

Understanding barriers to discussion-based learning: using an epistemological perspective to theorise student teachers' perceptions

DEMISSIE, Fufy Ayal <<http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2325-4313>>

Available from Sheffield Hallam University Research Archive (SHURA) at:

<http://shura.shu.ac.uk/27720/>

This document is the author deposited version. You are advised to consult the publisher's version if you wish to cite from it.

Published version

DEMISSIE, Fufy Ayal (2020). Understanding barriers to discussion-based learning: using an epistemological perspective to theorise student teachers' perceptions. TEAN (Teacher Education Action Network), 12 (1), 97-108.

Copyright and re-use policy

See <http://shura.shu.ac.uk/information.html>

**Understanding barriers to discussion-based
learning: using an epistemological
perspective to theorise student teachers'
perceptions**

Teacher Education Advancement
Network Journal
Copyright © 2020
University of Cumbria
Vol 12(1) pages 97-108

Fufy Demissie
Sheffield Hallam University

Abstract

Discussion-based learning (DBL) has the potential to develop valued higher-order thinking skills and dispositions that are key to teacher professional learning and development. However, whilst much is known about effective classroom teaching strategies, students' lived experiences of discussion-based pedagogies are relatively under-reported. This study therefore adopts a qualitative/interpretivist approach to examine how a group of student teachers perceived and described their experiences of learning through discussion. Data were drawn from five female student teachers who were interviewed in their penultimate year of study. The findings suggest that the participants were mostly indifferent to, and often critical of the place and value of DBL. Moreover, how they articulated their views was connected to firmly held views about teaching, learning and knowledge that seem incompatible with the underpinning principles of discussion-based learning. This initial exploration of student teachers' lived experiences of classroom discussion therefore offers educators a fresh way to problematise and conceptualise the challenges of student engagement and participation in discussion-based learning, and to consider approaches that challenge students' deeply held assumptions about knowledge and learning.

Keywords

Discussion-based learning; Epistemological beliefs; Barriers; Student teachers; Perceptions.

Discussion-based learning (DBL)

Discussion-based teaching approaches in general, share a commitment to open-ended and collaborative talk, based on Dewey's notion of discussion as dialogue or as a 'conversation of thought' (Dewey, 2016:195). The notion of dialogue contrasts with the traditional teacher dominated monologic classrooms (Skidmore and Murakami, 2016; Mercer, 1995). Instead, implicit in DBL is a readiness to 'bringing various beliefs together, (and) shaking one against the other' so as to illicit newly formed understandings (Dewey, 1916:195). In other words, DBL is characterised by a mutual interest in the content of the discussion, and a willingness to the give and take, probing and exploration of ideas (Dewey, 1916, in Murphy et al., 2016).

There is a general consensus that discussion-based learning, (often associated with small group learning contexts such as seminars), facilitates deeper and more meaningful learning (Brookfield and Preskill, 2005; Fry et. Al., 2009; McKeachie, 2002). The process of explaining one's idea, responding to others' contributions and hearing alternative views enriches learning and understanding, and makes learning more meaningful (Gaunt and Stott, 2019). Moreover, it offers '...a more critically informed understanding of a topic', and promote '...enhanced self-awareness, the capacity for self-critique'... (and) an appreciation of a diversity of opinion' (Brookfield and Preskill, 2010:6). Yet, the evidence base for discussion-based learning is limited, mainly because researchers have prioritised effective classroom strategies (Biggs, 2003), rather than DBL and student learning (Hardman, 2016). Emerging evidence from schools, however, highlight that dialogic approaches enhance academic and social development (EEF, 2015; EEF, 2017; Mercer, 1995; Alexander, 2004).

Citation

Demissie, F. (2020) 'Understanding barriers to discussion-based learning: using an epistemological perspective to theorise student teachers' perceptions', *TEAN journal*, 12(1), pp. 97-108.

The outcomes of DBL are highly valued in teacher education (ECApedia, 2014; Sahlberg et al., 2014). Effective teachers critically reflect on, and evaluate teaching strategies, question the reliability and applicability of research findings and make judgements about the implications for practice (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Brownlee and Berthelsen, 2005; Sahlberg et al., 2014; Britzman, 2003). Moreover, these attributes equip teachers to better support their own pupils, and to make reasoned judgements about our increasingly complex and uncertain world (Gay and Kirkland, 2003; Reznitskaya and Wilkinson, 2018). DBL is a powerful learning process that can foster and nurture teacher education learning aims and outcomes, and has the potential to enculture students into valued ways of knowing, being and thinking (Nilson, 2010; Barnett, 1990).

