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## Navigating Discourses of Cultural Literacy in Teacher Education

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*Abstract: Pre-service teachers' understandings, skills and dispositions as global, culturally literate citizens and agents of change have arguably never been more important. Professional standards, systemic policies and frameworks and a broad range of scholarly perspectives on culture position pre-service teachers to take up cultural education in sometimes conflicting ways. It is these orientations to culture within a teacher education program and how they sit alongside potentially incongruent policies, practices and worldviews that are the focus of this paper. The practitioner research draws on cultural identity theories, policies and pre-service teacher experiences in the teaching and learning of an undergraduate education subject entitled Education for Cultural Diversity at a regional Australian university. Through discursive analysis of policy and pre-service teacher surveys this paper explores tensions that arise in navigating cultural constructs with pre-service teachers.*

### Introduction

Much of the research on cultural education addresses gaps and deficits in pre-service teachers' experiences, attitudes, and perceptions. Assuming a universal deficit in 'cultural experiences' for a diverse cohort of pre-service teachers is problematic, however there is an imperative for fostering particular social justice values and cultural relativity. Although recent research studies report a shift towards more positive attitudes about teaching culturally diverse students, persistent concerns plague pre-service teachers' understanding of cultural diversity (Castro, 2010; Delano-Oriaran, 2012; Russell & Russell, 2014). This paper draws on a recent research project that evaluated systemic policies, frameworks and pre-service teacher perceptions on the curriculum redesign of a subject entitled Education for Cultural Diversity. This project provided an opportunity to critically reflect on frames informing the subject, the curriculum intent and the pre-service teacher experience. Our curriculum intent is for pre-service teachers to develop an "awareness that one's worldview is not universal but is profoundly shaped by one's life experiences, as mediated by a variety of factors, chief among them race/ethnicity, social class, and gender" (Villegas & Lucas, 2002, p. 27). Awareness of personal and professional worldview will assist future teachers in becoming culturally literate in their classrooms and school communities.

What emerged as one aspect of the research is that the tentative and relative nature of being culturally literate can create tensions in terms of the need to define knowledge, skills and dispositions. We explore these tensions in the perceptions of pre-service teachers as they are framed by the policies and wider public discourse on culture. This paper contributes to the field by exploring the tensions of what constitutes pre-service teachers' understandings of culturally literate citizens as agents of change as framed by systemic policies, frameworks, Professional Standards for Teachers and scholarly perspectives.

In the sections that follow, this critical analysis of the curriculum context and our own practices is organised using notions of the intended, enacted and experienced curriculum (Billett & Henderson, 2011). In order to frame the curriculum intent we explore key concepts and theories that underpin cultural education and how these inform our own curriculum aims. Then we discuss enacting the curriculum by drawing on the constructs of culture that pre-service teachers bring and our own epistemologies as teachers. Finally the pre-service teacher voice is foregrounded to focus on the experienced curriculum and how these experiences related to the curriculum intent. In our concluding discussion we focus on the agency of pre-service teachers and our agency as educators in navigating the field and fostering reflective and transformative pedagogy for cultural literacy.

### **Framing cultural literacy as part of our curriculum intent**

Teaching cultural education to pre-service teachers requires navigating discourses of cultural essentialism and critical anti-essentialism evident in systemic policies, frameworks, Professional Standards for Teachers and curriculum approaches. Phillip (2010) discusses four distinct understandings of essentialism. The first concerns the attribution of certain characteristics to everyone subsumed within a particular category. The second concerns the attribution of those characteristics to the category in ways that naturalise or reify what may be socially created or constructed. The third concerns the invocation of a collectivity that seems to presume a homogenised and unified group. The fourth concerns the policing of this collective category and the treatment of its supposedly shared characteristics as the defining ones that cannot be questioned or modified without undermining an individual's claim to belong to that group. This section makes explicit how these discourses are manifest, outlines how our curriculum intent attempts to focus on critical anti-essentialist and dynamic understandings of culture and the role of pre-service teachers in developing cultural literacy.

