Australian Journal of Teacher Education

Volume 37 | Issue 10 Article 6

2012

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Recommended Citation
Naidoo, L. (2012). How Do Pre-service Teachers Cope With a Literacy Intervention Program in a Remote Indigenous Community? The Community Action Support Program in the Northern Territory, Australia. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education, 37*(10).
http://dx.doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2012v37n10.8

This Journal Article is posted at Research Online.
http://ro.ecu.edu.au/ajte/vol37/iss10/6

How Do Pre-service Teachers Cope With a Literacy Intervention Program in a Remote Indigenous Community? The Community Action Support Program in the Northern Territory, Australia

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Abstract: This paper examines a new community education initiative, Community Action Support (CAS) that helps facilitate learning in Indigenous young people from Tennant Creek in the Northern Territory. CAS is an innovative partnership program between the Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation and the University of Western Sydney. The core aim of the program is to create and communicate a positive and observable culture surrounding the significance of literacy for young people, in particular, Indigenous young people. The program is located within the secondary teacher-education degree at UWS. Four pre-service teachers engaged the participating school students in literacy and curriculum based activities ranging from creating newspaper articles and hosting drama workshops, to digital storytelling and screen printing. Video conferencing, wiki tools and other methods of communication also formed part of the process. The wide range of learning experiences ensured that student participants were challenged to use a diversity of literacy skills and communication techniques. In this article, pre-service teacher interview data is presented to show how universities such as UWS and educators have a responsibility to develop and support programs that provide Indigenous communities with alternatives to the standard curriculum. It also demonstrates how UWS pre-service teachers immerse themselves in the Indigenous culture and community, experiencing significant personal and professional growth.

Introduction

This paper discusses a service learning Indigenous literacy project in Tennant Creek in the Northern Territory named Community Action Support (CAS). The CAS program is a collaborative approach between the Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation (ALNF) who were purposefully funded by the Coca-Cola Foundation for the CAS project, the University of Western Sydney (UWS), Papulu Apparr Kari Language Centre and staff from the local schools in the area. Indigenous Australians are one of the most disadvantaged groups in Australian society. They face lower life expectancy, higher unemployment rates and significantly higher rates of incarceration (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2005; Gray & Beresford, 2008). Hunter (1999, 2000, 2005, cited in Hunter, 2009) has argued that Indigenous disadvantage is multidimensional, and different to other forms of poverty and exclusion by virtue of its extent and depth, and certainly cannot be reduced to poverty alone. A comparison between Indigenous Australians and non-Indigenous Australians in terms of their educational and vocational qualifications, as well as employment success rates, indicates a substantial disparity between these two groups (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2005). According to

Gray and Beresford (2008, p. 204), international evidence suggests Australia has 'the worst Indigenous educational outcomes of any comparable Western settler society'. Additionally, remote Indigenous education in the Northern Territory has been described as being in a 'state of crisis' and a 'national disgrace' (ABC 2008; Commonwealth of Australia 1999) and governments at all levels are accused of abandoning remote communities (HREOC 2008).

The improvement of Indigenous education has been recognised by the Australian Government as a major concern particularly that low achievement in the early years of schooling results in poor achievement and participation in secondary and further education (The 2001 National Report to Parliament on Indigenous Education and Training Department of Education, Science and Training 2002b). Card (2001) discusses the reality that those who complete secondary education have increased opportunities for employment, and Hunter (2009) states that there is evidence to suggest that alcohol/substance abuse, violence and crime amongst Indigenous people is related to participation in school. This in turn has a direct effect on the future economic outcomes in the community, creating a vicious cycle of reinforced behaviours over time. He says that educated individuals experience higher incomes and better health. It should also be recognised that the impact of education goes beyond the individual. It has the potential to positively affect the lives of family members and its impact extends to entire communities (p. 57). Huggins (2006) further adds that education "promote[s] reconciliation [because it] provides the key, the tools, the self-esteem, to triumph over disadvantage in other areas of people's lives – in employment for instance, and in health" (p.4).

