

Studying Person-Centred Education at the University of Sussex

MA in Education Studies

What is Person-Centred Education?

Person Centred Education puts people at the centre of the educative process. Our current systems of schooling have drifted too far away from this belief about the centrality of broad and deep notions of educating the whole person and this programme seeks to recentre and rearticulate a more holistic approach within a 21st century context. Through ways of working in a learning community as well as through research and academic study this Masters Degree will both draw on and extend our knowledge and practice of person centred education in a range of organisational settings.

MA in Education Studies

MA in Education Studies is a flexible master's level programme at the University of Sussex's School of Education. Students can choose an area of study within the broad discipline of education, constructing their own coherent integrated learning experience. The MA programme provides for one-to-one supervision with a tutor who has expertise in the student's area of interest. The structure of the programme makes it ideal for developing knowledge and accrediting work that derives from professional activity and courses of study offered by educational partner organisations. The MA provides an opportunity for students to gain a qualification from an institution with a high profile in research and a strong reputation for educational innovation.

Studying Person-Centred Education through the MA Education Studies

The Guerrand-Hermès Foundation is collaborating with the Sussex School of Education to offer an innovative programme in the study of Person-Centred Education (PCE) and leading to an MA in Education Studies.

The Centre for Educational Innovation (CEI) at Sussex School of Education has, for the past decade, played a leading role in fostering the advancement of person-centred education. It provides a forum for innovative work with schools and colleges in the region, primarily in the areas of leadership, pupil-centred learning and student voice. It reflects the importance the University attaches to forging close relations with the community. The Centre offers the opportunity for debate on issues around the government's education agenda.

The Guerrand-Hermès Foundation for Peace (GHFP) is primarily an international think-tank whose aim is to foster peace, harmony and understanding between people. The GHFP acts as a catalyst for positive change and growth through education and learning. The GHFP's research in education has focused on values and approaches that aim at human flourishing and the development of individual's full potential. The Foundation has initiated and organised international conferences on *Human-Centred Education* which have brought together a worldwide network of schools that are committed to the value and approach of person-centred education.

Person-centred education is increasingly being recognised, throughout both mainstream and alternative education, as a philosophy and intellectual framework. Person-centred approaches are being used in a wide variety of contexts to enable learners to develop and flourish as individuals.

The introduction of this new course is, in part, a response to the increased demand for personalised learning experience in English schools. However, despite the best intention, what it means to be a person and what it entails to provide personalised learning experiences yet remains to be examined. There are growing needs for research and for building a knowledge base in this area of education, and concerns about how to conceptualise the notion of person-centred education, its pedagogical implications, and how to integrate the value of person-centredness in day-to-day educative encounter. Opportunities are few at the postgraduate level for in-depth investigation, critical reflection and innovation in diverse approaches for engaging learners in person-centred ways.

The MA in Education Studies (PCE) is designed for educators who have a need to reflect upon and deepen their understanding of learning, developing critical thinking and ideas for education

innovation. Participants of the course would explore the notion of person-centredness in depth in terms of the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings, the educational pedagogy and practice. The sessions will be structured so that participants can ultimately learn to integrate the PCE in their own teaching, learning and ways of being, and be empowered to make significant contribution to existing body of knowledge and understanding of PCE by way of research inquiry. This is to be achieved through a process of dialogue, critical reflection, engaging in positive human relations and empirical investigation.

The programme of activity is structured around a core combining collaborative learning, critical reflection plus theorising grounded both in participants own experiences and those of the others within the group. It combines the MAES elements, such as seminars, one-to-one tutorials and independent study, with additional support offered by the GHFP, including a termly intensive group learning sessions in residence, invited speakers, individual learning biographies and learning plans, a supportive and committed learning community, on-line learning materials, forums and discussions, and personal learning logs; formative assessment and empirical research inquiries.

Rationale underpinning the programme design

The PCE programme intends to be person-centred in its values, approaches and intellectual content. It is developed based on the belief that learning is an active search for meaning and/or a shared meaning making; it is to be grounded in a community in which learners and teachers/facilitators relate to each other as 'persons rather than as role occupants' (Fielding 2000:52). It involves a deep commitment from all in the community to a dialogic process of inquiry, where individuals' subjective experience and journey of becoming is facilitated in an honest, respectful, trusting and co-operative environment.