Our intent is to introduce pre-service teachers to theories of culture that are poststructuralist and anti-essentialist. Grillo (2003, p. 158) defines cultural essentialism as a "belief grounded in the conception of human beings as 'cultural' ... bearers of *a* culture". Like Grillo, Risvi's (2009) notion of cosmopolitan learning is critical of essentialist notions of culture and argues that learning about culture should emphasise historicity, criticality, relationally and reflexivity. In the discussion of pre-service teacher perceptions, we draw on these scholars to discuss how theories of culture as fluid, dynamic and relational sit alongside more dominant traditional discourses in policy and in pre-service teacher's expressions of culture/s.

Increasing social and cultural diversity has imperatives for educators. Teacher education programs such as ours are tasked with preparing pre-service teachers with the willingness and abilities to teach in diverse school contexts and arguably not just respond to diversity but foster culturally literate students regardless of the school or classroom demographics. In this article we inescapably traverse the multiple constructions of culture as an identity marker and process of relating. There are traditional essentialist notions of culture evident in the policy and teaching experiences we go on to discuss. One dominant notion of culture is the cluster of learned and shared beliefs, values, practices, behaviours, symbols, and attitudes that are characteristic of a particular group of people and that are communicated from one generation to another (Gardiner & Kosmitzki, 2011).

Multicultural Education can reinforce fixed notions of culture or take on more complex and critical perspectives that seek to foster transformation and social action. A focus on ethnicity in cultural education has been considered an issue in Australia for decades (Leeman & Reid, 2006). Keddie, Gowlett, Mills, Monk and Renshaw (2013, p. 17) argue that

dominant discourses of critical and everyday multiculturalism take up forms of culturalism or cultural essentialism that attempt to “describe relations ...based on ascriptions of race, ethnicity and/or colour”. In another analysis of policy and curriculum tensions, Salter (2014) discusses the tensions in enacting an Asia focused cultural education and highlights the agency of teachers in constructing culture as ‘other’ or ‘different’ rather than a search for meaning.

A key concept that brings together critical orientations to cultural education is the notion of the global, culturally literate citizen. The focus is on deconstructing identity rather than acquiring fixed cultural knowledges. As Muller (2006, p. 15) contends “the globally, culturally literate citizen may come to a position of empathy and 'informed tentativeness' regarding cultural identity and cross cultural understanding where "to know the other, one must other the known". As much research (Banks & Banks, 2004; Smith, 2009; Gay, 2010; Keddie, Gowlett, Mills, Monk, & Renshaw, 2013; Lewthwaite & McMillan, 2010; Salter, 2014) argues, models of culturally ‘responsive’ education can take up forms of culturalism, that while they may be seen as progressive also reinforce fixed group identities and a sense that these cultural groupings can be ‘known’. While our curriculum intent is to disrupt culturalism and promote an informed tentativeness, we are still bound by curriculum, policy and public discourses.

Muller’s (2006) framework that outlines attributes of a culturally literate global citizen is a key reference. Muller’s framework has elements of membership to cultures that reflect public discourses and traditional anthropological notions of culture but also elements of a more critical, anti-essentialist notion of relativity and multiplicity. According to Muller, a global culturally literate person:

- understands complexity of culture and that all cultures contain strengths, weaknesses and paradoxes, and the inevitable, ongoing and complex nature of cultural change;
- is capable of analysing attributes of their own culture, and identifying and deconstructing stereotypes;
- is aware of cultural universals, internal (values-based) and external (lifestyle) components of culture, and the complex interrelationships of language and culture; and
- is likely to be a cultural relativist rather than a cultural fundamentalist.

These attributes suggest that pre-service teachers’ own dispositions and worldviews are central to being culturally literate, and that this informs their practice. The focus is on ‘self’ as much as it is ‘other’ in that understanding culture is relational. Constructing culturally literate as knowing self and other may be seen to reinforce a sort of ‘otherness’ and arguably it is hard to approach the field devoid of cultural markers. Culture is always relative and in a state of flux – it is a process (Risvi, 2009) and as such we take up culturally literate not to ascribe to being ‘literate’ *about* culture/s as fixed entities but as skills in understanding the processes.