Literature Review

Service Learning: Service-learning, a pedagogy which integrates professional learning experiences and academic curriculum (Billig, 2002; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Furco & Billig, 2002; Pritchard, 2002), has been used to improve learners' understanding of course content through service to communities. Real-life experiences become a learning and teaching tool to help students develop a deeper understanding of information (Rhoads, 1998). Students learn to work with rather than for communities (Weah, Simmons, & Hall, 2000) to develop interpersonal skills and social responsibility (Eyler, 2000; Eyler & Giles, 1999). Finally, service learning substitutes activity and engagement for the passivity that epitomizes many classrooms (Bell, Morrow, and Tastsoglou, 1999). Targeted service delivery initiations via rigorous education platforms hence have the potential to empower disadvantaged communities while improving the engagement between diverse sectors of society (Naidoo, 2010). The significance of service-learning is that it requires university or school students to become involved in their community in order to utilize knowledge learned at university (Naidoo, 2010). According to Noel (2010), a number of socially transformative implications of connecting teacher education with schools and communities have been documented, including: (1) building trust with local communities; (2) creating a greater commitment to community through service learning; (3) preparing culturally responsive future teachers who are more effective when working with community members to support classroom learning; (4) increasing the number of pre-service teachers who choose to teach in a low income or diverse school; (5) participating in community organizing; and (6) transforming the educational system.

Literacy

Following Street (1995; De Lemos, 2002), literacy is defined as an ideological practice (rather than an "autonomous" or neutral set of skills) that is grounded in and influenced by social, historical, political, and economic factors. Literacy can be multiple (as in "literacies") as well as dynamic, changing according to situation, interlocutor, purpose, and context. Many sociocultural studies of literacy and literacies claim that valuable lessons can be learned from studies of out-of-school literacy and learning and applied to school contexts (Hull & Schultz, 2001; Street, 1995). The New London Group (1996) claim that educators must address the question of "[W]hat is appropriate education for those who do not speak the national language, for speakers of non-standard dialects?" (p. 61). According to this perspective, teachers and educational institutions must change in order to deal with both language diversity and the effects of globalization in ways that promote learning among students from language-minority backgrounds: "Classroom teaching and curriculum have to engage with students' own experiences and discourses, which are increasingly defined by cultural and sub-cultural diversity and the different language backgrounds and practices that come with this diversity (p. 88)." For example, conventional questioning of students by the teacher to assess knowledge might be culturally inappropriate for Indigenous learners, who may prefer to learn through observation and modelling (Simpson & Clancy, 2005). Indigenous learner's face systems in which they are often characterized unfairly as deficient and "behind" non-Indigenous students (who are cast as the norm) even in programs intended to foster success (Harrison, 2007). This can lead to disengagement and a cynical approach to learning through "pleasing the teacher" (Harrison, 2008) or the devaluing of Indigenous ways of thinking as students learn that they are being "enlightened" by white learning (Harrison, 2007). In illustrating this inequity, it is claimed that the overrepresentation of Indigenous Hawaiian students in special education is partly through the failures of standardized testing, but more through teachers' interpretation of "inappropriate" behaviour (Ogata, Sheehey & Noonan, 2006). Indigenous learners face the possibility of negative assessment based on unconsciously held and culturally specific notions about interpretations of student behaviour (De Plevitz, 2007). In regards to Indigenous students, low literacy levels exist particularly for those in remote areas (Kral & Schwab, 2003). It has been established that literacy expertise of Indigenous communities be used to improve literacy skills for Indigenous students (Rennie, 2006) for example, the process of sharing stories, asking questions, explaining procedures, and interpreting events. Teachers can intervene in deliberate and visible ways to obtain desired outcomes for students (Hattie, 2009) while Penman (2006) argues for a literacy curriculum that acknowledges and respects children's existing cultural knowledge.

Theoretical Framework

Fraser (1997) offers a valuable perspective on Indigenous education when she talks about social injustice and disadvantage in terms of redistribution and recognition, and seeks to create a critical framework to analyse the difference between them. Fraser (2007, p.305) says to focus on one to the exclusion of the other is to fail to address the problem of injustice, it is '…conceptually inadequate and politically disabling'. Redistribution alleviates the problem of economic injustice, and recognition addresses that of cultural inequality. However, recognition demands that group identity is fore-fronted, whereas redistribution calls for abolishing specific identities of groups, hence they work against each other. There are groups which may fit one or the other model of injustice, in which case the solution is either redistribution or recognition, but for those who fit both, such as Indigenous Australians, the situation is far more complex, and both solutions are required at the same time (Fraser, 1997). Whilst Fraser makes the distinction for the purpose of clarifying some of

the salient points, it is her contention that in the real world both aspects are entwined (Fraser, 2007). Where, historically, there has been an emphasis on class interests (Skocpol, 1979), in more recent times the trend has shifted to focus on struggles of group identity and difference (Fraser, 2001).

