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## **(Re)Examining identities: Working with diversity in the pre-service teaching experience**

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### **Abstract**

Australia, like the United States (US) and the United Kingdom (UK), continues to experience a mismatch between the cultural backgrounds and socio-economic class of teachers and those of the students they work with. This article reports on a study that explored how a group of Australian teacher-education students understand their own ethnic and socio-economic class identities and how they work with students of ethnic and class backgrounds different from their own. Analysis of data from interviews and focus groups with the student-teachers is presented to highlight how they make sense of difference and how they take up the challenges of teaching for diversity. The paper raises issues and concerns regarding how diversity and difference might be addressed in teacher education.

**Keywords:** Pre-service teachers; Diversity; Socio-economic class; Ethnicity

### **Article Outline**

#### **Introduction**

How teacher-education students can be prepared to teach diverse student populations has been the subject of research in the United Kingdom (UK) and North America, and to a more limited extent, in Australia, over the last decade. A central concern within much of this literature is the mismatch between teachers' and many students' cultural backgrounds. In the US for example, the student population, already racially and ethnically diverse, is expected to continue to diversify (Ladson-Billings in Causey, Thomas, & Armento, 2000) and by 2010, students of colour will be the largest group in particular school districts (Olmedo, 1997). However, currently, teachers and teacher-education students in the United States (US) are overwhelming white, female and middle-class (Cochran-Smith, 1995; Cockrell, Placier, Cockrell, & Middleton, 1999; Echols & Stader, 2002; Olmedo, 1997) and are likely to have had little or no exposure to people of other cultures. According to Cockrell et al. (1999, p. 355), many pre-service teachers "operate from a limited base of knowledge about culture and identity", having been to white schools in predominantly white neighbourhoods. Such a disparity between teachers' identities and experiences and those of their students may mean that teachers fail to adequately address the needs of this diverse student cohort.

In Australia there are some parallels with the experience in the US. While Australia is one of the most ethnically diverse nations in the world with 25% of all students having a language background other than English (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2002), the teaching population is overwhelmingly Anglo-Australian (Rizvi, 1992; Santoro, Reid, & Kamler (2001) N. Santoro, J. Reid and B. Kamler, Making

difference count: A study of overseas born teachers, *Australian Journal of Education* 45 (2001) (1), pp. 62–75. View Record in Scopus | Cited By in Scopus (7) Santoro, Reid, & Kamler, 2001). Like those already in the profession, the majority of teacher-education students at Australian universities have attended white middle-class Anglo–Australian schools for their primary and secondary education. This means that opportunities to engage with others from diverse ethnic, linguistic and classed backgrounds in their schooling and current teacher-education courses are minimal. Of course, as a range of the literature has signalled, it is unclear whether mere ‘exposure’ to difference necessarily prepares teacher-education students with the skills, knowledge and understanding to work with cultural and social differences in productive and constructive ways.

The need for teachers in Australia to plan for and work with diverse student populations is deemed a professional requisite and is taken up in a number of national and state education policies (eg., Department of Education, 1997; Ministerial Committee Employment, Education, Training, & Youth Affairs (1997) and Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, & Training and Youth Affairs (2000); National Board of Education, Employment and Training, 1995). As in the US, Canada and the UK, education faculties in Australian universities have sought to develop courses to assist teacher-education students gain experience in teaching for diversity. However, there is a good deal of disagreement between researchers and educators about the extent to which pre-service education impacts on the ways new teachers work with diverse cohorts of students. How best to address these complex issues and what such approaches might look like, remains a challenge. Some research, for example suggests that “one factor that makes the task of influencing attitudes about diversity difficult is the tenacity with which pre-service teachers cling to prior knowledge and beliefs about other people” (Causey et al., 2000, p. 33). As teacher educators we often find our students reluctant to teach in schools where the students have different ethnic and socioeconomic class identities from their own. This reluctance may be motivated by fear of the unfamiliar, or may be in part, due to the ways in which teaching for diversity is generally taken up in teacher education. Too often, when markers of identity such as gender, ethnicity, ‘race’, or class are examined in teacher-education programmes, students of ethnic and classed difference are too often positioned as ‘problems’ to be ‘managed’. Delpit argues that when students of colour fail to thrive in school, their cultural and class differences are frequently offered as excuses.