Teachers need to respond to diversity in a critical way in order to develop their own cultural literacies. Klump and McNeir (2005) highlight that “the dynamic nature of the word ‘responsiveness’ suggests the ability to acknowledge the unique needs of diverse students, take action to address those needs, and adapt approaches as student needs and demographics change over time” (p. 4). According to Gay (2000) being culturally responsive is more than being respectful, empathetic, or sensitive. There should be accompanying actions, such as having high expectations for students and ensuring that these expectations are realised. Such critical and dynamic framing of cultural education as responsive and based on many socio-cultural practices or literacies is not always evident in the policy context that shape teaching practice.

## **Research Context- locating our curriculum response to the imperatives and policies.**

The site of the research study is the subject Education for Cultural Diversity, which is a core subject in the pre-service teacher education program at a regional Australian university. The strategic intent of the university is to service the needs of the region and facilitate participation of 'underserved' groups. As a regional university many pre-service teachers have moved from rural areas into the regional centre to study or need to travel from rural areas regularly. In 2013, 40% of pre-service teachers enrolled in the subject were mature-aged students who are more likely to be juggling significant family and financial commitments. Out of the cohort, 28% of pre-service teachers are considered to come from low socio-economic areas, 6% are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and 82% are female. Sixty-five percent of pre-service teachers enrolled in the subject are the first in their family to attend university.

The subject has to be responsive to the characteristics of pre-service teachers and of the regional education contexts and priorities, which includes preparation for working in schools with significant populations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Pre-service teachers have enrolled in a professional degree, and the subject is studied in the second year of a four-year program. Education for Cultural Diversity aims to prepare pre-service teachers with the knowledge of theories, policies, frameworks and teaching strategies to cater for culturally diverse classrooms and involves pre-service teachers confronting their understandings of their own culture and the culture of 'others'. The subject is a necessity for pre-service teachers who are entering increasingly economically and culturally diverse schools in Australia. It is the multiple frames of the subject in the teacher education program and how they sit alongside sometimes incongruent policy and practices in the university, school systems and wider community which are the focus of this paper.

The teaching team comprises of four teacher educators with different but complementary areas of expertise in educational disciplines and differing ethnic and cultural perspectives. One of the teacher educators is an Aboriginal scholar, two are from an Anglo-Australian background, and one is an African immigrant. The teaching team engaged in ongoing reflective exchange on preparing culturally 'responsive' and 'literate' teachers with the willingness and abilities to teach in diverse school contexts.

## **Research Method**

The study took the form of practitioner research (Zeichner & Noffke, 2002) to critically self-examine subject-matter and pedagogical practices in initial teacher education. Critical self-examination research positions knowledge as developing through a process of active construction and reconstruction of theory and practice by those involved (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). In conducting a thematic analysis of the systemic policies and frameworks, literature and pre-service teachers' qualitative data and critically reflecting on our own practices, we were guided by the following research questions:

1. In what ways can Education for Cultural Diversity curriculum for pre-service teachers navigate policies, programs and classroom practices?
2. What are pre-service teachers' perceptions of culture and being culturally literate?
3. What are the tensions between the intended, enacted and experienced curriculum?

The stages of the redesign of the subject drew from Mezirow's (1990) transformational learning framework which meant pre-service teachers and teacher educators needed to share and critically reflect on narratives of personal experiences of 'culture', theories, frameworks and models central to the subject and take action on insights gained

from critical reflection. McNiff and Whitehead (2006) suggest that participatory research “is a form of research that enables practitioners to learn how they can improve practice, individually and collectively” (p. 256) and Kemmis and McTaggart (2005) perceive practice as reflexive to be studied dialectically through critically examined action of participants.

Four teacher educators engaged in reflective dialogue and conducted pre and post surveys with pre-service teachers who consented to participate. The dialogue occurred weekly during our situated practice enacting the curriculum. This involved: (1) preparing teaching and learning materials and sharing those materials at the start of each week, (2) reflecting on the enacted and experienced curriculum at the end of each week, (3) reflecting on the experience of teaching at the end of each week, and (4) reflecting on pre and post survey data and end of teaching period review of pre-service teacher feedback.

