

‘It’s all in the context’: Indigenous education for pre-service teachers

Abstract

The Australian Professional Standards for Teachers details graduate teacher competencies and knowledge specifically related to Indigenous education, and informs the training of pre-service teachers at Australian universities. This article describes how five pre-service teachers at similar stages of completion in their course at an Australian university responded to case studies on Indigenous education topics such as government policies, developing relationships and teacher attitudes in the final assessment of a core unit of study. The case study approach was embedded across the pedagogy and content delivery in an intensively taught Indigenous education core unit with the intent of encouraging pre-service teacher understandings to move beyond prior knowledge through dynamic scholarship. The data consisted of an in-depth examination of five pre-service teachers’ assignments for levels of reflective language, and degree of orientation towards discourses in Indigenous education as associated with the assessment criteria. The findings support prior research by asserting core units in Indigenous education for pre-service teachers as paramount for developing teacher competencies, and argues for careful consideration when deeming a graduate ready to teach according to the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers.

Introduction

Australian universities offer pre-service teacher training in Indigenous education through core, elective and embedded units in an attempt to respond to the expectations outlined in the varying policies that interpret graduate teacher knowledge. Interpretations in the policy discourses and impact of the variability amongst communities and students can be understood through recent debates in education best practice for teaching Indigenous students. The debate referred to as the ‘education wars’, includes Noel Pearson’s assertion of the Direct Instruction Method, whilst Chris Sarra emphasises a focus on ‘high expectations relationships’ (as cited in McMullen, 2012). The variability in the debate highlights the contestations involved in teacher knowledge about learning models, even beyond the policy context.

Anderson (2012) highlights that school curriculum and teaching methods are the basis of an urgent reform in remote community schools and argues that teachers with university degrees and five years of experience are needed to make a difference to outcomes for Indigenous students and approaches within the classroom. Conversely the teaching population in remote communities are often new or recent graduates (Cape York Institute; Heslop as cited in Jorgensen, Grootenboer, Niesche, & Lerman, 2010, p. 61) and the prospect of working in Indigenous education settings as a whole, are viewed by some in the teaching profession as low status (see Malin, 1997 on teacher attitudes). The outcomes communicated during teacher training have largely been left untended in recent debates about policy and practice in Indigenous education, despite the assumption of graduate teachers’ ability to:

- Demonstrate broad knowledge and understanding of the impact of culture, cultural identity and linguistic background on the education of students from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds, and;
- Demonstrate broad knowledge of, understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages. (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), 2012)

This paper describes how five pre-service teachers at similar stages of completion in their course responded to case studies on Indigenous education in the final assessment of a core unit of study on Indigenous education topics such as government policies, developing relationships and teacher attitudes. It also discusses the implications of prior content knowledge of education, and prior metacognitive knowledge of university study on the assignment submissions (Dochy, de Rijdt, & Dyck, 2002, p. 270; Dochy, Segers, & Buehl, 1999) and the relationship with course outcomes and preparing teachers according to the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL, 2012).

Terminology

This paper uses the term ‘Indigenous’ to signify that pre-service teachers in the study site engage in both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and thus the use of the word aims to represent the diversity of First Nation cultures within the Australian context. The term ‘education’ posits perspectives on teaching and learning, as well as the range of perspectives and knowledge explored in the unit being attributed to perspectives in education. As such, the term ‘Indigenous education’ in the paper refers to a unit of study that is situated in the graduate teacher development of professional practice, knowledge and engagement (AITSL, 2012) in teaching and learning in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education.

Indigenous education

The importance of pre-service teacher training in Indigenous education was initiated at a federal level from the 1967 referendum and resulted in Commonwealth influence over Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs and highlighted the disparity of educational outcomes for Indigenous students (Beresford, 2003, p. 112; Malin & Maidment, 2003, p. 87). Despite continual policies and reports about the inclusion of Indigenous education and consideration of students' needs in national structures (Malin & Maidment, 2003, p. 89), it was not until the late 1990s that explicit units were considered as core within the context of pre-service teacher training (Craven, Halse, Marsh, Mooney, & Wilson-Miller, 2005a, p. 16). Amidst recommendations by the Australian Education Council in 1989 and the Australian Council of Deans in 2001 for requisite units, institutions still embed Indigenous education across other areas (Craven et al., 2005a) such as inclusion or diversity. With less than 50% of universities in 2002 having compulsory subjects for Indigenous education (Craven, Halse, Marsh, Mooney, & Wilson-Miller, 2005b, p. 2) the area remains as a low status priority within pre-service teacher training and knowledge. Pre-service teacher preparation through Indigenous education units causes to subsequent changes in classroom practice as teachers (Craven et al., 2005a), however analysis of outcomes in current core units has been limited.

