;
- the effects of a cross subject dialogue with modern languages students;
- the relationship between this language teacher identity and previous understandings of subject identity; and
- how they are working towards the construction of a language teacher identity based on a developing personal language theory.

The use of personal narrative begins the whole process of examining English student

teachers' knowledge and understanding of language. The main aim of the first session in the language teacher education programme is to examine the linguistic diversity among the English and modern languages student teachers and prepare them to write their own language autobiographies. To achieve these aims, student teachers are asked to discuss their use of language and language varieties. This discussion must consider:

- where the language, dialect or variety of language is used and who uses it; and
- the world status and the social uses of the languages or language varieties used.

The discussion is moved towards an analysis of patterns and principles underlying language variety and change. In the language autobiography, student teachers are asked to write critically reflective accounts of their own language development and use, which also include comment on links with individual, social and cultural identity. In addition they reflect on how their experiences could relate to their role as a future language teacher.

LANGUAGE AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

What follows are examples of personal voices from the language autobiographies which reveal the extent of the diversity in both student teacher groups. One English student, who was initially assumed to be monolingual, discusses the effect on her family of having a bilingual mother. She says: "My older sister was spoken to in Dutch from the moment she was born and acquired Dutch and English fluently at the same time." She is envious of her sister's bilingualism and describes it as a "luxury which did not apply" to her. She further describes the range of communication strategies she developed when visiting family in Holland "to devise a different way of communication, a way in which we could bond without the use of formal language".

The powerful impact of first language experiences on personal identity, including in some cases the effects of language loss are very apparent in the autobiographies. When writing about the range of languages she has learned in different contexts and countries another (modern languages) student discusses their relationship to her first language: "It would be wrong to think that these languages are pushing my Serbo-Croat away, but they are certainly weakening it as much as they are making it stronger.....they confirm that emotionally I best function in Serbo-Croat. It also shows that I can be a completely different person by simply switching to another language."

The students' writing demonstrates an understanding of the parallels which exist between diversity within a language and diversity of languages. Their choice of which language or variety to use is much influenced by their own perception of language status at various levels within society including family, peer group, professional and academic circles. An English student teacher writes about her use of "Patois" (Jamaican Creole): "Patois has a lot to do with my roots and my heritage, but for a long while I shunned it and saw it as 'incorrect' speech. I think this all

comes from wanting to be viewed as the same as your peers. Inadvertently I was also shunning my Jamaican background, which is something that I now embrace and am extremely proud of.”

Some student teachers show an ability to relate their own language history to their future role as language teachers so that there is an emerging identity as a language as well as an English teacher. An English student teacher, who was born in East London into an Italian family wrote: “As I begin my studies as a trainee teacher I have been made more aware of the vast diversity of language. Looking back on my experience of language I feel that as an English teacher I want my pupils to appreciate the colourfulness and vastness of language...Having more than one way of expressing yourself is important.”

These voices taken from the language autobiographies illustrate the range of experience, knowledge and understanding which student teachers bring to the learning process and confirm the strength of personal narrative as a basis of critical reflection in language teacher education. They also form an important part of the pedagogical practice of the course and when hearing the “voices” of the students at the end of the course their development becomes apparent.

THE FINAL SESSIONS OF THE LANGUAGE TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMME

The last two sessions of the language teacher education programme give student teachers the opportunity to apply the knowledge, understanding and experience gained previously. In a session entitled “Cross-subject language teaching approaches” English and Modern languages student teachers are asked to:

- investigate and compare the knowledge gained about the language curriculum and pedagogy in each of the two subject areas;
- consider ways of facilitating transfer of knowledge and skill between the two subject areas; and
- promote a holistic approach to teaching and learning about language.

In subject specific groups student teachers identify approaches they have observed being used or have used themselves in schools to develop different aspects of the language curriculum, together with a rationale for each approach. This information is then used to make cross subject comparisons and to analyse the reasons for similarities and differences. A list of language teaching strategies, which promote a holistic approach to language teaching across English and modern languages, is then produced. English and modern languages student teachers then apply the principles to their own subject teaching.

When this session has been evaluated by student teachers of English and modern languages it has become clear that although both subjects work at word, sentence and text level in their teaching of language, there is a fundamental difference in emphasis that affects the treatment of these areas within the classroom. In modern languages the major focus is at word and sentence level whereas in English, text level work is the starting point. The articulation of these differences enables student teachers to

consider enriching their teaching by acknowledging how these different approaches could be built into their own repertoire. For example, a teaching approach which modern languages students have frequently experienced in relation to sentence level grammar (highlighting syntactical features using colour codes) was found useful by English student teachers as a way of supporting pupils' recognition and understanding of grammatical patterns.

A final session "Collaborative work with a text" was an addition to the programme in 2002 and is evidence of the way the language education programme is continually evolving. It provides the opportunity for student teachers to apply the outcomes of their dialogue over the year to the practical task of curriculum planning at a more holistic level. Working in mixed subject pairs on poems in both the first and the target language, they plan activities which enable pupils to have some understanding of both the meanings in the poems and the way language has been used to convey them. They are asked to plan activities at word, sentence and text level.