Recognition

Fraser (2007, p.305) says that recognition is about status hierarchies. Since, poverty is a global problem, and since misrecognition of certain groups of people is blatantly unjust, what is required is a theory that can combine both aspects of injustice in a social politics of equality (Fraser, 2007). In analysing the relationship between recognition of cultural difference and social equality, Fraser (2007) points out that social equality is linked to the political/economic structure of society, whilst cultural difference is embedded within social patterns of representation. Taylor (1994, cited in Bingham, 2006) says,

Our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by misrecognition of others, and so a person or a group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves (p. 325).

In terms of education, recognition has informed multiculturalism and attempts have been made by teachers to transform curriculum and pedagogy, so that all students are given full positive recognition (Bingham, 2006). Whilst recognition and hence multiculturalism is being challenged in some quarters, it still offers a valid means to understand struggles that abound around culture (Bingham, 2006, p. 327). Misrecognition is a fundamental injustice and it is essential to mend the image that is generated by the dominant culture, and thereby enable Indigenous people for example [author emphasis] to re-create representations of themselves, so that they in turn become full partners in social interaction (Fraser, 2001).

Todd (cited in Bingham, 2006) however maintains that recognition encompasses a process of projection, whereby it is possible to undermine the 'otherness of the Other' by projecting something of oneself, and is in fact the first step in assimilation. It attempts to overcome difference, instead of being completely open to accepting difference. To counter this, rather than avoid recognition altogether, it is possible to prepare students to be open to the otherness of the "Other", rather than try to find points of similarity. At a practical level, this can be done by embracing those feelings of guilt that students often feel when confronted by the suffering of others. Used constructively, these feelings can be a building block towards an alliance with those people being recognised (Bingham, 2006).

Effective listening, too, becomes part of a process towards understanding – not in the sense of one person being able to fully understand the 'Other', but that listening is part of an on-going relationship that leads to learning 'across difference without claiming to know across difference' (Bingham, 2006, p. 335). Bingham (2006) also cites Boler who in warning against 'passive empathy' with the person being recognised suggests a 'pedagogy of discomfort' – to recognise and then take action (Boler, 2003, cited in Bingham, 2006). The relevance for this project lies in the fact that CAS occurs in a period when pre-service teachers shape their new professional identities while at the same time enabling their personal selves to persist and remain coherent. In doing so, those pre-service teachers take a step beyond recognition and passive empathy giving Indigenous students a voice in the classroom in order to achieve dignity.

Redistribution

Distribution says (Fraser, 2007, p.305) is about class inequalities. It seeks to re-evaluate group identity whilst maintaining the underlying social arrangements that produce such binaries as black/white. Economically, it may promote equal job and educational places, but fails to change the availability and the nature of those things (Fraser, 1997). Both types of injustice (recognition and redistribution) are pervasive in society, and certain groups of people are 'systematically disadvantaged' (Fraser, 1997, p.72). To remedy the problem, Fraser (2001, p.6) suggests what she calls a transformative 'parity of participation', and that means allowing all members of society to interact as peers. In order to achieve this interaction, it is necessary to create economic independence by redistribution and a 'voice' for everyone. This requires removing those social structures that perpetuate exploitation, deprivation, and inequality, so that people can interact as peers. 'Parity of participation' also requires that institutionalised values of culture are based on equality, rather than existing ones that demean certain cultures and refuse to accept their differences (Fraser, 2001). In arguing for social justice, Fraser (2001, p.5) talks of the need to transform the "symbolic order, deconstruct the terms that underlie existing status differentiations" and thereby change everyone's social identity. In order to combine recognition with the other aspect of injustice, mal-distribution, she suggests a 'parity of participation' (p.6) wherein social arrangements are transformed so that all members of society interact as peers (Fraser, 2001).

Hunter (Hunter, 2009, p.57) highlights the importance of peer groups in Indigenous communities by referring to Myrdal (1944) who saw a vicious cycle whereby 'whites' oppressed 'blacks' and then pointed to the poor performance of 'blacks' as justification for the oppression. (Hunter, 2009, p.57) calls this a process of cumulative causation, which creates a 'feedback loop' where results reinforce one another. The strength in peer groups is that behaviours of one individual can be influenced by the behaviours of another, thereby creating a continuous loop. For example teachers get to know their students' needs and strengths better; trust develops between teacher and students and among classmates and as the next section will show, this loop continues by offering teachers the opportunity to provide more differentiated instruction, even tailoring lessons to individual children.

