

GTE 2020 – reflections on a valuable space for discussion about research, policy and practice in areas that matter to geography teacher education

Each January the Geography Teacher Education (GTE) community come together for an annual conference to share research, discuss policy changes and critically consider how we can provide the best education for our (student) teachers and ultimately the children they teach. The GTE community is varied and vibrant; it is inclusive of colleagues at different career stages, those working and researching in different phases of education, different policy and country contexts, and increasingly as teacher education in England diversifies (Geographical Association, 2015; Whiting et al., 2015), those that work in teacher education in both schools and Higher Education Institutes (HEIs).

This year, the conference was hosted by the UCL Institute of Education (IOE). GTE 2020 ran across three days and included twenty-eight papers and workshops, two keynote lectures and a fieldtrip to the Kings Cross redevelopment led by Dr David Mitchell. The conference included a variety of papers which considered the many facets of teacher education, with Dr Steve Puttick examining ‘geography teachers’ written lesson observation feedback’, and Alan Kinder stimulating a discussion about the impacts of policy changes in England, specifically focussing on the Early Careers Framework (DfE, 2019a) and the ITT Core Content Framework (DfE, 2019b).

A particular highlight of the conference was Professor David Lambert’s retrospective on his forty year career in geography education, which he entitled ‘Something Happened!’ (Lambert, 2020). In the keynote, David situated his experiences and research in both the changing socio-political contexts of education and schooling, and the advancements and debates in what he describes as two of humanity’s big ideas; geography and education (Lambert, 2010).

It is well recognised, and much debated, within the GTE community that there are gaps and ‘borders’ (Castree et al., 2007; Butt, 2020; Finn et al., in review) that exist between geography as an academic discipline and school subject. In light of this, it has become a GTE tradition to invite an academic researching in the discipline of geography to the conference. This year, Dr Russell Hitchings spoke on the ‘geographies of environmental estrangement’, considering how experiencing outdoor environments can unsettle everyday life.

In a session on ‘geography and environmental education’, a variety of papers examined some of the most challenging issues of our time-space (including climate change), considering the complex questions of how, and why, we explore them with our children. For example, Dr Nicola Walshe spoke on ‘pedagogies for environmental and sustainability education’, and Sam Thurston and Janine Maddison shared their work on a DfE funded partnership focussed on ‘nature friendly schools’ and the value of outdoor education to both mental health and wellbeing, and also in stimulating students’ interest in the environment.

I am now looking forward to continuing these discussions, and to seeing how research and teaching in geography education evolves, at GTE 2021.

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