The accreditation of teacher education courses is dependent on a graduate's aptitude in the 'core knowledge... skills and general capabilities important for all Australian students' (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2012a) as attested within the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL, 2012). Significantly, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives must be included across all key-learning areas [KLAs] beyond those that

relate specifically to Indigenous Studies such as content descriptors related to Indigenous histories, furthermore all teachers must appreciate and respond to the needs of Indigenous students. The quality of content and instruction within explicit units correlates with positive and active positions in Indigenous education (Craven et al., 2005a), however the approaches and processes by which these principles can be developed are varied.

Pre-service teachers and Indigenous education

Teachers are a significant factor in learner achievement and engagement (Hattie, 2002), and a critical determinant of attendance and outcomes for Indigenous students (Hughes & Hughes, 2011). Most neophyte and veteran teachers in Australia come from Anglo-Saxon, middle-class and metropolitan upbringings with limited dealings with people from other cultural and social backgrounds (Allard & Santoro, 2004), affecting their attitudes towards Indigenous education. Often a teacher's knowledge base about students, issues, communities and contexts is drawn from unquestioned personal assumptions and experiences acquired through their childhood and schooling years (Leonard, 2002) that may have detrimental implications for students (Malin, 1997).

Neophyte teachers are consistently cited as being ill equipped to operate in contexts affiliated with Indigenous education (Jorgensen et al., 2010) resultant of a 'missing paradigm' (Shulman, 1986, p. 6) due to units that have focused on pedagogy for Indigenous students however being devoid of content knowledge regarding perspectives and issues. A 'chasm of the intellect' (Pascoe, 2012, p. 5) regarding histories, peoples and knowledges ensues, with a subsequent disparity between the self-competency and affective attributes (Craven et al., 2005a, p. 8) that are required for sustainable engagement in Indigenous education. Self-competency develops from

cultural competency where those in professional positions such as health workers and educators develop their practice by reflecting on their own background and profession in the choices they make, consistent with Indigenous expectations (Ranzijn, McConnochie, & Nolan, 2010). The affective attribute stems from educators enjoying teaching Indigenous Studies and Indigenous students, because then ‘they are more likely to be committed to this area’ (Craven et al., 2005a, p. 8). Although the affective attribute is noted as a predictor for longitudinal commitment to Indigenous education, a reliance on unchallenged personal views results in deficit and ‘blame’ ideologies (McConaghy, 2000) that infer Indigenous students’ identities as being the reason for a failure to achieving equitable educational outcomes, in turn refuting cultural competency. Conversely, the affective attribute is defined in teacher-education theory (Dewey, 1960; Schön, 1987) as requisite within reflective practice and integral to the development of teacher professional and personal identities.

Content comprehension or ‘knowledge acquaintance’ (Shulman, 1987, p. 7) is based on a teachers’ choice, so too is Indigenous education transposed in the classroom dependent on the knowledge of the educator (Harrison & Greenfield, 2011, p. 66). The representation of Indigenous peoples in the curriculum is a space often contested within the classroom where teachers are in greater control through selection of perspectives, resources and ‘cultural displays’ such as dance, song and other representations (Chalmers, 2005, p. 163). As such, teachers are expected to be informed of the historical, social, political and environmental circumstances affecting Indigenous students and communities (AITSL, 2012; Price, 2012), as well as familiarity with the implications associated with embedding perspectives across the curriculum (ACARA, 2012a; AITSL, 2012; Harrison & Greenfield, 2011).

The inclusion of professional knowledge is what differentiates Indigenous

education courses from Indigenous Studies courses as the knowledge base extends to include, ‘pedagogical approaches, curriculum developments and assessment issues around the learning needs of Indigenous students and how to teach non-Indigenous students about Indigenous society’ (Ma Rhea & Russell, 2012, p. 20). Pre-service teachers are exploring Indigenous Studies through the professional lens of an educator. Conversely, because ‘what teachers say in public and private should fit well with how they teach their students in the classroom’ (Lampert, 2012, p. 87), studies in Indigenous education affects the development of teacher identity. In this way, an understanding of the states in which Indigenous education operates necessitates that core units challenge assumptions and develop pre-service teachers’ content knowledge and reflective practice.