The Community Action Support (CAS) Program

The Community Action Support (CAS) program is a service learning program that comprises two components: the Cross-Generational Literacy Tutoring Initiative in which high school students mentor primary school students on a weekly basis by providing support in reading and writing; and the Remote Community Teaching Placement in which UWS pre-service teachers mentor high school students in a variety of literacy and communication areas. The high school is a government school catering for students from Years 7 to 12 and has 26 full time teachers and 14 non-teaching staff (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, ACARA). It serves approximately 240 students from surrounding urban areas, as well as regional and remote communities. Indigenous students comprise 75 – 80% of the student population (ACARA).

he school offers senior secondary students options for study in addition to standard school subjects. Students can choose, and are encouraged by the school, to study Vocational Education and Training (VET) courses offered in partnership with the regional university. This is necessary because Indigenous students are much less likely to continue their education beyond the compulsory years. Only about 38% of Indigenous students remain at school from the commencement of their secondary schooling to year 12, compared to about 75% of non-Indigenous students in 2000. In addition, in some parts of the country, in 1997, only a quarter of these year 12 students may successfully complete year 12, compared to 50%

of non-Indigenous Year 12 students (MCEETYA, 2000). The school also offers courses by correspondence in conjunction with the Northern Territory Open Education Centre, and apprenticeships provide another opportunity for students (ACARA). National Assessment Program- Literacy And Numeracy (NAPLAN) results for Year 7 and Year 9, in 2008 and 2009, demonstrate that the average scores across each of the five learning areas (Reading, Writing, Spelling, Grammar & Punctuation, and Numeracy) are significantly lower than the average for all Australian schools but 'close to statistically similar schools' averages' (ACARA).

According to the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA), which uses information from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and school data such as socio-economic characteristics and remote location to measure educational outcomes for schools based on performance in NAPLAN tests, the high school has a rating of 712 while most schools average between 900 and 1100 (ACARA). The figure for this school is significantly lower than the average and is a reflection of a variety of elements which affect teaching and learning. These include socio-economic characteristics of geographical setting and demographics, as well as the percentage of Indigenous students enrolled at the school (ACARA).

In 2010, four exemplary secondary pre-service teachers from UWS, training to be teachers as part of the Master of Teaching (Secondary) degree, were selected to be involved in the Remote Community Teaching Placement. To participate in CAS, UWS pre-service teachers were merit selected by submitting an expression of interest that included a resume and responses to key questions concerning what influenced their decision to become a teacher, why they chose to participate in CAS, experience working collaboratively with community organisations, whether they ever worked/lived in a remote community of Australia or considered teaching in a rural or remote community, and what skills and qualities they see as beneficial to this program and its participants. The pre-service teachers experienced a one-week observation (focus week) placement in the Tennant Creek community in June followed by a four-week classroom and community placement in the October/November period. The traditional classroom placement (25 teaching days) was supervised by school-appointed supervising teachers assisted by a UWS appointed liaison officer. During the four-week period the classroom placement operated according to the Institute of Teaching regulations where pre-service teachers were required to teach in their key learning area specializations while the community placement required pre-service teachers to plan and conduct a variety of projects associated with the theme, "Communicating Our World". Creation of a newspaper involved deliberation over issue to cover, recording of interviews, transcription of recording, production of article, discussion over layout and actually distributing the paper in the community; drama and writing workshops were hosted on the theme of "family", with the aim of ultimately producing a print and online anthology in future iterations of the program; facilitating a connected classroom between diverse students in a Sydney urban high school and a Tennant Creek classroom through video conferencing and wiki tools; experimenting with screen printing, innovative textile and New York stencil art and using the online digital storytelling tool storybird.com to start an online picture book gallery that will eventually grow through local and external contribution and which can be used by classroom teachers. While Brace (2010) commented that what UWS pre-service teachers offered to high school students was a "meaningful contribution to the on-going work of the CAS program", it must be noted that there is need for further professional learning for secondary pre-service teachers about effective literacy interventions which together with coursework will help equip them to be effective secondary teachers.