Nonetheless, there are inherent challenges in realising DBL's intended outcomes. For example, students are uncertain about how to engage in seminars (Fejes et al., 2005), and anxious about expressing opinions and managing the challenges of group dynamics (Dawson and Evans, 2003; Jacques, 2000). Findings from a cross-disciplinary study highlighted students' uncertainty about the purpose and format of different teaching modes, and what this meant for their own roles (Van Der Meer, 2012; Casey et al., 2002). In a linguistic studies course, Engin (2016) identified lack of confidence in language, and uncertainty about expectations of 'talk rules' as key factors limiting classroom discussion, whilst Wade's (1994) study of student teachers highlighted insecurity about contributing to discussions.

Perry's model of intellectual development

Theoreticians of student learning have mainly addressed the issues in DBL from a constructivist perspective (D'Andrea and Gosling, 2005). In general, constructivist theoreticians primarily view learning as the outcome of our attempts to interpret and make sense of phenomena, such as when we read and interpret a piece of text (Biggs, 2003). Not only does this view neglect the influence of prior experiences on motivations and behaviours (Mann, 2001; D'Andrea and Gosling, 2005) but it also gives a 'limited conceptualisation of pedagogy as an educational transaction' (Malcolm and Zukas, 2001:33). In other words, constructivist pedagogies fails to recognise the multi-faceted and complex nature of teaching and learning.

In contrast, cultural theorists argue that learning is more complex and that cultural and social factors can influence our actions and behaviours (Vygotsky, 1978). For epistemological theorists such as Perry (1968), for example, beliefs about knowledge are key to how students adapt to the more open-ended, co-constructive nature of learning in HE (Moon, 2008). In other words, if students '...look for certainty and to see facts as largely indisputable and either right or wrong' they are less likely to embrace teaching approaches that encourage alternative viewpoints, or questioning their own and others' assumptions and reasons (Moon, 2008:101).

Perry's influential model of intellectual development identified students' beliefs about knowledge as one of the main barriers to academic success at university. Perry devised a nine point scale that categorised students approaches to knowledge as either dualist (knowledge is generally seen 'in polar terms we - right - good vs. other-wrong-bad') or 'contextual relativism' (associated with the ability to embrace complexity and uncertainty) (Perry, 1968:11). He concluded that dualist orientations hinder academic learning and progress, whilst contextual approaches facilitate them.

Perry's approach has been criticised for assuming progression is linear (Magolda, 2004; Schommer in Hofer and Pintrich, 1997) and the exclusively male data set on which it was based (Belenky, 1986). It has, nevertheless, been highly influential in higher education and teacher education. Teachers with contextual approaches to knowledge make better judgments about teaching strategies (Darling-Hammond, 2000), are more aware of their own learning needs, and better at problem solving and adapting curricula to their pupils' needs (Howard et al., 2000 in Bondy et al., 2007; Britzman, 2003).

The rationale for the study

This study was motivated by the need to understand the challenges to DBL in a contested and uncertain teacher education policy context in England (Parker, 2015). Though teacher educators continue to value the educational outcomes of DBL, teacher education operates in a context where policy makers prioritise 'learning on the job' (Gove, 2011) and an accountability culture that encourages teachers to unquestionably adopt 'good practice' (Philpott, 2012). At the same time, however, the wider HE discourse has a sustained focus on teaching quality in the UK policy context (TEF, 2018), and DBL could play an important role in improving the quality of students' learning experiences.

After outlining the methodology and the study's context, I present data to illustrate the complexities of the participants' lived experiences of DBL and how they describe, theorise and evaluate their perceptions of DBL. Finally, I critically discuss these findings in relation to Perry's epistemological perspective, and conclude by arguing that it provided a 'pedagogically fertile' (Entwistle, 2018:6) way to theorise barriers to DBL. For stylistic purposes the terms tutor and educator will be used to refer to seminar leaders, and discussion-based learning (DBL) will refer to any discussion-based teaching context that involves groups of up to 30 students (Gunn, 2007; Fry et al. 2009). 'Students' will refer to all students (including student teachers) and 'student teachers' for those specifically undertaking a teacher education course at university.

I aim to address the following questions:

- What are student teachers' experiences and perceptions of discussion-based learning?
- How do participants describe, theorise and evaluate their perceptions of DBL?