The assessments, content and pedagogies employed in Indigenous education units vary, and there is limited information about the suitability of current approaches. Historically non-Indigenous, white academics have located themselves as the protectors of knowledges in Indigenous education and Indigenous Studies (Sherwood, Keech, Keenan, & Kelly, 2012, p. 190) resulting in much discussion in regards to who should be teaching Indigenous education. Aveling (2001) confronts her position as a white migrant academic in Indigenous education units for pre-service teachers as a constant process of reflection of whiteness and gender, and embeds these theories in the facilitation of Indigenous education units. The implications for the small number of pre-service teachers who were unsettled when faced with whiteness and gender were expressed in their feedback through violent and defensive discourse in regards to the tutorial discussions needing ‘... to be more accepting of different points of view—try to be less hostile towards white males’ (Aveling, 2010, p. 128). On the other hand, pre-service teachers who were uncomfortable in the space of Indigenous education

wrote comments in their journals that were reflective of school, and social situations in which racism exists, demonstrating a developing and ongoing appreciation of the reflective struggle of educators.

Prior knowledge

Unit outcomes are used as key indicators of content within units taught at universities, and are similarly used to determine course accreditation. Pre-service teachers progress through their course at different rates, and Indigenous education features at varying times across different institutions (Craven, Halse, Marsh, Mooney, & Wilson-Miller, 2005c). The early positioning of Indigenous education units in courses indicates the ‘tell me how to do it’ phase of education (DiAngelo & Sensoy, 2010) where pre-service teachers are grappling with the strategies, principles, approaches and essential identities of becoming a teacher (Britzman, 2003). As such, pre-service teachers may be looking for solutions to perceived problems in Indigenous education. Alluding to a set of pedagogies or knowledges in Indigenous education for pre-service teacher training is synonymous with ‘formulas for domination’ (Foucault, 1977) within the classroom.

Achieving unit outcomes and understanding unit content, and preceding study within a specific area, has been used as a predictor within fields other than education (Hailikari, Nevgi, & Komulainen, 2008; Thompson & Zamboanga, 2004). As with other professional fields, a prior knowledge base in education and in higher education study develops skills in grappling with the academic and at times, confronting nature of higher education. Prior knowledge in the field of education and the workings of higher education allows pre-service teachers to think critically about the contexts of Indigenous education beyond the self, as they are already versed in the foundations of education.

The consideration of pre-service teacher's prior knowledge within Indigenous education is imperative as '... the systems of schooling and teaching Indigenous students cannot be analysed in isolation from the social, the historical, or the political contexts' (Downey & Hart, 2012, p. 106). Neither human growth nor learning is divorced from agencies within a vacuum and neither are they absent from experience (Dewey, 1916, p. 127). As such, the context of school and the construct of place in which learning is facilitated have direct impact on the connections between growth and learning. 'Knowledge of the past and its heritage is of great significance' (Dewey, 1916, p. 125) when entering into discussions of context, and so education must be considered in a context relative to the objective of learning.

Case studies

Case studies as an embedded and ongoing assessment tool have been utilised in fields other than Indigenous education for pre-service teachers to reflect on their practice and on their assumptions of students and the classroom. This reflection occurs within a specific context, rather than in the general sense of education contexts. Hammerness, Darling-Hammond & Shulman (2001) describes case studies a way to engage pre-service teachers in multiple, critical perspectives and make connections to theory and the knowledge base of the teaching profession whilst addressing the particulars of a situation beyond uninformed and unchallenged personal perspectives (pp. 2-3). The study describes the process of embedding case studies as one of scaffolding, feedback (including rubrics and assessment frameworks) and peer conferencing. Pre-service teacher responses showed detailed consideration of intellectual honesty in education, and perspectives on students beyond being a source of problems. Hammerness et al. (2001) furthermore outline the need for grounding cases in theory to develop pre-service teachers theoretical knowledge (p. 23). There are additional informal research-

informed methods of assessment in teacher education that aim at unpacking assumptions and developing reflective practice within a context such as weblogs (Shoffner, 2008) and learning journals (Pedro, 2005). Reading and writing case studies on the other hand are a structured and formal method of assessment.