Methodology and Analysis of Data

It is important to understand the CAS program at Tennant Creek through the eyes of the pre-service teachers since Hattie (2009) believed that teachers can make a difference in the life chances of their students by intervening to enhance learning and teaching. For this reason, thematic discourse analysis was selected to provide a more detailed and nuanced account of themes where broader assumptions and/or meanings were seen to underpin what is articulated in the data. With time-constraints and availability of participants, it was not possible to reach saturation of the analysis and since this was a small scale pilot study, the researcher had to articulate an analytical scheme that is less developed than desired. Given the small data sample, it is difficult to generalize about the findings of the study and further research and analysis is required to examine the themes in more detail. Nevertheless, by interviewing pre-service teachers, it was possible to assess whether the service learning prepared them to organise, manage and prepare their classrooms in ways that improved outcomes for Indigenous students. The researcher used semi-structured in-depth focus group interviews of an hour's duration to gather data and document the experiences of the four participants. These interviews which were recorded and transcribed, gave the participants the opportunity to communicate their experience of the CAS program and offer their first-hand perspective. The first focus group interview was at the beginning of the professional experience block. This discussion provided benchmark information about expectations of 1) their teaching/mentoring experience, 2) their initial expectations about Indigenous students, and 3) the pre-service teachers' anticipated learning from the experience. The second focus group interview was held at the end of the teaching period and explored 1) what they learned about teaching in the process of mentoring Indigenous students, 2) how their ideas about Indigenous students have changed over the course of the term. The focus was on whether the pre-service teachers had a positive impact on: students and bringing the community into the classroom and the classroom into the community (if only for the 4-weeks face-to-face teaching block). A case study approach was used in order to provide an accurate picture of the experiences of the four participants according to their personal reflections. It provided a reconstruction, or detailed description, of an individual's lived experience in its unique context (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). The data was analysed by focusing on the interrelatedness of the various aspects for example the pre-service teachers' relationship with the high school, the remote Indigenous community of Tennant Creek; the social context of the remote school and the university traditional and community engagement practicum requirements.

Reflections on the CAS program

The data presented below is based on interviews of pre-service teachers at the commencement of the teaching placement.

Experience the culture in a remote community

Prior to beginning the teaching placement, all four participants were keen to experience teaching in a remote Australian community, in particular an Indigenous community. They wanted to be part of a broader challenge and one that would take them out of their own culture.

> I wanted to experience a remote community because I'm interested in working there in the future… and see if I can handle it, see how I go

> (Participant 1)
> In my undergraduate degree, my Bachelor of Arts, I actually did an internship placement in an Arts centre in a remote community in Central Australia and it basically was the most amazing thing I've ever done (Participant 2)

Some of the pre-service teachers communicated concerns about connecting effectively with the Indigenous students and local community. They felt apprehensive as to whether the techniques and strategies learned at university would translate to the Northern Territory context. For example, one pre-service teacher found that whereas Technological and Applied Studies (TAS) in New South Wales has a separate syllabus, in the Northern Territory, it forms part of a broader Art syllabus. A similar anomaly with History was identified by another pre-service teacher

> I'm also finding it hard to interpret the Northern Territory syllabus with reference to society and culture/history here …it's not defined the way it is in [NSW], it's much, much broader

The pre-service teachers were eager to make their placement worthwhile for themselves and the students, and were concerned that students would see them as outsiders. They felt it was important to immerse themselves in the culture, foster greater community participation in the program, and create relationships of trust and partnership.

> I just really want the students to be able to engage with me and trust me and I just really want to do a good job when I'm there (Participant 2)
> I'm concerned about my ability to engage the students … I'm going up there with really big ideas but I've got no idea whether I'll walk into the classroom and they'll actually work …I have no idea whether that's going to work because I don't know the community, I don't know the students (Participant 1)

Pre-service teachers valued the opportunity to dispel cultural myths and break down stereotypes, by experiencing first-hand what it is like to teach and learn in remote Indigenous communities.

> The thing that I wanted to gain when I set out to do this was just an awareness about being there rather than all these things that you get from the media, from textbooks, from journal articles … I hope to gain knowledge and awareness of Indigenous issues within the remote community and hopefully become an agent for change in some way (Participant 4)
> I hope to gain experience not just in teaching but in terms of life as well. I think, yeah, just a broader horizon of the world and I also think that the skills that I encounter and pick up, teaching Indigenous kids in that insular environment can then be translated to other kinds of kids anywhere (Participant 2)

Several pre-service teachers felt that they would like to work in a similar context in the future and were optimistic that the CAS program would provide them with invaluable skills and experience.