Participants are considered to be inquirers and researchers who embark on the journey of learning together. By way of critical reflection, in-depth research and investigation, the participants will be contributing to the understanding of the overall 'landscape' of person-centred education.

One way to approach shared meaning and understanding is through narrating and writing a 'learning biography' (Donimicé 2000). Learning biography, which has a long tradition at Sussex, is an interpretation made by the learner about his or her life journey in and through learning. It helps the learner to reflect on their own learning in both formal and informal contexts, and use this understanding to inform their ongoing experience of learning through formal educative experience and in life. Interpreting and analysing learning experience can also help participants to identify learning goals, clarify learning needs and determine learning trajectories.

Learning biography in the context of the MA is to be used through the course of study and will be created and shared with the community to which the participant belongs. Sharing learning biography in itself can be critical learning, facilitated by dialogue and reflexivity. Such dialogic process aims at fusing the insights, understanding and perspectives of different individuals, which will form the basis for their respective creative educative encounter (Gadamer 1977). In this sense, the person-centredness is deeply embedded in a web of reciprocal human relations, and learning, albeit independent and self-directed, is situated within the collaborative endeavours of all members within the community.

The programme therefore provides no fixed modules, and the intellectual content is to be collaboratively identified and developed to integrate individual participants' learning needs, goals and purpose. A list of recommended elements may be used as guidelines to help participants determine and construct their own learning trajectories. The programme encourages participants to design their own learning plan with the help and support from the group.

The essence is to see each individual as the 'whole person'. This not only requires the facilitators to be their own selves and to accept and value the participants, it also requires participants to be open, accepting and valuing their peers. The programme encourages participants to be exposed to each other's practices, since this is seen as vital for the mutuality of learning.

The programme recognises and makes full use of the rich resources each participant brings to the community, which includes a breadth of cultures, expertise, knowledge, skills, etc. It is expected that participants' understanding will also contribute to a wealth of knowledge in the field of person-centred education, co-constructing the communal resources.

Studying PCE through the MA Education Studies: Aims

In summary, the intention of the MA is to

- be a capacity-building programme that offers exposure to a range of relevant educative encounters and experiences;
- explore participants' learning biographies to construct learning goals, identify learning needs, and construct meaning from learning experience;
- help participants conceptualise PCE through an exploration of the theoretical and conceptual framework, including investigating both classic and modern texts as well as research reports exploring aspects of PCE;
- develop critical and analytical skills in order that participants analyse and engage critically and reflexively with the pedagogical practices and philosophical underpinnings of PCE, as well as empirical research inquiries of learning in different contexts;
- enable participants to develop capacity in a range of educational research methodologies, methods and skills, in order that they see careful and rigorous research and its results as integral to their professional development;
- empower/enable participants, through their own research, to contribute significantly to the existing knowledge in regard to PCE;
- enable participants to implement and integrate their theoretical and practical understanding of PCE so that they may meet local needs within their own particular professional contexts.

Innovative features

The main innovative features include:

- A. it offers a programme that is explicitly person-centred in its values, intellectual intentions and content, as well as in its own educational approaches;
- B. there is no pre-determined syllabus for participants to follow. Instead, the participants determine their own learning trajectories, given their own personal, professional and institutional background and needs;
- C. the programme of study emphasises working in a community of 6–8 individuals, co-ordinated by a facilitator, so that participants are able to support and learn from each other during the learning journeys;
- D. each individual's learning biography is used to inform an approach to identifying participants' learning goals and developing learning plans as well as to understanding of PCE and applying PCE in their own learning and professional contexts;
- E. formative assessment is integrated into the programme structure to create process based learning and personal development.

Programme structure

Overall programme structure is in accordance with the MA in Education Studies. That is to say that the programme is part time and requires that participants accumulate a total of 180 M-level credits. Participants can take between two and five years to complete the study. However, as the MAES (PCE) programme highlights the significance of establishing a community of learners, it is anticipated that most participants will complete their study in two years.

