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## **Dangerous Practices: The Practicum Experiences of Non-Indigenous Pre-Service Teachers in Remote Communities**

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*Abstract: This paper seeks to explore the risks of providing pre-service teachers with professional experiences in remote communities. In particular this paper focuses on the risks associated with this kind of professional experience. Twelve pre-service teachers were interviewed whilst on a three-week practicum around Katherine and in Maningrida in the Northern Territory during 2012. The dangers outlined in this paper relate to the way their experiences continued to be mediated by stereotypes and perpetuating colonial practices. The pre-service teachers' limited understandings of Indigenous knowledges and languages are discussed before exploring the vexed issue of reverse culture shock that some of the participants identified when they returned home. The paper concludes by exploring the notion of 'allies' as a way to negotiate the problematic nature of this work.*

**Keywords:** pre-service teachers, professional learning, Indigenous education, dangerous practices

### **Introduction**

*My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do (Foucault & Rabinow, 1984, p. 343)*

Foucault and Rabinow (1984) contest that dangers are found in all practices due to the power relationships negotiated by people in their work informed by their individual professional subjectivities and the institutional expectations of professionals. Taking a perspective of dangerous practices can open up spaces of critique that explore these power relationships and offer alternative ways of negotiating professional practice. This is a useful way of reporting professional experience for pre-service teachers since the dangers of their practice lead to the identification of some of the structural and systemic limitations that are not readily apparent, acknowledging a range of voices that may have been silenced.

This paper explores the dangerous practices of supporting the professional experiences of non-Indigenous pre-service teachers in remote communities in the Northern Territory in Australia. For the purposes of this article we refer to this group as pre-service teachers. By dangerous practices in this context we are meaning those practices that run the

risk of being counterproductive to the empowering and transformative practices of student learning and the ethical responsibilities associated with teaching. The dangerous practices in this paper explore the friction between the agency of pre-service teachers who are not fully aware of the implications of their teaching and the structural barriers to full student participation in education. The dangers of this work come from a clash of expectations from the pre-service teachers, in-service teachers their students and parents. For pre-service teachers it means grappling with the complexities of teaching in remote communities where they confront the history of the failure of mainstream education as it continues to be experienced by Indigenous students.

There is obviously a danger in supposing that such experiences might constitute an intervention that will immediately begin to address perceived deficits in Indigenous education. Yet while pre-service teachers have a limited capacity to make structural changes in schools, they do have open hearts and minds (Osbourne, 2003), which is essential to enacting and sustaining structural change in their future professional life. Even though we shall be exploring the way their preconceptions posed obstacles to fully engaging with Indigenous communities, the pre-service students who have chosen this site for their professional experience with whom we have been working have at least made a beginning when it comes to thinking about and practising education in a more inclusive way.

An equally worrying danger lies in constructing a deficit view of pre-service teachers as the researchers' quote from their reflections on their teaching in remote communities. The epigraph that we have chosen for this article signals that we are not attempting to identify 'bad' understandings about teaching in this paper. Rather we are looking to name and unpack dangerous practices in teacher education that may negatively impact effective learning for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and thus turning the spotlight on our own practice as teacher educators. Any evidence from pre-service teachers in this paper should be seen from the perspective of how well teacher educators have negotiated the constructs of race, remoteness, Indigenous knowledge systems and identity in the induction, teaching and debriefing sessions of this professional experience. The authors are conscious that the dangers come from a mix of pre-service teachers' construction of their identity and the organisational structures that have been put in place to support this professional experience in a remote location. As Cook-Sather (2006) suggests, an important aspect of teacher education lies in the opportunities to revise and critique the pre-service teacher individual and group development in order to make teacher education a generative process.

In an effort to bridge the theory and practice of this research, this paper provides a background to the professional experience, followed by a section on methodology, before embarking on a discussion of dangerous practices. There are several dangerous practices outlined in the paper, some of which are not mutually exclusive to each other. For each practice the authors will provide some important background to the risks of doing this work before interweaving the voices of the pre-service teachers with the voices of academics who can place what they say in perspective. The paper then concludes with a suggestion on how to move forward that takes into account these dangerous practices.

## **Background**

Deakin University offers pre-service teachers a number of Global Experience Programs (GEP) to support their professional experience in a range of diverse settings. Pre-service teachers from six initial teacher education courses have the opportunity to undertake a GEP in five global sites, one of which is the Katherine and Arnhem regions in the Northern Territory. Although the pre-service teachers apply for each experience they have to cover

their own costs to participate in the program. The pre-service teachers on the Northern Territory Global Experience Program (NTGEP) spend three or five weeks on placement in one of several remote communities in the Northern Territory. No students in the NTGEP identified as having Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander heritage.

