The presence of mathematics anxiety in future primary school teachers and factors affecting abatement

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This study reflects on the implementation of various teaching initiatives for reducing anxiety toward mathematics in students studying to become primary school teachers. We highlight similarities between these practices and those promoted by the ‘Whole Teacher’ approach – in particular, the aim to develop attitudes along with knowledge and skills. Here, the negative past associations with mathematics and anxiety toward mathematics that students bring with them have been a key consideration when designing the subject content and delivery. Given the important role these students will have in shaping mathematics education in the future, we suggest frameworks such as that of the ‘Whole Teacher’ could be extended to the university setting. We investigate four years of student feedback pertaining to a first year undergraduate mathematics unit, contending that the teaching initiatives introduced over time have helped students develop a positive attitude toward mathematics. We note, however, that the student-teacher relationship was still the most prominent factor directly identified by students who previously had a fear or negative attitude toward mathematics.