The pre and post surveys asked pre-service teachers about their expectations of the subject, perceptions on culture and being culturally literate and their experience of undertaking the subject. Sixty pre-service teachers consented to participate representing approximately 25% of the overall cohort. Ethics approval was sought and received from the institutional ethics committee prior to conducting this project. The demographics and experiences of the respondents are diverse and represent a range of perspectives that are consistent with other institutional student feedback data over three consecutive years.

This research draws from Kemmis and McTaggart (2005) to analyse the responses from the pre-service teachers’ pre and post surveys and to critically reflect on our own practices. A thematic analysis of the literature, systemic policies and frameworks and pre-service teacher data was conducted (Creswell, 2008). Thematic analysis “takes into account both patterns of commonality across all cases and the contextual aspects of the phenomenon that account for differences among participants” (Ayres, 2008). Analysis of pre and post survey responses referenced back to cultural theories and transformative educational theories to determine alignment or incongruence with the subject aims, curriculum documents and multicultural education frameworks and policies. The next sections apply the theoretical frames to analyse orientations from the policies and then subsequently relate these to the teaching and learning experience.

## **Navigating policies**

We are navigating the many discursive practices in educating about and for culture and there are slippages in our positioning of culture as we work within and beyond existing policies and systemic practices. In enacting our curriculum vision we navigate policies, programs and classroom practices. Fostering cultural literacy is a core aim of the curriculum that draws on a body of work about critical culturally responsive teaching. However, policy frameworks and professional standards can be uncritical in how culture is cultured, potentially reinforcing essentialist notions.

Our curriculum is based in part on accountability to Teacher professional standards which define set knowledges and skills. Systemic initiatives to address Indigenous disadvantage are dominant policies that pre-service teachers need to work with but these can reduce cultural literacy to a series of ‘known’ cultural knowledges and practices that respond to the ‘other’. The global culturally literate teacher is one who is shaped by critical frameworks but must also work with legitimated cultural perspectives in enacting the curriculum and professional responsibilities. A key policy frame that shapes our approach as educators is the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL, 2014). The standards that frame teachers’ work as culturally responsive are:

Standard 1.3: Demonstrate knowledge of teaching strategies that are responsive to the learning strengths and needs of students from diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Standard 1.4: 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.

Standard 1.4 targets specific cultural backgrounds and adopts the social justice imperative to focus on Indigenous disadvantage. Both standards are responsive to the learner, but the teachers' own worldviews are not mentioned. In the previous *Queensland Professional Standards for Teachers (QCT, 2006)*, which were used for registration until 2012, there was more focus on teachers' own knowledge and understanding of "cross cultural sensitivities and perspectives". There is potentially a narrowing of teachers' professional selves to assuring cultural responsiveness to 'other' and little acknowledgement of the complexity of teachers' own global, culturally literate identities as influencing their practice.

An expectation of acquiring concrete knowledge and skills negates culture as socially constructed and reinforces culturalism. As Martin states in talking directly to pre-service teachers about sharing Indigenous and Western perspectives on Education:

it would have been easy to provide a list of practical advice of 'what to do', or 'what not to do'. This would be to imagine you, the reader, as limited in your capacity as an undergraduate teacher to engage with knowledge and mediate it in your role as educator... The core issue is that providing teaching tricks removes the contexts in which the living, teaching, and learning takes place (Martin, 2012, p. 37).

Educators therefore have to foster tools for navigating context, rather than looking for a one-size-fits-all approach. This assertion aligns with Risvi's (2009) notion of understanding processes of cultural change with a focus on how and why as apposed to 'what'. Potentially reductive interpretation of the professional role of teachers also creates tensions when standards and assessment must balance 'knowledge as problematic' with knowledge as 'known' and assured. "Assuring" professional competencies of teachers across the complex domains becomes problematic. A repertoire of tools and knowledges for culturally responsive teaching is the expectation of pre-service teachers that is reinforced by the limited framing of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL, 2013). Knowledge of self and the complexities of culture are not framed as part of that responsiveness. An emphasis on the tools for critically deconstructing dynamic cultural practices and identities presents tensions in a broader educational regime that is increasingly standardized and performance driven.