> So hopefully this will be an opportunity to open doors – if that happens fantastic, if it doesn't well I've got experience so you know I can then move on (Participant 1)
> I'm also expecting to grow in my pedagogy, pastoral and communication skills across the board but particularly in

> understanding Australian Aboriginal communities and life (Participant 3)

Even though Wheldall and Beaman (2000) discuss an intervention program for low reading skills, they proposed that the commitment of dedicated and enthusiastic educators, who are willing to go to remote areas, contributes significantly to the success of such programs. Part of experiencing teaching in a remote community is also about experiencing another culture. Calma (2008) suggests that it is only when this understanding of another culture takes place that curriculum can adequately reflect that culture. Our task as teacher education institutions therefore is to explore how an understanding of other cultures can be maximized in education, how it can be used to enhance the opportunities of pre-service teachers to develop as exemplary teachers, and how stereotyping and prejudice towards others may be minimized. Only then can the remote Indigenous communities feel that the education system is committed to their on-going educational needs.

> I think also now it has a lot to do with what I want be able to achieve as a teacher so I think being involved in a community program as well as being able to teach there at the same time …it's going to give me an opportunity to be really involved with that community and make really strong ties (Participant 3)

Reflections on the CAS Experience

This data is based on interviews conducted with pre-service teachers after the teaching placement.

The Challenges of the Program

Establishing Trust

Pre-service teachers discussed the negative feeling amongst community members towards the education system, describing a loss of faith directly linked to the transient nature of teaching staff and the subsequent failure to complete interventionist educational programs. This presented them with a challenge, in particular with regard to establishing rapport and trust, in the hope that they would successfully influence attendance and attitudes towards school and education.

> I also became aware of the highly transient nature of teachers in remote communities [that] is serving to reinforce barriers between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, because they are getting this message that no one really cares enough to stay (Participant 1)

> Pre-service teachers were very aware that they, too, were there for a short period of time, and therefore were keen to be honest about their intentions and limitations.

> While we can't all stay forever I think something we all tried to do was to be open and honest about our intentions and say we are only here for one month (Participant 2)

Developing Rapport with students and the community

CAS reinforced the essence of traditional Indigenous methods of learning, which are based on mentoring and reciprocal learning. This style of collaborative learning is only

successful with the establishment of rapport between teachers and students, and the CAS pre-service teachers saw evidence of this when the students began to open up and participate in activities enthusiastically.

> Some of them it took a week, some of them took two weeks for them to even say a word to me (Participant 2)
>
> …as we went along the students were much more confident in going up to people in the street and interviewing them and writing about them, and things like that, so yeah, probably confidence and being comfortable (Participant 4)
>
> I had them (students) coming in at lunch and recess… and obviously showed that they cared about what they were doing in class… they were enjoying and they wanted to spend extra time (Participant 1)

Students also seemed more willing to attend class.

> I just overheard a lot of the other teachers talking about certain students that they had never seen [but] who would be at my class every day (Participant 1)

These reflections are supported by current research, which suggests that Indigenous students with high attendance levels generally attribute their success to culturally sensitive teachers who are able to develop a rapport with both students and the community as a whole (McDonald, 2004). Aside from respect for cultural values, students felt that their enthusiasm in presenting their projects outlined earlier should elicit a positive response from the community members. For example the collaborative approach to community projects used by one of the pre-service teachers proved to be successful and had a positive effect on the wider community.

> I was doing a collaborative class between an urban High School in Sydney and the high school in the Northern Territory. There was a video link up, there was also posting via Wiki. I had a student in one of my classes who said that from talking to other people from other parts of the world and from learning about parts of Australia and the world, she had gained more confidence to achieve what she wanted to achieve in life (Participant 3)

Another of the pre-service teacher participants completed a community project teaching the local ladies to sew tote bags. She commented:

> I took a photo of them all ….and they wouldn't smile but you could tell that they actually… they wanted to go off and show people what they made. And someone wanted to buy one of the bags and the lady was like, no, no, no, no, no, because she was so proud of it she wanted to keep it for herself (Participant 1)

Literacy

The fact that Indigenous students in remote communities perform in the bottom 5 to 10 percent of all students nationally (Masters, 2009) highlighted to pre-service teachers the reality and systemic nature of literacy problems in this remote community. It also points to the fact that this literacy intervention program is insufficient to address the range of literacy problems in remote Indigenous communities. What is urgently needed is deliberate pre-service training procedures for developing literacy competencies in secondary teacher educators that suggest applications to classroom practices, curriculum development and evaluation.

