Auditing and assessing knowledge for teaching, 27 September 2007

Discussion Group 2

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Our discussions began as an open-ended reflection on the papers of the day, concentrating in particular on Tim Rowland's *Auditing the mathematics subject matter knowledge of pre-service elementary school teachers* and Julian William's *Audit and evluation of pedagogy: towards a sociocultural perspective.* Were there possibilities for synthesis, between compromise and conflict, in the various representations of audit seen in these papers?

Given the constraints of the group meeting this challenge turned out to be rather too great. I think we felt it useful to return to Julian's points of critique to make several problematic areas even more concrete. Among the issues raised, in no particular order, were: (i) The likelihood of audits to intimidate and alienate parts of the teacher community, including those on the defensive about their own MKiT issues, or others who find that gender issues interfere negatively with audit, (ii) The likelihood of audit to skew teaching practice towards the audited outcomes - learning for audit - with the danger to produce unexpected and undesired side-effects; (iii) The inability of audit to take into account complex issues, such as interaction between practice and MKiT, and situated learning. In addition we were worried about (iv) the general undefinedness of audit, with the potential for audit to become above all a tool of implementation of education policies and local management. We briefly discussed the baseline mathematics subject knowledge of the student entering a primary PGCE, the equivalent of Grade C in the GCSE. Together with the MKiT component of the PGCE program, is this an adequate foundation for the profession? Therefore (v), what is the rational of auditing outcomes in separation from the learning inputs?

No concerns were expressed about the beneficial effect of the SMK audit of the 173 primary teachers in Tim's paper. Clearly it is heartening to hear about the strong association between high audit score and high teaching performance. In addition, from the paper there is good evidence that strong SMK points to positive effects in the delivery of elementary mathematics teaching. In a similar vain we heard about the South African experience where audit has been an essential means to 'leaver up' knowledge to disadvantaged and excluded groups. Again there is little doubt about the potential benefits of audit.

If audit then is defined as an adjudication with responsibility to an outside body - a government department - then audit becomes distinct from examination and from policy implementation. If the subject of adjudication was suitably delineated, is there a useful purpose for audit? The key question then turns to the subject of audit. There was agreement that attributes such as 'membership of a community of practice' indeed should be included while there was doubt about the inclusion of a syllabus of core mathematics knowledge. Clearly it would be useful to explore this further. We agreed that mathematics subject knowledge was not sufficient for high teaching performance but to what degree and in what form it was necessary could not be decided.

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