We expose student teachers to an education that relies upon name calling and labelling (‘disadvantaged,’ ‘at risk,’ ‘learning disabled,’ ‘the underclass’) to explain its failures, and call upon research study after research study to inform teachers that school achievement is intimately and inevitably linked with socio-economic status. Teacher candidates are told that “culturally different” children are mismatched to the school setting and therefore cannot be expected to achieve as well as white, middle-class children (1995, p. 178).

Such a focus on the ethnic and class positionings of *learners* ignores how these categories also have an impact on teachers’ identities. This leaves subjectivities of teacher-education students untouched and unexamined.

Aware of these dilemmas, in 2003 we gained funding to conduct a small research project<sup>1</sup> that aimed to: investigate how teacher-education students construct their identities around understandings of

ethnicity and socio-economic class; and explore the ways in which teacher-education students engage with students from different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds to themselves. Since some research (Britzman, 2003; Causey et al., 2000; McWilliams, 1994) highlights the importance of teacher-education students beginning from their personal constructs, this was the starting point for the study reported here.

In this paper, we draw on interview data obtained via interviews and Focus groups with four teacher-education students to highlight how they understand their own identities and how they have endeavoured to work in classroom settings with students from diverse non-mainstream backgrounds. The paper concludes by raising some of the implications for teacher-education programme development.

## **2. Overview of study**

In the study, we worked closely with eight teacher-education students who volunteered to complete a three-week teaching experience in one of two inner city government secondary schools. Each of the selected schools had significant populations of non-Anglo–Australian students who also received an education maintenance allowance (EMA); a government subsidy paid to families living in poverty. Participation in this project meant that the student-teachers would move well beyond their ‘comfort zone’ to explore and experience themselves as teachers of very diverse groups of students.<sup>2</sup> Data for the study was collected in three stages. (1) Pre-teaching experience: before the students undertook their teaching experience, they participated in a two-hour focus group where discussion elicited information about how they constructed their own identities in terms of social class and ethnicity. (2) Teaching experience: during their teaching rounds, each student-teacher kept a reflective journal where they noted their concerns, issues and experiences while working with different groups of learners. We also kept fieldnotes reflecting upon our visits to each student-teacher during their teaching rounds when we observed some of their classes also engaged them in discussions about the professional and personal challenges of teaching for diversity. (3) Post-teaching experience: following the three week teaching experience, the student-teachers were individually interviewed to follow up pertinent issues. A final focus group discussion was held to enable participants to compare and reflect on their experiences.

### **2.1. Defining ‘diversity’**

In its broadest sense, diversity is defined as “different racial and ethnic groups, cultures, traditions, and belief systems” (Echols & Stader, 2002, p. 1). While ‘diversity’ is a problematic term for which there is no common agreed upon definition, in this article, we use the term ‘diversity’ to refer specifically to the concepts of ethnicity and socio-economic class. These categories represent the most significant differences between our teacher-education cohort and the secondary students in inner urban schools with whom they worked during their three-week teaching experience.

In international literature, the terms, ‘ethnicity’ and ‘race’ are often used interchangeably, although for some researchers, they are quite distinct markers of identity. According to Mason (2000), for example, ‘the concept of ethnicity entered sociological and policy discourses partly as a reaction to the perceived inadequacies of race’ (2000, p. 93) and is seen by some scholars as having fewer

essentialist connotations and fewer connections to the biological determinisms often associated with 'race'. Tsolidis (2001) explores the role of schooling in processes of identification for ethnic minority students. She claims that in Australia where the terms 'minority' and 'majority' most commonly stand outside black–white relations (2001, p. 16), the naming of ethnicity as a category of non-belonging takes on a particular significance that it seems not to have in other places (p. 13). Thus, in Australia, 'ethnicity' is often used as short-hand for 'non-Anglo–Australian' and becomes a way of defining those who are 'other' to the dominant cultural group, that is, those of Anglo–Australian heritage.