Methodology

Context

The study took place in a large post-1992 university in the North of England. Five female student teachers responded to an email invitation (sent to all 150 second year students) and took part in a series of in-depth interviews. The participants were undertaking a three year QTS (Qualified Teacher status) undergraduate course in primary education. The semi-structured interviews were conducted by the researcher who taught on the course, but was not involved in teaching the participants. Four participants (Jess, Daisy, Lilly, Ellie) were aged 19, having started their studies the year before, after completing their A levels (examinations taken at 17-18 years in the final year of schooling in England). Natalie at age 25 was the oldest participant.

The university-based teaching period lasted from September to March and school placements took place in May/June. During the year, students spent roughly 60 hours of their time in school settings and approximately 200 hours at university. They all studied the same (seven) modules, and in their busiest week they could be timetabled for two one hour lectures, eight hours of practical curriculum/workshops (e.g. music, physical education), six hours of curriculum-based seminars (English, maths, science), two hours of professional studies seminars and one day of school placement.

On the timetable, these small-group learning contexts were labelled as 'seminars'. All were tutor-led, that is, the tutor chose the learning outcomes, organised the content and led the session (the term 'tutor' is used to refer to teacher educator in their role as seminar leader). Discussion featured in most seminars, though this depended on the module and/or tutors' individual pedagogies. For example, the child development module would generally involve more whole group discussion compared to curriculum workshops (e.g. drama, physical education). Other modules were 'subject specific' e.g. science and involved 'practical' elements and discussions of related educational policies and

teaching/learning approaches. At the beginning of the year students are allocated to a seminar group. For all modules, students attend seminars in their respective seminar group. As the participants in this study belonged to separate seminar groups, their accounts of their seminar experiences related to their individual seminar group. Nonetheless, it was possible that they encountered the same tutor for some of their modules.

Research design

The study adopted a qualitative, interpretive approach as a 'way of knowing' to explore and deepen understanding about a relatively under-researched phenomena (Mason, 2002). Qualitative/interpretive approaches cannot provide generalizable findings, but they are suited to studies that seek insights and understanding about others' views and perspectives (Mason, 2002). It acknowledges, nonetheless, that the findings and conclusions are interpretations and the process itself, a '(re)construction of the social reality' (Charmaz, 2006:130). Thus, any conclusions drawn are tentative and suggestive rather than definitive.

Following university ethical guidelines, participants were given information about the study and a consent form that outlined the actions taken to ensure anonymity, beneficence and minimise maleficence (BERA, 2011). Semi-structured interviews rather than focus group interviews were used as the aim was to capture a range of individual experiences and perceptions (Denscombe, 2014). Twelve hours of interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed in line with the ethical standards agreed by the participants. As the focus was on lived experiences, the participants were prompted to reflect on their most significant and meaningful experiences rather than a specific module or type of seminar.

The interviews lasted 45-60 minutes and took place at three specific points in a year: at the beginning (September/October), middle (January/February) and finally, at the end of the year (June). The first interviews focused on the participants' overall and group learning experiences with questions such as:

- What is it like to be a learner at university?
- What is it like to learn in lectures, seminars, tutorials?, and,
- Tell me about recent seminars - what were the significant aspects?

Subsequent interviews focused on emerging themes from previous interviews using prompts such as: '*You mentioned your peers' roles in seminars at the last interview... can you tell me more?*' and an invitation to reflect on what the participants recorded in an optional reflective diary about significant seminar experiences.

The analytical approach was iterative and guided by the research questions as well as the emerging data (Gibbs, 2007). Initial and on-going analysis (from interview 1 and 2) highlighted tutor pedagogy and participants' views (about key events during DBL) as the two main themes. At the final interview, participants were presented with selected extracts containing storied accounts and 'red flag' words such as 'never' and 'always', to ascertain the significance or otherwise of these extracts (Gibbs, 2007; Rubin and Rubin, 1995). To better capture the complexities of the participants' accounts, the themes were further analysed in relation to the participants' perceptions of the key events (what happens in seminars) and practices (what people do in seminars) and how the participants theorised their own and others' actions (see Table 1).

Table 1. An example of how the participants' (Jess's) responses were categorised.

	Pedagogical practices: what people do related to teaching and learning strategies/approaches in seminars
Events/practice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What happens • What people do 	<p>Self: playing with plasticine, explaining to others, switching off, talking about something else, thinking about food, interactive, join in discussions, asking 'stupid' questions, look at things from different view points</p> <p>Tutors: positive feedback, contradicting own advice, e.g. time talk through PowerPoint, provide different kinds of seminars</p> <p>Peers: No data</p>
Views about events and practices	<p>Positive: when able to: annotate slides in seminars, know peers well to participate, ask stupid questions, practical ideas to try, relating to classroom practice, feeling involved, reinforce, motivating, practical or relate to practice, process based learning, understanding, short and focused group work, link seminars to how it might be with children</p> <p>Negative: when tutors 'talk' at students, don't take seminar seriously, switching off when tasks taking too long, repeated content, boring, slow pace, too much time, limited feedback on group activities, mobile phone, lack of enthusiasm, uncontrolled discussion, too many viewpoints</p> <p>Neutral: no data</p>

Findings

What are student teachers' experiences and perceptions of discussion-based learning?