Methodology

The purpose of this study is to describe how pre-service teachers responded to Indigenous education through the use of an embedded assessment case study approach. The study took place in a core Indigenous education unit facilitated through an education faculty with the purpose of embedding an Indigenous understanding into educators' methodology.

The site for the project was a south-eastern Australian university that runs two regular semesters typically of fourteen weeks, and a third intensive term of seven weeks that is situated in the middle of the two longer semesters. There were two instructors in the unit, a non-Indigenous lecturer and an Aboriginal tutor who drew from identical tutorial plans, and met twice weekly after each topic session to discuss progress and concerns. The teaching of the core unit for this project was condensed into a four week period during the intensive middle term, with pre-service teachers meeting twice weekly for a one-hour lecture, twice weekly for a one and a half hour tutorial, and fortnightly for a three hour seminar. Lectures consisted of the presentation of theory and the tutorials emphasised discussions and action around the three assessment tasks with seminars being held off campus, amalgamating both theory and action through the three types of sessions. Tutorial participation was compulsory for passing the second assignment, and as such there was relatively high attendance to all types of classes for the term in comparison to prior semesters. The

unit was ranked as suitable for an undergraduate first year level, however students in undergraduate pre-service teacher education courses were advised to take the unit at different stages through the dissemination of course structure guidance:

- second semester or intensive middle term in the third year primary and early childhood courses;
- second semester of the second year for secondary education courses; and
- second semester of the second year for the two-year Graduate Entry course

Figure 1 shows the spread of all enrolments in the unit across the year levels. The majority of the cohort (81%) were in their second, third or fourth year of study, however 19% of enrolled pre-service teachers were in their first year.

Insert Figure 1

Course enrolment, grade in the final assignment and completion rate for the population (n=101) is displayed in Figure 2. As Figure 2 shows, Fail (F and NX) submissions comprised 19% of the assessments; Pass (P) submissions made up 35%, Credit (CR) consisted of 26%, and Distinction/ High Distinction (DI/HD) were 19% of total submissions.

Insert Figure 2

Participants

The 5 participants in the study came from different year levels, with one participant in their first year, and the remaining four in their second year of study in their degree.

Figure 3 describes the 5 participants involved in the study. The participants were at similar stages in their course completion. One participant from each grade range Pass (P), Credit (CR) and Distinction/ High Distinction (DI/HD) (3 in total), were a third

of the way through their course before enrolling in the unit. Three of the participants were enrolled in a Primary (PR) course, and only one participant was enrolled in a Secondary (SEC) course. As a result of the course enrolment, 4 participants examined case study six, which was situated in a primary school, whereas only one participant examined case study 3 which was situated in a P-10 year school setting. There were strict limits in ethics on collecting any personal characteristics about the participants such as age, gender or Indigenous identity as the researcher was also the lecturer in the unit and these characteristics would jeopardize the anonymity of the participants.

Insert Figure 3

Data collection

Two months after the finalisation of unit grades, two emails were sent to all students who were actively enrolled in the unit (Pass-High Distinction grades) at the time of the final assessment, outlining the scope and implications of the project. Five participants (two P, two CR and one DI/HD) were sought based on the total number of assignment grades in order to reflect the spread as shown in Figure 3. F and NX assignments were not included due to the possibility of appeal. A total of 9 students replied to the request for participation. It was planned that in order to avoid bias in the selection of participants, the first five relevant students (two P, two CR and one D/HD) would be sent consent forms. However, lack of returned consent from a CR graded participant resulted in the overall recruitment of two Pass (P), one Credit (CR) and two Distinction (DI) / High Distinction (HD) participants.

Case study assessment

The unit's intention was to prepare pre-service teachers by learning about their

attitudes towards facilitating Indigenous education for all students. There were introductions to Indigenous Studies through readings and guest lectures, however the majority of the unit focussed specifically on teacher choices in curriculum, pedagogy and practice. The unit explored the idea that context and perspective matters in schooling and how school and education looks different from different standpoints. The use of resources that represent Indigenous issues, perspectives and peoples such as books, Internet and human resources were examined in the context of the curriculum and were the basis for the first assessment item.