The program is designed according to Deakin Graduate Learning Outcomes which involve learning about communication, discipline specific knowledge, critical thinking, problem solving and teamwork. The learning specified by the AITSL standards is also clearly relevant, namely 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', and 2.4 'demonstrate broad knowledge of, understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages' (Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership Standards, n.d.). The program provides each pre-service teacher an opportunity to work within a curriculum framework other than the AusVELS (the state school curriculum in Victoria), since the Northern Territory Department of Education and Training uses the Northern Territory Curriculum Frameworks. However, the cross curriculum priority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures from the Australian Curriculum (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2014) is found in both AusVELS and the Australian Curriculum and thus assumes particular meaning to the students who engage in this professional experience.

The NTGEP is contextualised by the More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teacher Initiative (MATSITI) which focuses on developing strategies to recruit and graduate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pre-service teachers and retain them in the teaching workforce. Currently Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers account for approximately one per cent of the teaching workforce while Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders comprise approximately four per cent of the population of Australia. An important aspect of the work in the NTGEP is to make the classroom and school culturally safe so Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and teachers have the best chance of success. This means most non-Aboriginal pre-service teachers have not worked with an Aboriginal teacher who can give authentic voice to how teaching and learning can be inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and people.

## **Methodology**

As a way of exploring the dangers of pre-service teachers' professional experiences in remote communities, the approach in this study is commensurate with a critical tradition in educational research that examines relations between knowledge, subjectivity and power in educational settings. Drawing on the theoretical resources of scholars such as Michel Foucault (1983) the study explores how the power relationships are mediated both in and out of the schools where the pre-service teachers were teaching. Gore (1998) has used a similar methodology based on Foucault to uncover the techniques of power which challenges how educators might exercise power differently. Carspecken (1996) and Yandell (2014) provide a useful overview of this tradition of critical research in education where the researchers do not see themselves as simply describing what is going on in educational settings but commit to using the evidence they generate to explore and change power relations with respect to voices that are otherwise marginalised by research. In this research we are exploring the practices of the NTGEP with reference to the Aboriginal people who are variously associated with the schools where the pre-service teachers are teaching. We use the pre-service teachers'

experiences of this professional learning to illuminate the dangers of this kind of work, as outlined below.

36 pre-service teachers took part in the NTGEP in 2012 when the study on which this paper is based was conducted. Of these 12 who agreed to participate in the study, half were from the undergraduate three-week NTGEP program and half were from the post-graduate Master of Teaching five-week NTGEP program. The pre-service teachers completed an induction program at the University prior to their participation of their professional experience that covered understandings of identity, the history of Australia (presented by an Aboriginal elder) and ESL teaching methodologies. While in the communities the pre-service teachers were supported in face-to-face dialogic conversations with teacher educators and teachers that followed Bakhtin's (1981) notion of interactive and responsive inquiry approach to learning about the context of their teaching. The pre-service teachers were also introduced to yarning with members of the community. Yarning is a conversational method using oral traditions of storytelling that privileges and validates Indigenous Knowledge Systems (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010). A teacher educator accompanies the pre-service teachers on the professional experience and students are always placed with at least one other student to provide peer support.

In 2012 a colleague of the researchers conducted interviews on site, in both Katherine and some of the remote communities, where the PSTs were undertaking professional experience. Ethics approval from the university was obtained for this research. The interviewer was not in a power relationship with the participants in that she was not responsible for their assessment for either their placement or any of their related University coursework. The interviews were conducted outside the normal teaching hours of the pre-service students and consideration was given to the participants' demanding workload during this placement experience. Interviews were usually conducted outside the rooms in which participants were staying, and some were conducted while travelling in vehicles from one location to another. Semi-structured interviews were undertaken in small focus groups of 2-3 PSTs, while some were done with individual students. The interviewer encouraged the pre-service teachers to give an account of their experiences using everyday language. The interviewer consciously avoided introducing language that may shape their responses (Yin, 2011). The data from the pre-service teacher interviews were analysed for the dangers of this kind of work when making links to the literature.

The interviews gathered information about the participants' motivations to become involved in the NTGEP, their expectations prior to their participation, and the learnings they felt they were taking from the program about pedagogy, identity and practice. They were also asked about the learning they would take into their future teaching.