The notion of 'class' has attracted a good deal of debate among researchers. This is due to its traditional connections to Marxist theories that were founded on economic levels of social stratification no longer seen as relevant in complex and globalised western economies. However, class has recently attracted renewed attention from a range of scholars who are interested in bringing it back into the academic arena (eg., Apple & Whitty, 2000; Skeggs, 1997; Yates, 2000). These researchers claim that class remains part of a struggle over access to resources and ways of being (Skeggs, 1997, p. 7) and that socio-economic status is one of the strongest predictors of educational success and life chances (Connell, 1993; Teese & Polese, 2003).

## 2.2. Analysis of data

Our approach to data analysis in this study was informed by post-structuralist discourse theory. According to Luke, "social institutions such as schools and universities are comprised by and through discourses. Discourses make up a dense fabric of spoken written and symbolic texts" (Luke, 1999, pp. 163–164). In our analysis of the 'texts,' derived from Focus group interviews and individual interviews, we have borrowed from a number of key critical discourse theorists (eg., Fairclough (1992) and Fairclough (2003); Gee, 1999; Luke, 1999) to examine the discourses that have produced such texts. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a theoretical tool underpinning the micro-analysis of data and requires researchers to bring knowledge of social and cultural assumptions and frameworks to bear in a rigorous and systematic interrogation of written and/or spoken texts. According to Fairclough,

Critical discourse analysis is concerned with continuity and change at [the] more abstract, more structural, level, as well as with what happens in particular texts. The link between these two concerns is made through the way in which texts are analysed... Text analysis is seen as not only linguistic analysis; it also includes ... 'interdiscursive analysis', that is, seeing texts in terms of the different discourses, genres and styles they draw upon and articulate together (2003, p. 3).

We have not taken a linguistic approach, but rather have endeavoured to examine the texts in relation to the different discourses that have produced them. In particular, we ask "What are the discourses (socially accepted ways of thinking and acting) that work to produce this text"? What is the discursive 'truth' produced in the text and how does it "construct representations of the world, social identities and social relationships"? (Luke, 1999, p. 170). CDA is described by Luke as, "a political act itself, an intervention in the apparently natural flow of talk and text in institutional life that attempts to 'interrupt' everyday common sense" (Luke, 1995, p. 10). We note, following Fairclough (2003), that "What is 'said' in a text always rests upon 'unsaid' assumptions, so part of the analysis of texts is trying to identify what is assumed" (p. 11).

Additionally, in our analysis of what the student-teachers say (that is, the 'texts'), we concur with Fairclough's argument that "there is no such thing as a complete and definitive analysis of a text" (p. 14). Our readings of these texts are situated and subjective. Nevertheless, our readings serve as a means of opening up for discussion and better understanding, how we, as teacher educators, might make sense of our students' making sense of difference.

### **2.3. Sites and participants in the study**

In this paper, we draw on data from four of the student-teachers gathered via individual interviews and Focus group interviews. In what follows we provide a brief profile of each of the four participants in order to contextualise their comments. We also describe key features of the two inner urban schools in which they were located for their teaching experience.<sup>3</sup>

#### **2.3.1. The schools**

The two schools selected as sites for the study have diverse student populations and presented alternative teaching experiences to the middle class, mainly Anglo–Australian secondary schools that are the usual locations for teacher-education students at our university.