The programme is divided into four parts:

Part 1 Understanding learning and meaning

Year I Term 1 + 2 – reflect on personal learning biography and identify individual learning goals, needs and learning plan.

1st project – Learning biography and learning plan

Part 2 Investigating the landscape of PCE

Year I Term 3 – explore and critically engage with philosophy, theories, concepts and approaches of PCE.

2nd project – Review of current literature on PCE

Part 3 Planning for individual inquiry

Year I Summer – become familiar with diverse research methodologies, plan for individual inquiry, and prepare for embarking on individual journey of research inquiry.

3rd project – Individual research proposal

Part 4 The journey of inquiry

Year II – explore field-based research inquiry, reflect on research experience, and integrate conceptual framework with learning from practice.

Final project – research project and dissertation

The requirements for the MA are set out in the Sussex University programme handbook for an MA in Education Studies. This programme intends to integrate these requirements for assessment in ways that enable the participants to see and understand the meaning and relevance of written projects. It is believed that writing is a profound reflection and learning experience in itself and that projects submitted for assessment will be in both practice based and reflected in writing. The overall assessed projects for the participants studying PCE are provisionally scheduled as above, although the final decision will be made by the learning group when they meet at the beginning of the programme.

Participants will be expected to study independently, supported by group work, online resources and individual supervision. The MAES provides one-to-one tutorials with a personal tutor, ongoing research seminars, seminars about research methods, library services, and other forms of student support as listed in the MA Education Studies handbook.

In addition, GHFP in association with the CEI will provide the participants with the following opportunities for group-based study and extra individual support:

- a) residential group study sessions over two years time for group based learning activities including reflection on personal learning experience; seminars run by invited speakers; challenges and support from the learning group, dialogue and discussions on PCE.
- b) an individualised programme of learning created with the support of others in the group;
- c) online discussions and forums;
- d) using online learning logs for peers in the group to view and challenge;
- e) opportunities to visit projects in which others in the group are involved.

Research Project and Dissertation

It is hoped that participants' research for the final project or dissertation will contribute to the knowledge base with respect to PCE. Dissertations may be project oriented, based on the participants' own practices and professional context. The following are examples of potential questions for investigations:

- student voice and innovation
- putting the person into 'personalisation'
- co-operative learning and schools as learning communities
- integrated learner-centred curriculum
- formative assessment
- person-centred learning within large state schools
- emotional intelligence and respectful communication in primary schools
- philosophical underpinning of person-centred education
- teachers' life histories and professional development

Participants

The programme provides opportunities for participants' professional advancement and for enhancing the quality of learning within their institutions. It will appeal particularly to practising teachers, teacher educators and other educational professionals. Persons likely to benefit from the programme are those who are interested in an educational experience that aims at human flourishing and the

growth of the individual, along with a commitment to personalised learning and other innovative pedagogical approaches. We believe that the learning experience on our programme will be enriched where we have participants from different backgrounds. We would therefore welcome applications from participants who will be contributing to the diversity of the community.

Entry requirements

Normally, applicants must be honours graduates with at least three years of professional experience or, in the absence of this experience, have at least an upper second honours degree. However, applicants will be considered who do not meet these criteria but who can demonstrate relevant experience in education and sufficient academic proficiency.

Teaching experience is desirable, but applications are also welcome from those just beginning or planning to embark on their educational careers. The intention is to allow for a diversity of interests, and the experiences to be reflected through differing specialist topics and dissertation foci.

Fees

Details of the programme fees are available on request from the MAES programme convener and from the MA handbook and university's website.

Participants are expected to be self-funded or funded by their employers. Those who are financed by their place of employment would be encouraged to conduct research relevant to that institution.

The Guerrand-Hermès Foundation for Peace has a number of grants for participants who have difficulty in paying the full fees. The grant, to be applied for, is to contribute towards partial tuition fees.

How to apply

To request an application form or for further information for the MA in Education Studies at the University of Sussex, contact:

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Applicants who are short listed will be invited for an interview.

Contacts

The programme is led by Prof Michael Fielding, Director, Centre of Educational Innovation, and Dr Scherto Gill, Guerrand-Hermès Foundation for Peace.

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