Before outlining the dangers, it is pertinent that the evidence from the pre-service teachers is not taken as a series of individual deficit constructions of their professional practice. It is important that pre-service teachers have the opportunities to reflect on their practices and the dynamics of education in a remote community. As a whole their narratives identify the complexity of this work and the systemic limitations of doing teacher education in this context with non-Indigenous teachers. The dangerous practices below provide prompts for planning and curriculum reform in our teacher education courses and subsequent programs in the Northern Territory

### **The Danger of Constructing the 'Real Aborigine'**

Rose (2012, p.75) comments on the experiences of non-Indigenous people wanting a real Aboriginal experience: 'Indigenous Aboriginal people in Melbourne, for instance, often

watch in bewilderment as 'the suits' drive through Fitzroy to catch planes to Fitzroy Crossing for that 'real Aboriginal experience' when all they needed to do was get out in Fitzroy.' One participant in Gorringe, Ross, & Fforde's (2011) study suggested, the real Aborigine, as constructed by non-Indigenous people as having limited education, darker skin colour, an ability to speak an Aboriginal language and not living in an urban setting. There are more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in metropolitan centres in Australia than living in remote communities (Fredericks, 2013). By travelling over 3000 kilometres to remote communities we run the risk as teacher educators of reinforcing essentialist stereotypes that 'that you are either black or you are not' (Gorringe, Ross, & Fforde, 2011, p. 6), and, what is more, that 'true' Aboriginal people live in remote communities. The act of traversing half of Australia with pre-service teachers in tow runs the risk of ignoring the voices of Victorian Aboriginal communities, their educational traditions and their struggles – struggles that occur on the very door steps of Deakin University, located over three sites in Victoria each with their own language groups. This calls into question the authenticity in our work. What we are doing not only runs the risk of bad faith with respect to Victorian Aboriginal communities but fails to engage with the complex historical experience of the European invasion of Aboriginal communities everywhere in Australia, involving inequity in learning (the privileging of Western education over traditional education), the struggle to retain language, and the degree of connection to the land (Gorringe, Ross and Fforde, 2011).

One of the participants, Jane, provided an insight into this question of authenticity in a binary construction of culture and heritage:

*... you've got to think what kind of future are we looking at for these kids? Are we wanting them to integrate into western schools and to go to schools where they learn the western ways and lose their culture and their heritage?*

There are many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders who challenge this binary construction of culture and language. The construction of 'culture' as a static entity and of the 'true' Aborigine as being closely connected to land and hunting is problematic. As Nakata (2007a) suggests, 'the cultural interface is a contested space between two systems of knowledge, where things are not clearly black or white, Indigenous or Western' (p.9). There is a danger that visiting pre-service teachers embark on authentic experiences with real Aboriginal children while not really understanding 'the politics of knowledge production and the effects of knowledge positioning' (Nakata, Nakata, Keech, & Bolt, 2012, p. 127) that is essential if pre-service teachers are to critique their taken-for-granted teaching practices and understand their own embedded knowledge often unquestioned outside of this experience

By constructing the 'real' Aborigine as living in communities many kilometres from metropolitan centres, the teacher educators who are in charge of the NTGEP run the risk of reinforcing stereotypes about an Aboriginal identity. The pre-service teachers may conceivably be silencing Indigenous voices and preventing opportunities for engagement with Aboriginal people from communities local to students' home address. Scott (1992), with respect to the practicum experience of Geography students, has remarked, "it is not individuals who have experiences, but subjects who are constituted through experience" (pp. 25-26). We are not adequately recognising whiteness as a raced subjectivity that limits the political and discursive constructions of the pre-service teachers when they travel huge distances to these communities.

These pre-service teachers are not blank slates. Nor should they be constructed as sympathetic individuals who are naturally disposed to be 'open' to the experience of working on a remote settlement (i.e. a liberal humanist notion of individuals as capable of sympathy and empathy that enables them to transcend the cultural and linguistic differences that obtain here). We need to think of the pre-service teacher, rather, as Foucault and Rabinow's (1997)

idea of 'subjects' who are the product of particular discourses, particular positionings, particular ways on engaging with the world. It is equally important for the organisers of this program to reconceptualise what they are doing as the production of subjects, as setting up a situation for subjects in the making. Pre-service teachers would benefit from an awareness of the assumptions that are inherent in what they are doing that might shape the engagement of these student teachers and what meaning they construct from their experiences.

As Sally commented on her ideas about culture that she encountered in the remote community:

*They've lost so much culture as well. I don't know, you look at their children and some of them are just really westernised, they've got their mobile phones and they've got their iPod player things, and it's just like that's just the way that they are. Like they probably don't go out hunting and all those sorts of things, just because we force so many things on them.*

Sally's reflections show a similar juggling of essentialist conceptions of culture that ignore the way Aboriginal people themselves are actively negotiating space between traditional values and practices and the values and practices associated with Western culture. This connects with a view of Aboriginal culture as being corrupted by the West, and a construction of Aboriginal people as victims, without any agency.