There is a link between realistic assessment and achieving learning outcomes (Dochy et al., 1999), however assessments in teacher education are often separated from learning experiences in real teacher practice. Consequently, expression of understanding and learning through assessment is based on personal and assumptive perceptions rather than informed perspective due to the separation of theory and practice in instruction approaches (Hammerness et al., 2001; Price, 2012). In this way, the basis of the first assessment task emanated from the use of teaching resources to supplement practice. The aim was for students to challenge resources and their often-stereotyped representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, cultures and histories in the classroom. The second assessment task similarly focused on embedding resources in the creation of a curriculum resource such as a sequence of lesson plans, assessment task or small unit of work, in a way that reflects an understanding of embedding Indigenous education across the curriculum.

The final assignment was a case study analysis of Indigenous education situations related to topics such as government policies, developing relationships and teacher attitudes that was embedded across the total seven tutorials and two seminars. Case study approaches to assessment is a tool by which pre-service teachers are able

to engage in critical reflection, rather than personal assumptions and experiences (Hammerness et al., 2001) and was the basis for the design of the culminating assessment task for the unit in this study. Zeichner and Liston (1996) highlight the need for pre-service teachers to reflect critically on the institutional, political and cultural attributes of schooling (p. 53) and the associated implications of actions and knowledge through having control over processes and work (Zeichner & Liston, 1987, p. 26).

Reflective thinking is the foundational characteristic of genuine learners (Dewey, 1910), and integral to guiding teacher decisions (Schön, 1983) and professionalism (Pedro, 2005, p. 50). As genuine experiences are paramount to learning (Dewey, 1916), prescribing authentic experiences embedded with critical reflection during pre-service teacher training moves beyond the practices evidenced in university and into a personal reflective practice. As such, the final assessment was designed to develop reflective thinking through authentic learning experiences and extended intrinsic reflective practices. Peer partnerships as detailed in Hammerness et al. (2001), and Cornish and Jenkins (2012) aim at contributing to meaningful discussions on differing perspectives in professional experience and class consultations. This approach was adopted across the final assessment whereby pre-service teachers worked together to discuss their reflections on their assessment each week, and consulted with peers on drafts.

In the first tutorial for the teaching period, students were presented with six cases from which to choose as a lens for unit content and the major case study task. Each case contained information about a context drawn from school sites and profiles published on the My School website (ACARA, 2012b) from Australia's annual National Assessment Program in Literacy and Numeracy [NAPLAN] (ACARA,

2012c), and as such were based on realistic contexts as shown in Figure 4. The participants and contexts presented in the cases were also developed from the lecturer's own professional experience across a range of remote, regional and urban contexts.

Insert Figure 4

Each week during tutorials pre-service teachers were allocated times to work with others on their case study through critically reflecting on a series of questions that responded to the reading, lecture and online materials. In this way the assessment was embedded into the pedagogical approach of the unit delivery, amalgamating learning outcomes and affiliated teacher action (Campbell & Groundwater-Smith, 2010). The cases were written to encourage students to engage in multiple perspectives and make connections to theory whilst addressing the particulars of the situation (Hammerness et al., 2001). The criteria for assessment was thus:

1. Extent to which the response considers Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspectives in education;
2. Critical analysis of the case through the realistic educational context and integration of the unit's topics; and,
3. Use of relevant and extensive evidence to support ideas.

Context is significant for professionals to understand when engaged in Indigenous education so the cases aimed to encourage pre-service teachers to address the knowledge base of the profession rather than investigating through a personal perspective (Hammerness et al., 2001, p. 23). Each case was positioned in the present, not in the past or a utopian future (Dewey, 1938) and it was outlined in the criteria that the responses should likewise reflect this standpoint (criteria 2). Differences

between cases allowed for larger group discussions to highlight that education is not merely handing over a skill set or the construction of external powers (Dewey, 1916, p. 112), and the absence of ‘problems’ evidenced the inability for ‘solutions’ and aimed to encourage thinking beyond the deficit ideologies commonly defaulted to in Indigenous education (criteria 1). Criteria 1 included reflection on teacher identity and the impact of dominant identities such as whiteness, on the decision-making of educators in the context.