A range of poems were selected by student teachers, for example, from the poets Plath, Lorca, Prevert, and from poetry composed by young people and a poem written by a student teacher. It was noticeable how actively engaged the student teachers became with the collaborative task and many commented on how exciting and innovative they found this approach to curriculum planning. In answer to the question "How has it been valuable to work with someone from another subject in planning this work?", an English student teacher wrote: "It has been very valuable to work with someone from another subject area. MFL (modern foreign languages) students seem to comfortably access knowledge about language bringing new terminology into lesson planning. MFL seems to have a variety of exciting word level activities that English students can use/adapt for (their) own lessons." A modern languages student teacher commented on the different approaches taken by the two subject areas: "While I started out with activities at word level the English teacher approached the poem by talking about the meaning. I think it is important for MFL teachers to focus more on meaning and not to get stuck at word level." Such comments provide evidence of the fusion of ideas generated by the dialogue between the two subject groups over the course of the programme.

THE DEVELOPMENT IN THE STUDENT TEACHERS' VOICES DURING THE LAST FOUR YEARS OF THE LANGUAGE TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMME

This fusion of ideas does reflect on the successful nature of the language education programme. Apart from the voices already cited in the personal writing and evaluative questionnaires addressed to the student teachers, there is extensive commentary by students which has evaluated the effects of the language education programme during the last four years. During this time there has been a shift in student teachers' perceptions and understandings. At the beginning of the programme it was clear that English student teachers were experiencing anxiety about language when working with modern languages students. "A great deal of anxiety was expressed by EWM (English with media) students about their lack of explicit knowledge of the language structure of their own language...MFL and bilingual students were also aware of this difference and often noted the anxiety or lack of

confidence of monolingual EWM students when talking about language structure” (Pomphrey & Moger, 1999). However, student teachers’ responses at the time did recognise the gains to be derived from the cross-subject dialogue.

This focus on rules and grammar was not uncommon at the time, but English student teachers’ voices from two years ago show more of an ability to construct themselves as language teachers than had been the case in the past. “I think it is extremely important for teachers of English and MFL to talk together because both are involved in teaching languages to pupils.” Also at this time modern languages students were shifting from a lack of understanding about the relationship between the learning of the first language and additional languages to focussing more on language learning, including literacy. “Although the teaching methods used in the two subjects may vary, it seems very important for teachers of English and MFL to discuss pupils’ learning styles and strategies, their general language skills and abilities (including literacy) to devise a common teaching approach.”

Student teachers’ responses to the language education programme from last year recognised the value of the cross-subject dialogue as a learning process and saw it as reinforcing the underlying principles of the programme. When asked about the value of the dialogue, an English student teacher said that through working together (English and modern languages) “teachers from both departments can really help to develop language learners in a school. I think it is all too often the case that English in schools is no longer treated as a language that is still being learned even by native speakers.” There is also evidence of more practical application of the student teachers’ understanding than has been the case in previous years. For example, an English student teacher identified some collaborative work that she and a Modern Languages student teacher had engaged in during teaching practice: “We collaborated daily on our planning. I think it helped as we could see the cross-over between our two subjects.” These points were further reinforced by comments from modern languages students: “I wouldn’t have said before these sessions that there was much relevance to us talking but now I feel that through talking and ultimately planning there are various skills that translate or transfer between the two disciplines”. Another stated that it is “encouraging to think of language as a whole”.

THE CHANGES IN UNDERSTANDING ABOUT SUBJECT IDENTITY

These voices showing English student teachers’ development as language teachers also reveal a remarkable shift in understanding about the subject of English. As previously discussed, on entering the PGCE course, English student teachers mostly defined their view of English as related to literature but by the end of the course this construction of the subject had undergone significant development. A full account of this development has been documented by Burley (2003), but what follows are some of the student voices which are relevant here in showing the effects of the language teacher education programme on subject identity and language teacher identity.

Many English student teachers were able to “voice” their new understandings of the subject of English after the first four sessions of the language education programme. Several spoke of their previous definitions of the subject English as having widened to include an understanding that “English” was another language to study but also

about language varieties and different languages. As one student said: “English is not a language but languages...(as a teacher) I will do Standard English, (and) do different Englishes.” By the end of the course student teachers’ responses to the effects of the language education programme showed significant development in the following areas:

- The development of a more holistic view of language as a subject
- The development of subject knowledge in relation to teaching about language
- The extension of subject knowledge in relation to English.

These areas link closely with the overall aims and principles of the language teacher education programme.