The problematic nature of teaching culturally literate practices but also assuring defined knowledge, skills and dispositions is an issue explored by Nakata, Nakata, Keech and Bolt (2012, p. 133) who assert:

how intricate and open to interpretation the dance around worldview, knowledge and practice is ...students can be led to develop awareness of the limits of various positions, the persistent pervasiveness of 'all knowing', 'taken-for-granted' Western frames, and the way they set up a 'rush to 'understand' in order to find and 'know the answers' that will overcome the colonial legacy is more likely to be evidence of not understanding sufficiently.

Nakata and colleagues' assertion takes up a critical anti-essentialist and a de-colonial stance. The authors advocate a critical perspective that fosters pre-service teachers' awareness of complexities of culture rather than reaffirming an essentialist view of culture in that 'other' cultures can be known. The rush to know and the concept of there being definitive answers resonate with the persistent culturalism evident in policy documents. In the subject we teach, we are attempting to deconstruct dominant frames and explore the complexity of the "dance around worldview" with pre-service teachers, however, we are also

working with dominant constructions of what should and can be known by pre-service teachers. We interpret ‘dance’ as the relational exchanges and repositioning that takes place in unpacking processes of cultural exchange and the term ‘worldview’ as a postmodern term that acknowledges that multiple subjectivities shape understandings of cultures. ‘Dance around worldview’ resonates with the fluid and contextual nature of culturally literate practices in that culture is multifaceted and dynamic. We want pre-service teachers to be critically reflective of the dance around worldview, knowledge and practice. Of particular significance is how personal ways of seeing the world will influence the construction and legitimation of knowledge and professional practices. There is a competency/accountability discourse that sits alongside and intersects (somewhat irreconcilably) with ever-changing critical and political explorations of culture as social practice and not as something that can be ‘known’.

A focus on values of social justice and critical perspectives takes up the affective domain and not just a series of competencies. Some of the key models of cultural education that pre-service teachers engage with in Australian schools are steered by state education system frameworks. Examples of these frameworks and policies show the complexity of working with and beyond culturalism. An example is *Embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Perspectives* (Queensland Government, 2011) published by the Queensland state government to direct the efforts of public schools in being culturally inclusive and improve student engagement and achievement. This framework highlights the importance of navigating the community context and engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in a ‘third’ cultural space. The third space represents a space in which western knowledges and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges come together (Queensland Government, 2011).

The positioning of a particular set of cultural knowledges is that they can be ‘embedded’ into the curriculum. The framework is widely utilised in Queensland state schools and so pre-service teachers have to be prepared to work with this dominant approach as well as critique the ways it may marginalise superdiversity and reinforce culturalism. Although it can facilitate whole school transformation, most implementation of *Embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Perspectives* is arguably an additive approach. According to Banks (1999) in an additive approach, content or concepts, themes, and perspectives from diverse cultures are added to the curriculum without changing its basic structure. For example, *Embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Perspectives* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011, p. 36) suggest that when planning, “teachers consider where Indigenous perspectives will be explicitly taught. This might include examples to illustrate general points or concepts, guest speakers, assessing a particular knowledge or way of working”.

The new National Curriculum for Australian Schools (ACARA, 2013) describes *cross curriculum priorities* and *general capabilities* which delineate cultural boundaries in ways that open up spaces for reorienting our identity but also in ways that reinforce conservative tolerant interactions between groups. For example ‘Intercultural Understanding’ as a general capability and ‘Engagement with Asia’ may foster dualisms rather than complex situated notions of cultural practice (Keddie et al., 2013; Salter, 2014). Embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Perspectives is also a cross curriculum priority, and like the Queensland government framework it adds in discrete knowledge. Embedding perspectives does not take up spaces to explore worldview or knowledge systems but adds ‘known’ cultural perspectives into a traditional western knowledge system.



## Pre-service teacher perceptions of culture and being culturally literate

As discussed earlier, the construct of culture is central to the course. We position culture as complex and dynamic but also work with more fixed notions in light of dominant policies. Pre-service teacher notions of culture in commencing the subject frame the range of expectations and engagement with the rationale to 'other the known'. Their dispositions to cultural education range from highly reflective self awareness to an expectation of acquiring knowledge of the 'other' in an unproblematic, bounded way. These perceptions of culture and how culturally literate practices inform their personal and professional selves shaped how the curriculum is enacted and experienced.