A key finding was that their perceptions of DBL were mostly critical and expressed in varying degrees of ambivalence, contradictions, uncertainty and frustration. Some of these issues were practical, such as managing the demands of home, work and university '*stresses of everything (assignments) coming in at once*' or seminars that do not '*help with the assignment*' or peers' limited seminar participation. Others centred on the place and value of DBL, especially when discussions were perceived to have little relevance to classroom practice, or did not provide the 'right answer' about the issue under discussion.

The example below, illustrates how Daisy grapples with the lack of a definitive answer during a lively classroom discussion:

There is so many different opinions and it's not a bad thing everybody kind of bounces off each other but at the same time, sometimes, you sit there and you think, well, what were the answer? and sometimes you think, well I don't know maybe it's like what you said...it's for us to decide but sometimes I don't know, maybe I just like it too easy, maybe I just like someone to say this is the answer cause sometimes you can feel like where did this end?

The lack of a definitive 'answer' is clearly troubling and problematic because Daisy continues:

it goes back to that...because obviously everything leading up to those seminars leads up to what you are going to...you should be using in your assignment.

Despite this, Daisy was certainly willing to consider other students may value DBL, '*maybe not everyone would say that maybe some people will think you think this, I think this*'. But her response to the suggestion that students could make up their own minds is revelatory:

Interviewer: what would you say, if someone says...like I said to you earlier...it's for you to decide...based on what you heard...?

Daisy: I feel like I wasn't doing it right, I think I were making it up and it is not a definite answer because it is not come from a book. It has not come from what somebody else has said. Yeah, does that make sense? if I just made it up, I'd think, where did I get that from? It is scary because I will be sat there thinking - just tell me the answer (laughter)

Daisy's account implies that she has little confidence in her own views (Moon, 2008). Of course, direct instruction certainly has a role in any discipline. But this level of distrust and uncertainty towards co-constructed knowledge is not only incompatible with current pedagogical thinking generally (Ashwin, 2008; Alexander, 2004), but also, for teacher professional development (Darling-Hammond, 2006).

Jess's account also illustrates some of the unease about DBL, in this case, juxtaposed with schooling experiences. The issue is the lack of student engagement and the potential solution Jess outlines that draws a strong parallel with her own approaches to classroom teaching.

When it is not going well, I am like well...I could see that a class of 30 children weren't engaged in what they were supposed to be engaged in, and obviously, I am doing something wrong. If I could see maybe three or four aren't engaging, then I need to focus on them children. But obviously if everyone is focussing, then obviously it is going really well, and if it is not then I would sit there thinking, well, this isn't going very well, because nobody is listening

Similarly, she draws on traditional classroom pedagogy to question the absence of tutor feedback:

Her (the tutor's) feedback to what she'd seen or to what we'd said, it was just like 'ok' and sometimes, I need a little bit more than a "right ok". Because it doesn't say what we've discussed is the best thing we have discussed, on the right lines or we are totally gone the wrong way... kind of the kids need it in school, you need it

The phrase '*kids need it in school, you need it*' is interesting because it implies that Jess sees her own learning needs in the same way as children's learning in primary school. Whilst feedback is obviously important for any learner, what is of interest is the expectation that seminars should provide definitive answers, and mirror school-like tutor/student interactions and pedagogical approaches.

Tutor status and authority

A related finding was the significance of tutors' role in how the participants' described, analysed, and evaluated their DBL experiences. At university, the tutor's role in DBL is generally assumed to be facilitative (Murray, 2012); the relationship between tutors/ students is less hierarchical and there is an assumption that knowledge is co-constructed through dialogue and inquiry. The participants' account, however, suggested that their expectations were the opposite. In fact, a common expectation of effective tutors was as all-knowing experts, as exemplified by Jess and Natalie's (one of the oldest and most confident members of the groups) responses. Natalie's view of the tutor was as someone who is:

there to help to give you to pass on their knowledge they know the best things we need to know about school because they have done it and that things that where they were telling you stuff, where you don't think they are wrong obviously

Phrases such as '*passing knowledge*', and '*know the best*' and the unquestioned trust in their tutors' knowledge and experience are notable. They suggest that tutors' status is highly significant, and likely to inform and influence their expectations and behaviours in DBL type contexts.