*Transition Secondary College*, an inner urban red brick school, has an ethnically and linguistically diverse population of 363 students. Thirty-nine different languages are spoken within the student community. Currently, 43% of students are recent arrivals from the Horn of Africa—most are refugees who have experienced significant periods of interrupted schooling. Print-based literacy is often non-existent among many of the students whose first languages are Somali or Sudanese dialects. Therefore, there is an extensive English as a second language programme operating at the school. Most student families receive welfare payments.

*Market Secondary College* is centrally located in one of the oldest inner urban areas of Melbourne. The school draws from a diverse neighbourhood with 27 different ethnic groups represented in the school population of 464 students. A small percentage of students are from Anglo–Australian working class families while most come from ethnic minorities. Sixty percent of students' families receive government welfare benefits and many live in nearby high-rise government subsidised public housing.

#### **2.3.2. The student-teachers**

Teacher-education students, in either the third year of a four-year undergraduate education course or the second and final year of a post-graduate education course were invited to participate in the study. They were selected on the basis of their own secondary education experiences, their teaching disciplines and their availability to participate in the three stages of the study.

Martin is a post-graduate pre-service student who has an undergraduate Arts degree. He is Anglo–Australian, in his mid-twenties and describes himself as 'privileged,' having attended a prestigious private secondary school in Melbourne. His teaching experience took place at Transition Secondary College (TSC) where he taught Social Education.

Sally is an undergraduate pre-service student. In her early twenties, she is Anglo–Australian and attended a rural secondary college. Several of her family members are teachers. She taught English at Market Secondary College (MSC).

Susan is in her mid-twenties and a post-graduate pre-service student who is first generation Australian of Sri Lankan heritage. She described herself as 'middle class,' having attended a private secondary school in Melbourne's affluent Eastern suburbs for her secondary school education. She taught English at TSC.

Margaret is in her 40s and is a post-graduate student who attended an outer suburban, government school for her own secondary education. She is a single mother who, at the time of the study, was living in a public housing apartment. Margaret, unlike the other three students, described herself as having a "working class background". She taught Art at MSC.

### **3. Representations of self: class and ethnicity**

During the first focus group held prior to their teaching experience, we asked each student-teacher to speak about and reflect on his/her own ethnic and classed identities. All of them, except Susan, the student of Sri Lankan heritage who asserted that because of her skin colour she was seldom allowed to forget her 'ethnicity', expressed surprise at being asked to think about this aspect of their identities. Several of the student-teachers mentioned that they had never thought of themselves as having a particular ethnic background. Their comments suggested that they understood 'ethnicity' as a term pertaining to those of non-British heritage. This resonates with the work of Tsolidis who claims that "it is only the members of Australia's ethnic minorities who are generally conceived of as 'ethnics'" (2001, p. 14). Sally, for example, when speaking about her heritage during the individual interview said:

...my family has been here since the First Fleet [first British settlers to Australia], and it's not quite as interesting or, I don't know... I talked to my family about it a lot, and Dad said to me, "But on the other hand, don't you think that we're lucky that because we're Australian, we can kind of take on parts of other cultures?" We have tomato day. We're not Italian, but my Dad likes to think that he is. I mean, we have somebody in the family who married an Italian. We have tomato day and the amount of food and activities that we do at home are so multicultural... I think it is disappointing that in real life that you are *just* Australian.

In reading this text we suggest that Sally's taken-for-granted understanding of being 'Australian' is being white and Anglo-Australian. Her comments about her 'first fleet' family serve to position her as a 'real' Australian—ethnicity pertains to 'others' such as the Italian who married into her family. While it is highly likely, given that Australia has not had immigrants from Italy for many years, that her relative's husband is first generation Australian, her description of him as 'Italian', rather than having an Italian background, constructs him as 'other' to the category of 'Australian'.