After engaging in scaffolding questions structured around the focal topics of cultural safety, history and perspectives, policy and pedagogy, and relationships, students were asked to write an analysis on one of the cases drawing on the range of evidence presented in the unit. The aim of the assessment was to meaningfully address the learning outcomes namely, reflection on Indigenous students’ needs, and the application of Indigenous perspectives to Western education. In the analysis students were required to situate the breadth of the topics from the unit in relation to the dimensions of the case study with support from interviews, theory, literature, case studies and reflections to demonstrate careful deliberation of the interpretations and implications present in the context. As Indigenous education is not only demonstrated within specialised content descriptors or solely for Indigenous students (ACARA, 2012a; AITSL, 2012), four of the six cases mentioned Indigenous perspectives and contested areas such as policy and only one of the cases disclosed the number of identified students within the setting.

Data analysis

This was a qualitative study involving both description and interpretation in the design. The case studies were thematically analysed for:

- a) levels of reflective language and thinking (assessment criteria 1); and,
- b) degree of orientation towards discourses in Indigenous education
(assessment criteria 2 and 3)

An initial topical analysis was performed according to the a priori codes of *identity*, *action* and *context* as related to the literature on pre-service teacher education, and Indigenous education for pre-service teachers (Aveling, 2001; Dewey, 1938; Downey & Hart, 2012). The topical analysis ‘... is of course also necessary’ (Richards, 2005), in order to provide an overview on the range of interpretations about these topics and the ways in which they were used in the data. Subsequent readings of the data provided codes and sub codes as identified through the pre-service teachers’ submissions. In order to challenge the accuracy of the data, interpretations within the codes and sub codes were checked against the original submissions (Willis, 2010, p. 421). Notes were made alongside each of the readings on the researcher’s interpretations and were referred back to again to challenge the interpretations of the data. Reflexivity became an invaluable tool for unpacking the assumptions held by the researcher in this process, and to subject these interpretations to the same analysis as the rest of the data (Mason, 1996, p. 6).

Rossmann & Rallis (2003) highlight the need for researchers to consider their own personal biography when conducting research, as personal ontology and history of knowing affects the construction of truth (or truths) about the data and the project. Regular reflective memos assisted with the division between lecturer and researcher, and these notes ended up being the foundation to deeper findings as they were ‘intuitive, rather than systematic’ judgements (Willis, 2010, p. 411). Reflexivity is critical in the analysis of the factors influencing knowledge production from the data. Guillemin & Gillam (2004) highlight that reflexivity is about ‘improving the quality

and validity of the research and recognizing the limitations of the knowledge that is produced, thus leading to more rigorous research' (p. 275). Hertz (as cited in Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 274) poses two questions imperative for unpacking interpretations in the reflexive research process: What do I know? How do I know what I know? As a researcher led by literature, these interpretations were at times challenged by the interpretations from the perspective as lecturer. Reflexivity in the analysis occurred by questioning the interpretations, and challenging the process of 'knowing' through the data. The occasions where the intersection and interpretation opened further analysis are referred to in the findings and discussion.

Findings and discussion

The main themes in the qualitative data are presented in coding order, reflective of the prevalent categories represented in the five responses. The data were analysed for reflection, and orientation to discourses as outlined in the methodology. In the conclusion, the paper will draw on the findings to highlight possible implications for pre-service teacher education and professional learning.

Teacher knowledge

In relation to the theoretical framework of cultural competency (Ranzijn et al., 2010), pre-service teachers in the CR and DI/HD gradings identified that it was the teacher's prerogative to develop a knowledge base about the historical, cultural and social contexts of Indigenous education with a strong theme being responsibility.

Participants discussed teacher knowledge about historical events and implications across all three of the grade categories, although it was notably the focus of the response for pre-service teachers in the P and CR gradings. Core units in Indigenous

education offer learning about a range of substantive knowledges such as historical events and policies affecting both early and contemporary Indigenous and non-Indigenous identities and relations (Craven et al., 2005a). Although histories were a topic for only one week in the unit, P/CR participants' focus on this topic may indicate student inability to critically consider the knowledge presented at these gradings. Initially it was thought that the connection was a reflection of deficit discourse, however participants highlighted the prevalent etic theme of *educational implications* as being associated with histories across the CR-DI/HD grade categories, with P grade responses typically situating histories as being separate from the context of the case. Affective notions were found in the P and CR responses ranging from apologetic to uncertainty about the implications of historical events and policies:

CR Grade Participant: For some members of the community current policies such as the Northern Territory National Emergency Response and the Stronger Futures legislation may have further implications, and possibly return the feeling of being dictated to and being told how to live their lives.