The data also gives some indication as to why participants hold on to these expectations. Natalie, who saw herself as someone who, in her personal life, enjoyed debate and discussion is the one who reflected on this the most. Indeed, even how tutors' physically position themselves in the classroom (at the lectern) and tutors' control of the learning materials and resources is read, by Natalie at least, as reinforcing tutor status, because being at the front of the class means having '*more knowledge*'. In other cases, this perception also seems to lead to fear and vulnerability. Describing a tutor's role during a DBL context, Natalie explains how the response is '*automatic*', '*kind of fear*'

you see whoever is teaching you as the higher authority no matter where you are, even if it is all adult...cause I see tutors on being on a higher level, when they are telling me things, I think I sort of take it in and believe it, rather than actually thinking. Oh no, actually, I don't quite agree with that...and sort of say why

Lilly's account provides another example of the importance of tutor status. Describing a successful task completion and the tutor's response, she recalled how:

he (the tutor) was really impressed and he got the other teacher and he was saying "look what she has done!" and oh my God! Then he showed it to everyone and I was really like sort of proud of myself

The above scenario seems far removed from a DBL context where knowledge, to some degree at least, is co-constructed. Instead, it more closely resembles a school classroom context where the tutor is a 'teacher' rather than a facilitator. Whilst, students on a teacher training course are often curriculum content, the above raises questions about how these expectations might shape Lilly's views of tutor's roles in DBL.

Some of the accounts, however, also show that the reverse was true when participants felt they had a specific expertise, in Linzi's case, about her confidence in maths, or in dance and physical education for Daisy. Here, they were more willing to express their ideas and question and challenge their tutors, but the overriding perception was a heightened awareness of tutor status and authority as shown in the extract below.

yeah, she (the tutor) said I want you to question me, I want you to question my opinion, you are year twos now, you shouldn't just be taking everything, yeah, it is difficult sort of to take on board. I think, I don't know why, like I said, if I was talking to her just one on one, and she said something I didn't agree with, I probably like, no, no, or if is elsewhere, because it was sort of more formal, you are in university, you have come here to learn (Natalie)

It is seems, then, that in addition to self-confidence issues, and their uncertainties about the value of discussion-based learning, the dissonance between school and university pedagogy, and tutors' status and authority further exacerbate the generally negative perceptions of DBL. However, as the data only focuses on how the participants, theorise and evaluate their perceptions of DBL, there is a danger that this implies that the challenges of DBL are only about what students lack or are unable to do. The

findings can only offer a glimpse of the challenges in DBL and to highlight the pedagogical implication for tutors.

Discussion

According to cultural theorists such as Bourdieu, ways of knowing and being are socially and culturally constructed, i.e., they are '...the product of history that produce individual and collective practices' (Bourdieu, 1977:80). How individuals view knowledge is an aspect of their way of knowing, and is socially and culturally constructed. For example, if students' learning experiences are informed by traditional approaches, then this can shape their views about what counts as knowledge (Britzman, 2003). The data is understandably limited, but some tentative links can be made between the dissonance between the participants' perceptions and expectations and their lived experiences of DBL, and salience of the tutors' role in this study, and the way this belief can discourage engagement in DBL. For example, the phrases '*you don't think they are wrong*' and '*they have looked at the research*' and distrust of co-constructed knowledge hint at a taken-for granted expectation about tutor authority that arises out of their status. This illustrates cultural theorists view that dominant discourse (in this case about tutor knowledge and beliefs about knowledge itself) normalise certain ways of thinking (e.g. about valuable knowledge) and can shape how individuals think and act (Bourdieu, 1977; Britzman, 2003).

The epistemological perspective offers a meaningful way to theorise the challenges of learning in discussion-based seminars. The participants' high regard for their tutors' knowledge and experience suggests dualist rather than contextual perspectives of knowledge (Kember, 2001; Magolda, 2004). This was similarly evident in Jess's disregard for her own and peers' ideas and Daisy's account of a '*brilliant seminar*' (that was well-planned but overtly school like), that suggests that they see themselves as 'receivers' rather than as capable of constructing new knowledge. From this standpoint, it makes sense that they preferred the tutor to provide the right answers, act as authority figures, and did not trust their own or their peers' ideas. This suggests that they will be less likely to engage and appreciate discussion-based learning opportunities. Thus, it could be argued that views about knowledge, at least as inferred from the participants' perceptions of their tutors can present additional barriers to productive engagement in DBL contexts. The epistemological perspective therefore, offers a meaningful way to theorise the challenges of learning in discussion-based seminars.