Sally offers a critique of her positioning as 'Australian' suggesting that her 'just Australian' identity is not 'interesting' as the 'exotic other', but disappointingly 'normal'. However, being 'Australian' also means that she and her family are 'free' to borrow from 'other' 'more exotic' cultures represented in Australia, such as the Italian culture. A critique of such a discourse is presented by Hage (1998) who claims in his work on multiculturalism in Australia, that there is a taken for granted belief that

while the dominant white culture merely and unquestionably exists, migrant cultures exist for the latter. Their value, or the viability of their preservation as far as white Australians are concerned, lies in their function as enriching cultures (1998, p. 121).

Sally's understanding of 'multicultural' is reflected in what Tsolidis (2001) refers to as a 'stomp and chomp' approach, characterised by the superficial, colourful and least threatening aspect of cultures such as food and dance and so on. Adding these dimensions of difference (eg., food, dance) to the mainstream culture is acceptable and indeed, might be viewed as 'inclusive' or 'exciting'. However, such a discourse does not require those who belong to the dominant culture to question their own values and beliefs or to move much beyond their own comfort zone and question the power relations that determine what will be taken up or dismissed, and by whom.

Martin, during the first Focus group, described himself as having a 'privileged' background. His interview comments suggest that his experience at TSC has enabled him to reflect on the class differences between himself and his students.

From being at Transition Secondary College, I definitely feel I am from a privileged background. I've had a lot of opportunities and it sort of led the way for me to go on with different educational options and work options. So, yes ... in that regard I definitely feel privileged.

While on a personal level he is able to acknowledge his own privileged position, in his later comments about the students, he seems less able to see that socio-economic class and ethnicity are significant in shaping his students' lived experiences. He says about the students at TSC:

They're just sort of...they were students with ... a lot of students who have English as a second language. They were immersed in a new culture like a lot of refugees or other people that are going to go to Australia. So, yes that is definitely different to a lot of other schools. Kids born here or grown up here for a while have had time to adjust. So they [students at TSC] are still adjusting so, just living really and dealing with school along with that.

In this text, Martin appeared to see the students as 'just kids', whose different schooling experiences are characterised by being caught up in the process of 'adjusting'. His use of this term suggests to us that he believes they are experiencing a mere 'temporary set back', something that will be overcome simply with the passage of time. His stance is in keeping with what Causey et al. (2000, p. 34) describe as 'naïve egalitarianism', a discourse commonly used by pre-service education students to make sense of difference and characterised by a central belief is that each person is created equal, should have access to equal resources, and should be treated equally. This belief in the equality of all is a central tenet within Western liberal societies. However, it is not sufficient in itself to bring about change or to recognise the inequalities of classed locations. Causey et al. (2000) argue that naïve egalitarianism can cause student teachers to ignore the effects of poverty and to "deny the privileges they may enjoy because of their skin colour and social class and to discount the effects of past and present discrimination" (p. 34). Locating oneself in such a discourse of egalitarianism may mean that teachers fail to engage with the reality of learners' lived experiences and the need to do something about the inequities that their students' experience because of their cultural and classed identities. Therefore, how a different curriculum or additional resources might address inequalities, can remain unaddressed.



In contrast to Martin, Margaret, when asked to reflect on her own classed and ethnic identity, emphasised her 'working class' background, suggesting that this commonality with the students at MSC helped her understand them better. However, she makes a distinction between her own classed experiences and those of her students. She said:

...the thing that of course did stick with me...was the choices that you make and how close I could have come to living that way [like her students], but for some choices that I made. Because as you know, I live in a housing commission place not the same but similar and being a single parent and everything, yes. And I had to separate from my second husband, the children's father, because he had a habit, so you know, it could very well have been very different...And so I have a greater empathy with them [the students] about how they have ended up and just even being at school for some of them is a major achievement. But it really made me think about what is school for, what are we supposed to be doing in school.