As part of a survey at the commencement of the subject, pre-service teachers were asked about previous experiences that influenced their understanding of culture. Most of our pre-service teachers' responses about developing cultural understandings refer to previous work experience, some travel and the cultural makeup of their community. Work is focused on the interpersonal awareness of culture with varying degrees of understanding/contact. These contexts ranged from local to international work or living with different nationality/ethnic groups. In these contexts the work involved different roles and relationships alongside diverse 'others' or work for the needs of a particular 'other' as these examples demonstrate:

I come from Katherine in the N.T. and I worked as a teacher's assistant in a school there. The school had 60% Indigenous population.

I have had a lot of experience with people from diverse backgrounds. I grew up in Vanuatu and am currently working with Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander students as part of a tutoring program.

In other contexts pre-service teachers described social cultural identities based on previous learning experiences, community demographics, and family history. For example studying previous university courses in cultural studies, anthropology and undertaking professional experience in Aboriginal communities. Other less formal 'cultural' experiences included volunteering in homeless shelters, teaching sports with cultural groups and personal circumstances like immigrating to Australia or identifying as belonging to a cultural minority. One participant described their experiences as wide ranging, referring to many cultural markers:

I have volunteered in homeless shelters, taught Indigenous people sports skills, my sister has married into a traditional Singaporean family, my other sister married a half NZ and American, I spent many years in Dubbo in the clans out there, I have lived in cities and rural towns across 3 states, my mother is a retired magistrate and we spend much time working with youths and I have travelled through Asia, America and the Pacific islands –

The mix of geo spatial and familial references illustrates the diversity and transcultural nature of families (Keddie et al., 2013). These descriptions are diverse and signal a need to be critically reflective of assumptions about pre-service teachers' limited worldview. However, for pre-service teachers from the dominant ethnic group, culture can be seen in these geo-deterministic or membership terms – you have culture if you are 'other'. The subject aims to transform pre-service teachers' understandings of the assumptions and complexities of their own cultural identities. Some pre-service teachers did self-evaluate their previous experiences as limited:

A reasonable amount to understand, but not enough to be a culturally competent teacher

I have not had many experiences working with people from diverse backgrounds  
Very little. I have had some interactions with Indigenous students in my time

volunteering in the school.

Limited, only throughout pracs through this degree.

The diversity of the experiences within the subject cohort has implications as a valuable resource in sharing perspectives. Pre-service teacher diversity but also a perceived lack of culture or ‘othering’ of culture is part of the justification for including theories of culture and self-reflection in the first phase of the subject. These diverse experiences, in part, shape expectations of the subject but so too do the dominant public and policy discourses about educating for diversity.

Some pre-service teachers come to the subject with strong social justice orientations and others come with expectations of visible and practical teaching strategies that can be applied regardless of the cultural context. When specifically asked in the pre-survey “what do you hope to learn in this subject?” pre-service teacher responses reflected a diversity of worldviews and priorities as well as some of the orientations to culture and schooling in the literature. For example, there is a focus on responsive skills and strategies in these participant responses:

How to approach those who appear in the minority.

How to handle a student who will not acknowledge your existence or those around them.

How to deal with Aboriginal children who don't want to be at school and hardly turn up

I hope to learn about all cultures and be able to implement strategies to improve education outcomes for all students.

How to teach rather than the importance of recognising the difference.

The recognition is common sense, how to approach the situation is the skill teachers need to develop.

This language of handling and dealing with ‘the other’ presents a particular version of and privileging of praxis and teacher competencies. It also highlights a reactive view of culture that takes for granted the cultural practices of the education context. The references to ‘dealing with’ and ‘handling’ takes up a deficit or problematic discourse of othering. Other comments demonstrate dominant discourse of responding to the other. Such narrow interpretations of being response in order to develop cultural literacy links to Martin’s (2012) advice that prescriptive ‘dos’ and ‘don’ts’ ignores the socio-cultural contexts of teaching and learning.