Craven et al.'s (2005a) findings emphasise the need for core units to go beyond the teaching of substantive knowledges, instead extending into pedagogy and curriculum comprehension (p. 83), however participants in the P and CR grade ranges may have focused on this knowledge in the response perhaps due the unit being their first experience of learning about histories (Craven et al., 2005a, p. 81). Pre-service teachers who studied a core Indigenous education unit indicated that they too had experiences of personal responsibility for past injustices and subsequent feelings of

shame, disbelief, confusion and anger when learning about histories (Miller, Dunn, & Currell, 2005). Being faced with constructions of self through knowledge about histories is confronting for pre-service teachers and can be linked to prior content knowledge in incidents such as histories that are contained in core units. Moreover, a prior metacognitive knowledge is assumed through engaging in critical thinking as it is an imperative lens when discerning histories as idiosyncratic reflections ‘... can be counterproductive in terms of both understanding our history and, more importantly, in engaging in the present to combat racism’ (Hollingsworth as cited in Miller et al., 2005, p. 64). Although the assumption about prior content knowledge would apply to all pre-service teachers undertaking a core unit, prior metacognitive knowledge in regards to discerning literature and ideas is developed through prolonged academic engagement. Applying new knowledge skills in addition to debunking previously unchallenged and accepted content knowledge may have implications for understanding faculties within Indigenous education units.

Indigenous perspectives

All participants discussed the understanding of how to include Indigenous perspectives as being an integral component to teacher knowledge, with a predominant recurring theme being learning. The terminology of ‘pedagogy’ and ‘ways of learning’ in relation to the 8 Aboriginal Ways of Learning pedagogical framework (Yunkaporta & Kirby, 2012) were used interchangeably through all gradings suggesting that there are a range of ways to include perspectives through practice. Interestingly, students from the P/CR gradings separate perspectives as being for Indigenous students, whereas DI/HD gradings suggest that the practice of including perspectives is for all students and inherently part of teachers’ role and responsibility:

DI/HD Grade Participant: Any teacher can incorporate Aboriginal perspectives using this framework that responds holistically to land, people, culture, language, spirit and nature...

P Grade Participant: ... this framework allows Indigenous students to use kinesthetic learning to develop skills and indirectly learn through different perspectives.

Indigenous education is for all students and teachers, and including perspectives benefits not only Indigenous students but all students in the classroom (Yunkaporta & Kirby, 2012). Despite the prior assessment item being about the use of planning and resources as avenues for including perspectives, only the P and DI/HD participant responses mentioned these practices in the analysis of the context. In order for the inclusion of Indigenous learning and teaching, processes need to come from a non-dominant standpoint (Nakata, 2007; Taffe, 1995, p. 12) and need to consider all practices and expectations within the classroom that affects learning. Initially it was thought that the absence of planning and resources in regards to perspectives and pedagogies may be resultant from the previous two assessment tasks being about practices specifically, however literature indicates it may be an indication of the separation of curriculum and content knowledge (Shulman, 1986, p. 6). Resources are referred to by participants as being synonymous with school attributes such as gardens, and a P participant was the only one to discuss the use of resources in the classroom through the use of an Aboriginal languages map.

Stereotyping is defined as a subsidiary of pedagogy (Craven, 1996, p. 213) due to its significance in representation of Indigenous perspectives in the classroom. Student and school achievement was discussed by CR and DI/HD participants, with a strong emic theme of a culture of stereotyping due to recent and current government policies. Participants indicate however, that teachers and parents are central to challenging and refuting commonly held stereotypes through policies such as the Northern Territory Emergency Response/Stronger Futures and Close the Gap:

CR Grade Participant: In Rachel's situation her parents have set the benchmark in their family. Stereotyping is a contributor to the gap in education and Rachel's parents have stepped away from the stereotype, and shown her that she can achieve what she wants out of life.

A teacher knowledge based on race, racism and misconception has dire consequences for the success of teaching strategies and student learning and engagement (Craven, 1996, p. 213). The acknowledgement of achievement across all gradings refutes deficit ideologies regarding the ability of students and schools to achieve equitable outcomes in Indigenous education. However, the degrees to which these achievements are engaged with differ. As discussed earlier, the P and CR gradings had a strong focus on histories; however the DI/HD gradings had a strong focus on unpacking the achievements of the schools and students.