Here, Margaret seems to draw upon contradictory discourses as means to make sense of her experiences and those of her students'. While she acknowledges the effect of family break-down in her own life, an event over which she had little control, she appears to understand her own identity as shaped significantly by self-determination and attributes her present circumstances to individual choice and the decisions she made. This discourse of personal agency is referred to by Causey et al. as "optimistic individualism—the inevitability of triumph over any obstacle through hard work and individual efforts" (Causey et al., 2000, p. 33). However, Margaret's use of the phrase "how they have ended up" in reference to her MSC students locates her in a somewhat contradictory position, given her emphasis on self-determination for herself. This phrase suggests she sees these students as locked into a particular classed context with no choice—a final, rather than transient experience. The fact that these working class students are also not white, a point of differentiation between them and her, further complicates the discursive production of these texts. Are they not able to exercise choice because they are not members of the dominant white Anglo–Australian majority? At the end of the text, Margaret's questions regarding the purpose of schooling are particularly salient. Does schooling still offer a way 'out' of poverty for these MSC students or does it merely replicate systemic injustice? When asked about how her teaching experience at MSC had helped her think about her own ethnic and classed identity, Susan, the fourth student-teacher, said:

I think it makes you aware of your own class more than ethnicity. I think it has. Just going in there and your eyes are open to what happens on the other side. You can only imagine or read about things in a magazine or newspaper, but to really experience it is different from going through it. There's the idea that after school they have gone home, not into a home, they have gone into a place really. But I can catch a train out and come home for a dinner.

It would seem from her reflections ("I think it makes you aware of your own class") that Susan's teaching experiences at MSC have helped her understand her privileged position. Her use of the phrase "what happens on the other side" suggests she recognises that the students are located, both geographically and metaphorically in very different places from her. The students' lived experiences are characterised by poverty and social problems and while at the end of the school day she "can catch a train out" and leave the poverty and social problems behind; her students cannot. She returns

to a middle-class suburb and a middle-class “home”, vastly different to the “place” they return to (perhaps not a ‘home’ at all by Susan’s implied standards). Unlike Margaret who privileges the discourse of ‘individual choice’ or Martin who endorses the belief in equality without interrogating what this might mean in relation to his students’ lives, Susan’s text indicates an awareness of poverty and how it shapes the lived experiences of her students, but offers no answers.

#### **4. Working with difference through curriculum**

Each of the four student-teachers took seriously the need to address the needs of their students through curriculum and pedagogies. However, how each did so, was different and perhaps linked to their separate ways of making sense of their students’ ethnicity and class. For example, in Sally’s texts we see her taking up discourses of assimilation discourses in her overt endorsement of existing mainstream curriculum. While both Martin and Susan recognise that the existing curriculum lacks relevance to their students, Martin feels unable to make changes. It is Susan who is able to modify the existing curriculum and select culturally and linguistically relevant resources so that lessons are more relevant and culturally accessible to her students.

##### **4.1. Curriculum for assimilation**

In order to teach argumentative writing skills to her year nine English students at MSC, Sally chose an issue that had recently been in the Australian media. A former Anglican Archbishop and newly appointed Governor General, (i.e., the Queen’s representative in Australia), was forced to resign because of the public perception that he had mishandled claims against priests accused of child abuse whilst in an earlier position as Archbishop in the Anglican Church. In her interview Sally suggested that this particular lesson didn’t go as well as she had hoped. She believed this was because the students, most of whom were not Christian, were not familiar with the religious or political terminology integral to their successful reading of the newspaper text she had presented to them (*“They didn’t even know what an Anglican or an Archbishop was”*). Nevertheless, Sally believed this was an important topic and in response to an interview question about whether, with hindsight, she would choose another topic, she said:

No, I don’t think so...at least it was an opportunity for them to learn about it. I mean, it was an opportunity for them to learn about politics and about child abuse. I’m not saying, “This is what all Australians are like, [or that] we are all Anglicans. This is a section of Christianity that some people follow and some people don’t and this is what has been affected by this issue”. I wouldn’t have changed the issue [that is, chosen a different one] because any issue in a school like that is going to be affected by kids’ backgrounds.