The search for the 'right answer' was another strong theme in the findings, as highlighted in Daisy's and Jess's accounts. This may partly be due to the 'history of their own learning' (Britzman, 2003:1), i.e. their own schooling experience, and the dominant performativity culture that pervades their learning experiences in school (Murray, 2012). It is understandable therefore that teachers seek safety (in the form of ideas that work) rather than risk uncertainty by questioning and evaluating practice and curriculum (Murray, 2012). In this case, because the participants considered authority figures to have access to valuable and useful knowledge, they were frustrated when tutors promoted discussion-based pedagogies that precluded one right answer. Thus, adopting the 'beliefs about knowledge' perspective allows educators to consider the potential role individuals' assumptions and beliefs on their learning to further enhance our understandings of why DBL may be so problematic. Consequently, these insights give educators a richer understanding that would be missing if only seen from psychodynamic and constructivist perspectives (D'Andrea and Gosling, 2005; Jacques, 2000).

However, the debates about the limitations of this perspective, such as the fluidity of individuals' dispositions cannot be ignored (Kember, 2001; Magolda, 2004; Hofer and Pintrich, 1997). Indeed, Natalie's assertion that she would challenge tutors' ideas '*if it was outside in the corridor*' suggests that perceptions can be context dependent. In other words, so called 'dualist' attitudes may not necessarily reflect the totality of the ones' disposition; it is possible that individuals' beliefs about

knowledge may change depending on context, and on the classroom culture and learning environment (Magolda, 2004). Nonetheless, the findings here strongly resonate with one of the best-evidenced sub-themes in the epistemological beliefs theory. 'Sources of knowledge' refers beliefs that valued knowledge is associated with authority figures (Hofer and Pintrich, 197). As Jess and Daisy's account show, they did not value their own or their peers' knowledge. But the deep trust in their tutors' knowledge and experience, and their role in passing on this knowledge highlight the importance the participants attached to them as 'sources of knowledge'. In the light of this, it is perhaps unsurprising that when educators fail to live up to expectations (as authority figures) it creates uncertainty about their own and tutors' roles during discussions.

The study has several shortcomings: it did not examine tutors' facilitation skills, and whether some of the students' responses resulted from poor teaching (Hardman, 2006). Additionally, validity was compromised as the participants were not asked to focus on a particular type of DBL. Moreover, the notion of DBL is itself problematic as it is based on an idealised version of discussion-focused small group teaching that may be difficult to realise in larger classes and/or accountability driven professional courses such as teaching. Despite this, an element of discussion and discourse permeates most small group teaching contexts in HE, and further studies are needed to determine whether different types of modules (e.g. workshops-based, theoretical, or subject focussed) affect students' views about DBL.

Conclusion

Discussion-based learning is a vital pedagogy for teacher education, because it has the potential to enhance thinking and reasoning and lead to better informed insights and understandings (Wells, 2009). This study has illustrated the richness and complexity of the participants' lived experience of DBL, (Van Der Meer, 2011), and the potential significance of epistemological beliefs for theorising barriers to productive engagement. By examining student teachers' perspectives of DBL, the study gives a valuable insight into how learning and teaching work in everyday teaching and learning contexts (Entwistle, 2018). The epistemological perspective proved to be 'pedagogically fertile' (Entwistle, 2018:6) in highlighting how dualist beliefs about knowledge can exacerbate the existing challenges of DBL. This implies that understanding barriers to DBL may require not just a focus on cognitive or affective issues, but also on students' perception and assumptions about knowledge.

The findings are particularly relevant to early career educators as they offer a broader perspective about the issues in DBL. The participants' beliefs about knowledge however, can only be part of the reason why they found DBL context problematic and challenging. Thus, the implications for educators and teacher educators are conceptual and practical: to think afresh about the influence of epistemological beliefs on productive engagement classroom discussion, and to adopt teaching approaches that actively challenge students' assumptions about knowledge, so they are better placed to engage in discussion based learning.

References

- Alexander, R. (2004) *Towards Dialogic Teaching: Rethinking Classroom Talk*. York: Dialogos.
- Ashwin, P. (2008) 'Accounting for structure and agency in 'close-up' research on teaching, learning and assessment in higher education', *International journal of educational research*, 47(3), pp.151-158.
- Barnett, R. (1990) *The Idea of Higher Education*. Buckingham: SRHE and Open University Press.
- Belenky, M. (1986) *Women's way of knowing: the Development of Self, Voice and Mind*. New York: Basic books.
- BERA (2011) *Ethical guidance for educational research*. Available at: <https://www.bera.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/BERA-Ethical-Guidelines-2011.pdf?noredirect=1> (Accessed: 4 December, 2019).