For some pre-service teachers their personal aims were in knowing about and teaching ‘about’ culture as a series of protocols that can be decontextualised:

I was [am] hoping there would be more for how to bring more Indigenusness into the classroom teaching as they are the traditional landowners, and how do we teach this remembering our other cultures, religions etc.

A greater awareness of various cultures and religions e.g. Whether a group undertakes Ramadan, or whether there are certain foods that are forbidden etc., the wearing of shoes indoors, eye contact, festivals or events that are celebrated or famines observed etc., etc.

One pre-service teacher focused on knowledge of diverse cultures but also positioned this as transformative:

All cultures are equally important and it would be a shame if this is not reflected in this subject; which in its essence, to me, stands for equality for all. I hope to leave this subject feeling proud of my culture, proud to be an Australian who respects others cultures and beliefs and also I hope that I feel empowered by the knowledge we learn and more accepting. Also there are other cultures and communities which people are unaware of, for example, the deaf community.

There were some more transformative aims that aligned with or had taken up the aims of the subject.

Effective ways to get students of the hegemonic culture to value and appreciate culture beyond the tokenistic.

To not 'judge a book by its cover.' To understand why I think the way I do about certain cultures. To learn how to ~tactfully~ adapt my lessons.

Broaden my perspectives and learn to teach my students to be culturally competent.

The comments above reflect a diversity of perspectives on culture in coming into the subject, with most aligning to traditional, essentialist notions. The professional standards frame teacher practice in potentially limiting ways when it comes to recognising the complexities of the cultural work that teachers do.

### **Tensions between the intended, enacted and experienced curriculum**

When asked to reflect on their experiences after undertaking the subject, most pre-service teachers suggested ways in which the subject had influenced their ideas about culturally diverse classrooms. These reflections of the experienced curriculum reveal some congruence and some tensions between the curriculum intent and experience. Pre-service teachers who identified that the subject had influenced or transformed their thinking used terms such as 'broadened', 'opened' and 'highlighted'. The degree of transformative thinking ranged from general awareness to understanding the contested socio cultural constructions of the curriculum:

It taught me to be aware of others and that one thing won't work for everyone.

I'm more aware of my actions towards other cultures and how they learn differently and incorporate their culture into classroom learning.

I see how the difference in backgrounds of everyone in the classroom will effect the way content is interpreted.

This response aligned with the social justice aims of the subject and the focus on teacher worldview:

This subject has motivated me to challenge explanations for student failure and disengagement from learning, specifically in relation to teaching practice and the expectations that teachers hold for students based upon their social and cultural background.

There were also some negative and neutral responses from the pre-service teachers:

No, not very much. I have only learnt about reflection as a teacher.

It has taught me some worthwhile strategies to implement in the classroom, however I often feel that most cultural subjects to be tedious. This view however is not directed towards the importance of learning to be culturally diverse, merely the subject itself.

When reflecting specifically on their own cultural knowledge or identity at the end of the subject, pre-service teachers' responses were mixed. Some pre-service teachers signalled a change in their perspective and others rejected the role of the subject in influencing knowledge of self. In response to "Has this subject changed or challenged your own cultural knowledge/identity? If so, in what ways?" some responses included references to complexity of culture:

Sure. It challenged my cultural knowledge but the main thing I picked up was that cultural knowledge requires continuous learning, critical self-evaluation and reflection throughout my entire teaching career.

Yes, being from the dominant culture I did not realise how students that were from somewhere else were treated differently or disadvantaged.

Some of the comments illustrate attempts to theorise experience and references to ‘cultural capital’ are examples of the language and tools required. References to pre-service teachers’ own culture indicated that in these instances they did ‘other the known’ and have come to an awareness about contested identities. On the other hand, some pre-service teachers did not see the learning experiences as personally transformative. For example:

No, I believe my cultural knowledge and identity is a fairly balanced one.

I do not judge others or treat anyone differently because of their culture, especially not in a classroom.

The comments above indicate that for some pre-service teachers the sharing of cultural perspective affirmed their already ‘balanced’ worldview. Not treating others differently because of their culture contradicts the aims of exploring inequity and social justice in the subject. This view did not seem to align with the transformational aim of the subject to share and critically reflect on narratives of personal experiences of ‘culture’, theories, frameworks and models and take action on insights gained from critical reflection.