Sally’s last comment suggests that she recognises that the cultural beliefs and values students bring to class will affect how they engage with any curriculum topic that she might choose to teach. However, perhaps it is their lack of knowledge about the topic and her assumption that non-Anglo–Australian students need to be assimilated into the mainstream, that was one of her motivations for choosing it. In doing so, she endorses specific beliefs about her role as teacher. Some research (eg., Delpit, 1991) discusses the need for teachers to help students of diverse backgrounds engage with ‘the culture of power’. This may have been inherent in Sally’s choice of topic and she may have

sought to ensure that her students are taught about the governing processes and systems of their new country. However, what is not apparent from the above text is whether Sally, as a 'first fletcher Australian' operated on an unquestioning belief that transmitting 'knowledge' about the mainstream was sufficient and worthy in itself and that as a teacher she had a responsibility to assimilate her students into the mainstream or did she understand that there was also a need to explore how students made sense of the media story about the Governor General from their own cultural perspectives

#### **4.2. Recognising ethnocentric curriculum**

Martin was asked by his supervising teacher to continue teaching a unit of work on World War II that the students had already begun. His year ten Social Education class consisted mainly of students recently arrived from the Horn of Africa and some Asian–Australian students. Martin believed that the students saw this particular Social Education topic was:

...pretty boring and a lot of parts, I agree, were foreign to them, I think because, like, I don't know, maybe they just thought World War II was ages ago. This was mainly a European war. A lot of the history that we learnt was ethnocentric and from their backgrounds...although it was a 'World War' and sort of affected other countries, it wasn't as dramatic for those people. And so, yes I think a lot of them just thought 'Oh yes, this is boring' and things like that.

Furthermore, the documentaries he showed the students about the war did not engage their interest. He says of the videos:

They were interested in a few scenes. The fighting scenes and stuff. They would go into it a bit, but as soon as they saw black and white [film], they were like, "Oh, this is boring". And I'd also just try to wack in a few interesting points every now and then.

Martin shows insight into the mismatch between the curriculum and the interests and cultural backgrounds of his students. However, the study of World War II is likely to be a challenge for most students, not just African–Australian or Asian–Australian students. Additionally, watching black and white documentaries would be unlikely to appeal to any Year Ten student—not just those from different cultural backgrounds. Martin's explanation of why his students lacked interest in this unit, i.e., it wasn't relevant because of their ethnic identities, highlights a dilemma that surfaces often when working with diverse student cohorts. The danger of focussing on difference is that difference may become the only lens through which young people are viewed. On reflection, we felt that our attempts to raise awareness of how ethnicity and class are often played out in classrooms could at times produce undesirable consequences. Students' responses could be misinterpreted by student-teachers and result in over-simplification and/or stereotyping. This is a pedagogical (and methodological) question that we return to in our discussion.

Like Martin, Susan had also 'inherited' a unit from her supervising teacher but this one was about The Middle Ages, including a focus on The Crusades. She too, recognises that her students, Muslims of Turkish background are unlikely to see this topic, reflecting a Western cultural view of history as relevant to their personal cultural histories, needs and interests. She says:

I think that was one of the best topics....Thankfully I was teaching with Jill [her supervising teacher] sort of like team teaching, and it was fantastic to see where, you know, how we should think of it and the gaps in our knowledge and how these kids have something to add that we just ignore. And I would have ignored it had I not been looking at the St Andrew's cross [on the Crusaders' shields]...then I realised--'hang on these kids haven't got a clue of what this cross is'. And then, you know, [I asked them] "What's a similar word or do you have something similar?" That was really interesting. Actually getting their input and using them as resources, these kids have something to add but we often ignore it...we need to ask them, to get a multiple perspective on the one topic.