Developing relationships

A DI/HD participant further expressed that working with communities and students was part of culturally competent practice and foundational to meeting the needs of students within the given context. This is reflective of the Ramsden (2002) cultural

safety principles that underpinned unit theory in relation to the Negotiation and Equal Partnership Model, whereby relationships between local community and service providers, such as schools, are critical to developing cultural safety for students (p. 99). A recurrent emic theme arising from the analysis of responses in relation to developing relationships with community was collaboration, highlighting that cultivating a ‘cultural identity’ or ‘cultural understanding’ within schools is dependent on the quality of relationships and partnerships:

P Grade Participant: This collaboration creates the cultural understanding needed to help “close the gap” between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Education. This can be established further through the development of partnerships and relationships with parents and the community members...

DI/HD Grade Participant: However, in order for teachers to maintain these relationships and community links they need to ensure that an equal power balance is developed between them and the Elder, parent or other Indigenous community member...

Harrison and Greenfield (2002) assert that interactions between teachers and community through relationships and partnerships are integral to the inclusion of perspectives in all classrooms within a school as ‘learning is local’ (p. 74) and so needs to be situated within the surrounding environment. Ways of forming partnerships in the context of the case were discussed by all participants from formal agreements to informal gatherings, and a strong focus across all the gradings was the

reciprocity of success in Indigenous education based on meaningful community involvement. It was also highlighted that although there are varying reasons for relationships such as student mobility, educational success and the values associated with learning, it is ultimately the teacher's role to develop and build these relationships with an understanding of the implications of the context:

DI/HD Grade Participant: To be successful within the school community the teachers will have had to develop a strong community presence, which involves formal and informal partnerships with both the school families but the wider community.

Communication of place in regards to naming of people and country was evident in the CR and DI/HD gradings with connections between languages and people discussed in relation to implications with communication and local histories. Teacher engagement with community is not only in what teachers do, but how teachers engage in discourse that results in stereotyped, stagnate, exotic and simplistic understandings (Harrison & Greenfield, 2011). As such, it is vital for teachers to know who the people are in the area they are teaching, so as to know the right people to speak with in regards to that community and to disband commonly held stereotypes.

Conclusion

This study shows that it is important for tertiary institutions to offer core units in Indigenous education as for many pre-service teachers it is the first time they are exposed to substantive knowledges, and challenged to reflect critically on the creation of knowledges about Indigenous issues and peoples. In order for pre-service teachers

to make the shift from affective to reflective, the thinking, issues and deliberations contained in units should be situated within diverse and specific contexts to allow for ongoing acknowledgement of the range of experiences and contestations that exist in Indigenous education beyond a formula of ‘what works’.

There are distinct differences between levels of achievement that need to be carefully considered when deeming a graduate ready to teach according the Australian Standards (AITSL, 2012). Pre-service teachers seem to understand the implications of context when forming relationships and partnerships with students, families and communities, however the acknowledgement of diversity in Indigenous Australia through referring to place is only demonstrated through those who achieved higher grades. Pre-service teacher reflections on how to include Indigenous education in teacher practice seem to be limited to entities of pedagogy, making argument for the inclusion of a specific practicum placement focusing on Indigenous education.

Ultimately it seems to be up to individual institutions regarding how they situate Indigenous education within course structures, but there may be vulnerabilities towards deficit and sympathetic understandings associated with engaging in Indigenous education too early in a pre-service teacher’s training. Further study in the way of a longitudinal investigation with a larger sample, as well as through an analysis of approaches across the range of tertiary institutions that offer core units would provide a more comprehensive understanding of this area. Interviews and focus groups with participants may also offer a deeper insight into Indigenous education for pre-service teachers.

The possible implications of participant demographics were unable to be explored in this study due to ethical limitations. There is literature about the implication of whiteness in the context of Australian Indigenous education, and the

effects of the white perspective in the classroom and the academy (for example Aveling, 2001, 2004; Fredericks, 2009) which would allow for further discussion about the implications of identity in structuring the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL, 2012), The Australian Curriculum (ACARA, 2012a) and university curriculum. Notably however, even within policy documents, there is limited mention of the personal identity of teaching staff and exploration of the implications of this in the context of education.

Core units are undoubtedly integral to developing graduate knowledge and understanding, however the methods in which universities engage students in learning, assessment and practice regarding Indigenous education needs to be considered carefully in order to redress both the lack of substantive knowledge upon entrance to a unit, and the absence of real practice in relation to the inclusion of perspectives as well as engagement with a community.

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