> I knew that there was low literacy, but in terms of English I had no idea that all the students were that [author added] low in literacy (Participant 2)
>
> Pre-service teachers were surprised to find that low literacy was not confined to a portion of the student population, but rather was a reflection of the community as a whole.
>
> The issue of literacy isn't in just the high school or primary school it is throughout the whole town and so if your parents or grandparents or whoever is looking after you can't read, how then can they help you do your homework? Or how can they sit with you and read a story? (Participant 3)
>
> In particular pre-service teachers found that students responded well when lessons were conducted in an informal and unstructured style, based on student collaboration, observations and imitations.
>
> I made this little slide show of my family because we were getting into the family writing … and they wanted to watch it five times! (Participant 3)

Pedagogy

As indicated earlier, pre-service teachers were keen to learn about the culture in remote Indigenous communities like Tennant Creek as many of the rules that operate in Indigenous communities are different to those in a non-Indigenous setting (Brady, et al. as cited in Smith, 1999). A major problem is the lack of consonance between the cultural backgrounds of Indigenous students and in particular those in remote contexts and the culture and curriculum of the school. While a culturally sensitive approach to teaching in this context was particularly important to the pre-service teachers, it also meant that they had to consciously unpack what it meant to be Indigenous and disadvantaged in order to identify the factors contributing to the non-engagement of Indigenous students in the classroom.

> I stopped taking things like a safe home life, space to sleep, access to a computer, desk etc for granted. Like some students were coming in and they literally hadn't slept all night because there were so many people in the house that they couldn't find a place to sleep, or a quiet space (Participant 3)
>
> …in almost every class I had ones who would sleep in the corner on the floor (Participant 4)
>
> So I was really – I wasn't shocked by people doing that, I was shocked by the number of students doing that (Participant 2)

Groome (2002) suggests that educators must be 'open to hear Indigenous voices' in order to develop education programs that are both culturally appropriate and relevant (p.186).

In time, such recognition by the pre-service teachers interviewed will increase their personal rewards as teachers and ultimately increase the contribution that they can make to teaching.

> I think the main thing is that you can't just look at a student and tick them off as Indigenous [then] look at a list of Indigenous learning styles and go this is what I'm going to do (Participant 1)
> Additionally, pre-service teachers believed that the CAS program helped them develop an understanding that teaching must be tailored to students in order for it to be meaningful. Indigenous students cannot be seen as a homogenous group and any program for students in remote Indigenous communities requires collaboration, dedication and flexibility.
> I feel ready to teach (Participant 2)
> I've walked out feeling I am ready to be a teacher (Participant 3)

Discussion

It is evident from the data analysis that when working with Indigenous students particularly in remote contexts, it is important for teachers to adopt an Indigenous pedagogy by embedding Indigenous perspectives in lessons. This pedagogical approach has certainly provided the cultural experience needed by non –Indigenous teachers thereby making them sensitive to their own biases and also allowed them to respect and understand the culture of Indigenous students. The experience of 'recognising' the importance of individual and group identity of Indigenous students, while at the same time providing for aspects of the dominant culture which need to be acquired for success at school, reinforces Fraser's (1996) point out it is no longer the case that assimilation to mainstream culture is the way to equal respect. The fact that pre-service teachers in this study were able to devise lessons using culturally responsive strategies for mainstream activities made the lessons more meaningful and important for students. As Bingham (2006) points out, feeling empathy towards the 'Other' is relatively simple, but taking a stand and changing how one acts from then on, involves discomfort. Recognition, he says too, is risky and difficult to achieve altogether, but it is a way of making a commitment '…towards what it means to be a human being' (p.341). Becoming involved in Indigenous life takes recognition a step further, and avoids the pitfall of passive empathy (Bingham, 2006), whereby students recognise the injustice that is meted out to Indigenous people but remain complacent, as if such recognition is sufficient in itself. Once recognised it is important for pre-service teachers to understand that education does not have the same means and ends for Indigenous students. Moreover, Boler's 'pedagogy of discomfort' (cited in Bingham, 2006) takes recognition a step further than simple awareness. Beyond 'walking in the shoes of the Other' (p.338) is 'using one's own shoes to take a stand in the face of oppressive power relations' (Bingham, 2006, p.338). Taking such action as working in a remote Indigenous community, though a small step, creates far more discomfort than simply experiencing empathy, but is a powerful step towards Fraser's 'parity of participation'. Furthermore by using culturally sensitive pedagogy, pre-service teachers made it possible to teach Indigenous students successfully. The success of the pedagogy was to a large extent, also dependent upon the rapport that developed between the pre-service teachers and the Indigenous students and between the pre-service teachers and the wider school community at Tennant Creek. Stewart (2002, p. 15) cites Fanshawe (1999, p. 41) who advocates that "a balanced formula of 'warmth and demandedness' provides for an effective teaching atmosphere for successful outcomes for Indigenous students".