Under the guidance of her supervising teacher, Susan is able to find ways to modify the existing curriculum based on Western cultural views of history and to take into account the cultural knowledge and understandings her students bring to the classroom. In doing so, she allows her students to engage in the topic in ways that appear to be personally and culturally affirming. Her willingness to see herself as a cross-cultural learner and take her students' standpoints into consideration meant that she was able to adapt and build on her students' cultural knowledges.

##### **5. The implications for teacher-education programme development**

We believe, from the reactions of the student-teachers who participated in this study, being asked to reflect on their own identities was a powerful act and an important starting point for examining difference within educational contexts. Most of the student-teachers referred to the first focus group as a significant experience in helping them begin to understand how 'difference' can be constructed not as a 'problem' but as a source of learning. Thus, while issues of teaching for diversity are addressed in subjects within the education course at our university, thoughtful engagement with these concepts seems to come more easily when students are asked to consider their own ethnic and classed identities. Working from the personal to the more general appeared to help these student-teachers gain some insight into the centrality of class and ethnicity within education.

However, while all of the student-teachers were able to reflect on their own identities, their reflections did not necessarily translate into a deeper or richer understanding of how the world might look from their students' perspectives, or how systemic discrimination might operate to limit their students' life choices. Clearly, what is also necessary to help future teachers develop competence in teaching diverse student groups is an examination of how class discrimination and/or racism operate to privilege some positions and silence others. How these discourses are taken up in curriculum, pedagogy and practice need to be understood alongside the 'personal' reflections about one's own experiences.

A methodological/pedagogical problem that emerged for us was how to avoid essentialising complex categories of difference when speaking about 'ethnic' or 'class' distinctions. The danger of reinforcing stereotypes, even with the best of intentions, became obvious to us as researchers. It made us reflect more deeply on the need to approach these issues from a number of different perspectives and over a period of time in order to move beyond simplistic or superficial analysis and the temptation to come up with quick solutions.

Another concern and relevant to Martin's experience, is the often limited scope for student-teachers to take ownership for designing and implementing curriculum during their teaching experience. In most instances, students 'inherit' pre-defined curriculum and have little input into what is to be taught. Additionally, as was evident from Susan's experience, supervising teachers' advice is vital in supporting student-teachers develop confidence and curriculum expertise. The depth of knowledge that supervising teachers can potentially share with student-teachers working with learners from cultural and class backgrounds different from their own remains an area that requires more research. Some of our research participants, for example, were able to develop deeper insights into teaching for diversity because of the guidance offered them by supervising teachers. Others were told that treating all students as "individual personalities" was sufficient to redress any inequalities experienced through and by current educational discourses. How teacher educators and supervising teachers might work more coherently together to challenge and move beyond student-teachers' misconceptions is an area that awaits further study.

Through this research project we have become more aware of the complex questions we need to address when working with future teachers. For example, how can we engage more productively with students such as Sally to problematise subject positions available to those of the dominant culture? That is, how can we help students-teachers understand that ethnicity and social class are integral to the identities of both learners and teachers and not just descriptors of non-Anglo-Australians or of non-middle class students? How do we, together with our teacher-education students, move beyond the construction of the 'other' as exotic, to the realisation that the self has an ethnic and classed identity that is played out in classroom practices through interactions with curriculum, pedagogy and assessment? What are the skills and knowledge that need to be taught to enable future teachers to negotiate from their own positions to an understanding of their students'—and vice versa? How might thinking about curriculum and pedagogies take account of these while recognising the need to 'teach the culture of power'? (Delpit, 1995)

This study has provided insights into how teacher-education students from mainly middle class or of Anglo-Australian culture make sense of their engagements with learners who bring to the classroom very different classed and cultural experiences from themselves. While we provide no answers, we argue that through this kind of research we, as teacher educators, can build a better understanding of the taken-for-granted beliefs and the discursive locations that student-teachers take up. In doing so, we are better able to identify issues and concerns that must be addressed in teacher-education programmes if we are to prepare tomorrow's teachers to work productively with all students.

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