In the first area, student teachers typically cited how their understanding of language as a subject in itself had informed a wider definition of English to include a more holistic view of language. As one English student commented: “...it gives a much wider understanding of language.” English student teachers also recognised how the collaborative sessions enabled them to understand how important the development of individual subject knowledge about language was to the teaching of language. One student commented how discovering a new metalanguage used by modern language student teachers had helped her to “learn and develop new meanings that we as English students might not have picked up on”, whilst another stated that talking with a modern languages student enabled her to learn more about “using language about language”. English student teachers also found real value in discovering how modern languages approaches the study of language and constructs language as a subject.

In the process of teaching about language many English student teachers found that, as a result of the collaboration, they were able to work in a more informed way with pupils at word and sentence level. One student commented: “word and sentence activities were informed to include more emphasis on sentence structure”, and another stated: “I have found some useful ways to teach word level activities.” In some cases student teachers were already thinking ahead to their teaching careers, “I think it should be mandatory for modern foreign languages and English to work and plan together. In this way they can reinforce and clarify learning of grammar, ...language...” and “bring different ideas for teaching language features”.

The development and extension of student teachers’ understanding and perception of what constitutes the discipline/subject of English can be reflected upon in more detail through: firstly, an examination of English as a subject and the place of language within English; secondly, the idea of English as a language; and thirdly, pedagogical approaches.

By the end of the PGCE course English student teachers had continued to widen their understandings about English and its relationship to the study of language. One student commented on how being involved in the language education sessions developed their realisation “that English is not the only subject in the world, not the only language learning the pupils are exposed to”. These comments suggest that the ability to work closely with another subject area, in this case modern languages, enabled the student teachers to stand outside their own subject area and reflect on its make-up, identity and status in a more objective way than is normally possible during

a PGCE course. Certainly there were responses that indicated how the language education sessions had encouraged the student teachers to focus more on language as part of English and on pupils' acquisition of language. One student teacher's exclamatory comment revealed the depth of surprise that the subject of English offers the opportunity to teach about language, "Opportunity to teach language! Very important!" Other comments showed the development of thinking and understanding: "I had viewed English much more as a text level subject before. These sessions have shown how important language is at word and sentence level...."

ENGLISH AS A LANGUAGE

A significant finding from their responses is the shift in student teachers' understanding of English as a language as well as a subject to be studied. Several responses comment on the holistic nature of language and how the study of English both reinforces and enriches the study of language. One student teacher commented on how reflecting on the language education sessions had reminded them of "my own view of how important language teaching is ...". Two other comments illustrate views on English as a language: "Realise that I am teaching English as a language..." and "It has given me a greater perspective of language as a whole, as opposed to just English." One final comment addresses the issue of how linguistic diversity can enhance the understanding of language: "I think English on its own is quite dry and with the help of other languages, its richness is realised."

This construction of English as a language alongside other languages is extended through student teachers' comments on their role as language teachers as well as English teachers. One student wrote: "If they (pupils) have a good grasp of the English language and the way in which it works I feel it would be easier for them to apply these skills to another language." Transferring knowledge about language from one language to another is seen by student teachers as being particularly relevant in linguistically diverse classrooms, both in using pupils' knowledge about languages other than English and also in pedagogical approaches which address the language learning needs of bilingual pupils. Comments which illustrate this include: "...this will help me use the linguistic expertise of bilingual pupils in my classes", "...KAL will make me more sympathetic about EAL learners" and "I...realised the specific needs of EAL pupils, how they need to understand words and can be assisted with text level (work)" and "how visual props can support lessons and make them more interesting".

Ultimately, student teachers acknowledged that the language education programme, with its focus on the range of aims and concepts discussed earlier, had given them more confidence in their ability to teach and consider the nature of what language might be in the English classroom. As one student commented, it has given "me (as a teacher) much more confidence in my ability to teach – but more importantly – to understand and channel what I am teaching". This redefinition of what it means to be a teacher of English also means that English student teachers had developed as part of/or alongside of their subject identity the beginnings of a language teacher identity. The beginnings of this new identity have been evidenced in many of the voices used in this article, for example, the student teachers who have commented on the importance of studying language as part of the subject English and realise that

language learning is a holistic area for study rather than just a focus on language structure. The importance of knowing about language structure in order to teach it is recognised but it has been recognised as part of a process rather than an end in itself.

CONCLUSION

These voices of students from the past few years reveal that the delivery of the language teacher education programme has become more effective in developing English student teachers' views of themselves as language teachers. The processes involved in this development need closer analysis and to this end, this year, case studies of individual student voices are being undertaken which will not only examine these processes during the student teachers' training year but will also chart their development as language teachers during their first year of teaching. From this data it will be possible to examine how the language teacher identity of each of the English student teachers continues to develop in their early careers. One of the important areas to consider will be whether this development of a wider understanding about language and its relationship to the subject English enables these future English teachers to work more confidently and knowledgeably with a language curriculum, be it a curriculum imposed by national policy or a curriculum of choice. It will be important to examine whether, and if so how, these developments which have been made as a result of the cross subject dialogue with modern languages in the language teacher education programme have continued to support the construction of the personal language learning theory advocated by Brumfit (2001).

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