Pre-service teacher reflections indicate that Indigenous students were engaged in the lessons and that as pre-service teachers, they too were motivated to embark on their teaching careers. As such CAS was an invaluable experience in terms of their future teaching

prospects and professional development. It is interesting to note that a study conducted by the University of Western Australia, reported that expectations and assumptions regarding teaching in remote and rural communities by pre-service teachers was based on stereotypes. The study found that pre-service teachers were primarily uninformed (Sharplin, 2002). Participation in a program such as CAS therefore not only serves to break down stereotypes, it offers pre-service teachers an enriching experience of benefit both to themselves and the students. One of the major stereotypes that Fraser (1997) identifies is the result of affirmative redistribution. Like affirmative recognition it does not remedy the racism inherent in the political economy, but perpetuates racial discrimination. A constant re-allocation of financial support represents the recipients as "deficient and insatiable, as always needing more and more" (p.90). Far from addressing recognition, it strongly emphasises racial differentiation in negative terms. Breaking these stereotypes will occur only when the people begin to understand another culture by direct contact, by listening and learning from them (Bingham, 2006). Pre-service teachers saw the experience as an opportunity to adapt their knowledge and skills to this unique context and challenge pre-conceived notions of Indigenous education discussed earlier in this chapter. Further, by making the knowledge relevant and connected for learners, the pre-service teachers were able to support and connect with students, community adults and elders as well as mainstream teachers. Traditionally, Indigenous Australians view education as being a lifelong, inclusive and social process where children "acquire knowledge in the company of older family members and the community" (Smith, 1995, p. 25). This worked particularly well with pre-service teachers who were able to combine the traditional practicum with the community engagement practicum and thereby build bridges to reinforce learning, to expand and extend knowledge, and to assist students in negotiating and navigating their paths and positions through "academic communities" (Moje & Hinchman, 2004).

A key implication of this research despite its small scale is its importance for future teachers, current teachers and policy makers in the use of culturally sensitive learning tasks in the classroom. "Unlocking the key cognitive and social/cultural issues in remote Indigenous communities may lead to Indigenous students more effective participation in post-secondary education, enhancing the economic and social self sufficiency of these communities and reducing the likelihood of dependency on welfare" (McInerney, 2006). The provision of powerful Indigenous role models in the cross-generational tutoring mentioned earlier will encourage the school age students to be successful at school and beyond. It will be of great benefit to the remote Indigenous communities contributing to the study.

School-community-university partnerships like CAS can increase the control of teachers over their classrooms; increase program demand, relevance, efficiency, and sustainability; and develop new knowledge, skills, and attitudes in those participating in the process. Bingham (2006, p.334) asserts that "the danger of recognition is to try to overcome difference, when in fact it is important to embrace difference, to honour the otherness of the Other". The CAS participants all agreed that this experience was invaluable and shaped future directions for their teaching. They described the CAS program as a wonderful opportunity and a highlight of their year at university.

> It was fantastic working with them. Best thing I've ever done.
> I loved it, absolutely loved it, it was a really amazing time, I couldn't even describe just how big an impact it has been…
> … I wish I was still there.

Conclusion

It is essential to acknowledge the role of education in society, in this case Indigenous society, and to recognise that improving educational standards for the sake of attainment is

not the intention. The role of education is seen as life-changing, having the ability to empower individuals and communities. Support programs like CAS offer Indigenous people choices; it provides a greater range of opportunity; it increases the potential benefits to communities as well as individuals.

Education should mean that Indigenous Australians have the opportunity to make informed decisions about their lives and their futures, and the lives and futures of those around them. This is of particular relevance to Indigenous communities because their customs are fundamentally different to those held by the general population. It is imperative therefore to recognise and understand those aspects of mainstream education that may present barriers to the improvement of educational outcomes for Indigenous youth. Building meaningful relationships between pre-service teachers and Indigenous school students is an essential ingredient for success. Fraser's (2007) concepts of redistribution and recognition are useful, in that they provide a framework to analyse the complexity of the problems that need to be overcome to improve outcomes for Indigenous communities. Those people coming into Indigenous communities as mentors need to recognise the importance and value of building partnerships with these communities. In this context it is the responsibility of teacher education institutions to provide alternative pedagogies for teaching the standard curriculum and to develop and support programs which reflect Indigenous values and characteristics.

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