DEMISSIE: UNDERSTANDING BARRIERS TO DISCUSSION-BASED LEARNING: USING AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE TO THEORISE STUDENT TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS

- Bondy, E., Ross, D., Adams, A., Nowak, R., Adams, A., Bronwell, M., Dhoppy, D., Kuhel, K., McCallum, C. and Stafford, L. (2007) 'Personal epistemologies and learning to teach', *Teacher Education and Special Education*, 30(2), pp.67–82.
- Bourdieu, P. (1977) *Outline of a theory of practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Britzman, D. (2003) *Practice makes perfect: a critical study of learning to teach*. Albany: State University of New York.
- Brookfield, S. and Preskill, S. (2005) *Discussion as a way of teaching: Tools and techniques for democratic classrooms*. San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass.
- Brownlee, J. and Berthelsen, D. (2005) 'Personal Epistemology and relational pedagogy in early childhood teacher education programs', *Early Years: An International Journal of Research*, 26(1), pp.17-29.
- Casey, N., Sutton, P., Casey, B., Dawson, C., Warren, D. (2002) 'Comparing seminars and workshops: student views on learning in sociology'. *Higher Education Academy (HEA)*. Available at: http://www.csap.bham.ac.uk/resources/project_reports/findings/ShowFinding.htm?id=26/S/03 (Accessed: 29 July 2008).
- Charmaz, K. (2006) *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. London: Sage.
- D'Andrea, V. and Gosling, D. (2005) *Improving Teaching and Learning in Higher Education: a whole institution approach*. London: McGraw Hill.
- Darling-Hammond, H. (2006) 'Constructing 21st-Century Teacher Education', *Journal of Teacher Education*, 57(3) pp.300-314.
- Darling-Hammond, H. (2000) 'How teacher education matters', *Journal of Teacher Education*, 51(3) pp.166-173.
- Dawson, C., and Evans, J. (2003) Exploring the Meaning and Purpose of Sociology Seminars and Workshops in Higher Education. Higher Education Academy. http://www.csap.bham.ac.uk/media/com_projectlog/docs/26_S_03.pdf (Accessed: 24 May, 2015).
- Denscombe, M. (2014) *The good research guide: for small scale research projects*. Maidenhead, Berkshire: Open University Press.
- Dewey, J. (1916) *Essays in experimental logic*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- ECApedia (2014) *The Bologna Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area*. Available at: http://ecahe.eu/w/index.php/Framework_for_Qualifications_of_the_European_Higher_Education_Area (Accessed: 6 December, 2019).
- EEF (Educational Endowment Foundation) (2005) *Philosophy for Children: Evaluation report and executive summary*. Available at: https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/Projects/Evaluation_Reports/EEF_Project_Report_PhilosophyForChildren.pdf (Accessed: 23 July 2020).
- EEF (Educational Endowment Foundation) (2017) *Dialogic Teaching: Evaluation report and executive summary*. Available at: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/projects-and-evaluation/projects/dialogic-teaching/> (Accessed: 23 July 2020).
- Engin, M. (2016) 'Contributions and silence in academic talk: exploring learner experiences of dialogic interaction', *Learning, Culture and Social Interaction*, 12, pp.78-86.
- Entwistle, N. (2018) *Student learning and academic understanding: a research perspective with implications for teaching*. London: Elsevier.
- Fejes, A., Johansson, J. and Dahlgren, M. (2005) 'Learning to Play the Seminar Game: Students' Initial Encounters with a Basic Working Form in Higher Education', *Teaching in Higher Education*, 10(1), pp.29-41.
- Fry, H., Ketteridge, S., and Marshall, S. (2009) *A Handbook for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*. London: Kogan Page.
- Gaunt, A and Stott, A. (2019) *Transforming teaching and learning through talk: The oracy imperative*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowan & Littlefield.