In reflecting on these wide ranging expectations there is some alignment but also some divergence with the subject aims and design. Pre-service teachers’ are engaged with a discourse of social justice and critical, action orientated frameworks to cultural education (Banks & Banks, 2004; Sleeter & Grant, 2009). This engagement aims to create the discourse to validate reflective insight on these experiences and can question the validity of taken-for-granted meaning and perspectives about schooling. These reconstructionist aims (Sleeter & Grant, 2009) can be limited in the space. This subject precedes more practice based curriculum subjects and it attempts to develop analytical skills and engagement with policies but also has to be seen as preparing pre-service teachers with concrete knowledges and a repertoire of culturally responsive strategies. In terms of developing culturally literate citizens according to Muller’s (2006) framework, the comments above from pre-service teachers do reflect some understandings about the complexity of culture and knowledge of self by analysing attributes of their own culture.

Another tension is the authenticity of pre-service teacher voice that can be determined within the enacted and experienced curriculum. While Nakata et al. (2012) emphasised exploring limitations of one’s own thinking and the conceptual limitations of all material – the key social justice and reconstructionist frameworks present a dominant discourse that pre-service teachers take up in order to demonstrate the ‘right’ approach. Taking up the dominant values and aims within an assessment regime can constrain ‘authentic’ critical reflection. While we espouse open inquiry, we also navigate pre-service teachers through the subject to reach ‘known’ criteria heavily framed by the Professional Standards.

## Conclusion

There is a need to reflect on the way such tensions in the positioning of culture may be navigated and the limitations of such navigation. Our pre-service teachers’ reflective thinking about culture does demonstrate that the aims of challenging and broadening worldviews have to some extent been realised. The experience of the curriculum has also given pre-service teachers some structures and metalanguage to articulate culture and the professional implications of cultural diversity. This reflection on the experienced versus the intended curriculum has also revealed areas for further curriculum development to open up more dialogic spaces and reinforce the “importance of teachers’ theoretical work to use social inquiry to negotiate multiplicity” (Salter, 2014, p. 223). In discussing decolonial pedagogy in the context of Indigenous studies in Higher Education contexts, Nakata et al. (2012) suggests a pedagogical approach to equip pre-service teachers with understandings and analytical tools

that can make explicit conditions of knowledge complexity Indigenous peoples confront “by engaging in open, exploratory, and creative inquiry in these difficult intersections, while building language and tools for describing and analysing what they engage with.” (p. 121).

While we have attempted to reflect on our navigation of learner, policy and institutional discourses of cultural education, these concepts are dynamic and as such should always be contested. Some themes relevant to our context and experiences in teacher education include a need for critical consciousness/reflection, disrupting cultural knowledge as fixed and known and key considerations in positioning learners in ways that value the diversity of the cohort and the contested knowledges being discussed. Such tensions are not easily reconciled with the need for clear performance criteria and the assurance of core knowledges and skills which by default presents a dominant set of materials as ‘right’ and positions certain groups in ways that they can be ‘known’. In an agenda of teacher quality and increasing teacher education accountability around ‘valued’ knowledges and skills, we hope this reflection and critique foregrounds complexities of teaching as cultural work and the pedagogies of fostering culturally literate global citizens.

This article has sought to identify some of the tensions with professional standards as potentially reductive and narrowing perceptions of cultural knowledges and praxis. Our aim is to encourage further research, dialogue and professional development to (*re*)conceptualise the rationales for engagement in teacher education in order to move beyond a privileging of practice removed from theory and additive or essentialist models. Cultural literacy cannot be assumed or subsumed into broader inclusion courses given the cultural diversity of local and global communities of education (Salmona, Partlo, Kaczynski & Leonard, 2015). Arguably, in the dominant legitimating frames such as the professional standards and policies for ‘embedding culture’ reinforce culturalism. The ‘dance around worldviews, knowledge and practice’ needs to be a legitimate pedagogical space in the preparation of teachers who are culturally literate global citizens.

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