- Gay, G. and Kirkland, K. (2003) 'Developing cultural critical consciousness and self-reflection in pre-service teacher education', *Theory in practice*, 42 (3) pp.181-187.
- Gibbs, G. (2007) *Analysing qualitative data*. London, Sage.
- Gove, M. (2011) Speech to the Education World Forum. Available at: <http://www.ukpol.co.uk/michael-gove-2011-speech-to-the-education-world-forum/> (Accessed: 6 December, 2019).
- Gunn, V. (2007) *Approaches to Small Group Learning and Teaching*. Glasgow, University of Glasgow: Learning and teaching centre. Available at: www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_12157_en.pdf (Accessed: 20 May, 2014).
- Hardman, J. (2016) 'Tutor-student interaction in seminar teaching', *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 17(1) pp.63–76.
- Hofer, V., and Pintrich, P. (1997) 'The development of epistemological theories: beliefs about knowledge and knowing and their relation to learning', *Review of Educational Research Spring*, 67(1) pp 88-140.
- Jacques, D. (2000) *Learning in groups: A handbook for improving group work*. London: Kogan Page.
- Kember, D. (2001) 'Beliefs about Knowledge and the Process of Teaching and Learning as a Factor in Adjusting to Study in Higher Education', *Studies in Higher Education*, 26(2) pp. 205-221.
- Magolda, B. (2004) 'Evolution of a Constructivist Conceptualization of Epistemological Reflection', *Educational Psychologist*, 39(1) pp.31–42.
- Malcom, J. and Zukas, M. (2001) 'Bridging pedagogic gaps: Conceptual discontinuities in higher education', *Teaching in Higher Education*, 6(1), pp.33-42.
- Mann, S. (2001) 'Alternative perspectives on the student experience: Alienation and engagement', *Studies in higher education*, 26(1), pp.7-19.
- Mason, J. (2002) *Qualitative researching*. 2nd Ed. London: Sage.
- McKeachie, W. (2002) (11th edition) *McKeachie's tips: strategies, research and theory for college and university teachers*. Boston, Mass: Houghton.
- Mercer, N. (1995) *The Guided Construction of Knowledge: talk amongst teachers and learners*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Moon, J. (2008) *Critical thinking: an exploration of theory and practice*. London: Routledge.
- Murphy, K. (2016) Instruction based on discussion, in: Meyers, R. (ed.) *Handbook of research on learning and instruction*, 2nd ed. London: Routledge. pp.432 - 459.
- Murray, J. (2012) 'Performativity cultures and their effects on teacher educators' work', *Research In Teacher Education*, 2(2), pp.19–23.
- Nilson, L. (2010) (3rd edition) *Teaching at its best: A research-based resource for college instructors*. San Francisco: Jolley-Bass Wiley imprint.
- Parker, G. (2015) 'School Direct: a critique', *Power and Education*, 7(1), pp 106 - 112.
- Perry, E. (1968) *Patterns and development in thought and values of students in Liberal Arts College. A validation of a scheme*. US department of health, education and welfare. Available at: <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED024315> (Accessed: 6 December, 2019).
- Philpott, C. (2012) 'A pedagogy for initial teacher education in England', *TEAN Journal*, 6(3), pp. 4-16.
- Reznitskaya, A. and Wilkinson, I. (2017). 'Truth matters: Teaching young students to search for the most reasonable answer', *Phi Delta Kappan*, 99(4), pp,33–38.
- Rubin, H. and Rubin, I. (1995) *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data*. London: Sage.
- Sahlberg P., Broadfoot P., Coolahan J., Furlong J., and Kirk G. (2014) 'Aspiring to Excellence, Final Report of the International Review Panel on the Structure of Initial Teacher Education in Northern Ireland'. Available at: <https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/20454/1/aspiring-to-excellence-review-panel-final-report.pdf>. (Accessed: 23 July 2020).
- Skidmore, S. and Murakami, K. (2016) *Dialogic Pedagogy: The Importance of Dialogue in Teaching and Learning* Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

DEMISSIE: UNDERSTANDING BARRIERS TO DISCUSSION-BASED LEARNING: USING AN
EPISTEMOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE TO THEORISE STUDENT TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS

- TEF (Teaching Excellence Framework) (2018) Office for students. Available at: https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/5ff81204-14f4-4e71-8b48-91f46247c49b/tef_short_guide_2018.pdf (Accessed: 6 December, 2019).
- Van Der Meer, J. (2012) 'I don't really see where they are going with it: Communicating purpose and rationale to first year student', *Journal of Further and Higher education*, 36 (1) pp.81-94.
- Vygotsky, L. (1978) *Mind in society: the development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard: Harvard University Press.
- Wade, R. (1994) 'Teacher education students' views on class discussions: Implications for Fostering Critical Reflection', *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 10(2), pp.231-43.
- Wells, G. (2009) *The meaning makers: Learning to talk and talking to learn*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.