Herbert (2000) argues the need for Aboriginal people to be positioned in a world that is meaningful to them in order to establish a strong identity. As a consequence successful students operate within two worlds: their own and that of the dominant culture (Herbert, 2000). Such a plurality of positionings in identity and culture is found in approaches to critical race theorists. McLaughlin and Whatman (2011) suggest that the lessons of critical race theory 'emphasize and value multiple and varied voices and vantage points of lived experiences of people of colour' (p.369). As teacher educators there is clearly room to do more work on how pre-service teachers construct Aboriginal subjectivities as part of their professional experience in remote communities.

### **The Danger of Perpetuating Colonising Relationships**

One of the dangers associated with travelling to a community many kilometres from the university is that teacher educators are reinforcing a colonial mentality in pre-service teachers. This might be subtle rather than overt, but the effects on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and members of the community are similar. Colonisation can be identified as "territorial incursion as an invasion and insidious habitation of the social and psychic space of oppressed groups" (N. Smith & Katz, 1993, p. 69). While the pre-service teachers are not actively seeking to invade a space or group of people, there is evidence they are using the visit for careerist purposes rather than seriously engaging with the educational and socio-cultural issues that it raises. As Karen noted:

*I'm only 20 so I pretty much haven't had very much life experience at all so I think I need to make a conscious effort for myself to go out and get those experiences.*

The pre-service teacher is constructing the experience as something she needs to acquire, and it is up to her to go and get these experiences to make her a better teacher. This approach aligns with Giroux's (2003) understandings of the market culture of neo-liberalism where Karen acquires experiences to position herself in the marketplace of teaching. What is dangerous is how the program might be constructing Aboriginal students as 'out there' as a

way of ‘othering’ students who are in need of high quality learning experiences. For Karen, the NTGEP forms part of her commodification of life experiences that might not connect or translate to the high quality learning that all students need in the classroom. This could be contrasted to Derrida’s (1997) notion of welcoming the other as if they were a friend not a stranger. Many elders across the communities welcome the non-Indigenous pre-service teachers into their community as part of the NTGEP. It is doubtful whether the pre-service students actually appreciate the deep cultural significance of such a welcome, which they tend to read on their terms (as a friendly thing to do) rather than seeking to understand how this gesture might be interpreted by those who are making it.

Another way the colonial power relations are perpetuated relates to the access the pre-service teachers have to Aboriginal people. The pre-service teachers are in a power relationship with the principal and mentor teacher throughout their professional experience in any school. In the NTGEP, the pre-service teachers often stay with the teachers due to limited accommodation. This provides after-hours access to a particular reality that is not necessarily balanced by other constructs of knowledge found in the community. Jenny commented:

*“A lot of my learning came from living with the principal and his partner and talking to all other student teachers and then this year again I’m living with a graduate teacher so a lot of my learning about this particular community is different cultural practices and little things going on in the community. Issues with students like why this one is not at school at the moment, or this one’s family, or what that look means, is coming from her because at home we’re debriefing and talking about these things and there’s a lot more opportunity to talk about the smaller things like that.”*

The problems faced by pre-service teachers are that they, too, are being colonised by non-Aboriginal people in these debriefing sessions where knowledge and practices are not contested from an Aboriginal standpoint. In doing so, often without knowing it, they are perpetuating the logic of assimilation and raced practices where narratives are told from an outsider’s perspective. While these narratives are important in understanding the context for learning, the narratives comprise perspectives by outsiders who are not privy to the daily struggles or long term aspirations held by Aboriginal members of the community.

One of pre-service teachers, Chris, who would prefer to work in rural communities is very positive about her prospects of working in a community where she has completed her professional experience. Chris stated:

*There’s always going to be a job up here cause no one wants to come up here cause as far as people are concerned it’s the middle of bloody nowhere.*

This particular pre-service teacher had grown up in a rural community, and equated working in a remote community with that experience, without seriously engaging with the question of what it means to step into a space that belongs to others, into a community where life might be shaped by other values and assumptions than those that motivate her (as expressed in the aspiration to get a teaching position). Her characterisation of a remote settlement as being in ‘the middle of bloody nowhere’ is consistent with the Terra Nullius Euro-centric view of place held by many of her teaching peers. Her teaching experience has capitalised on this discursive construction of remoteness to position herself as very employable in such contexts. Ryan (2011) argues that pre-service teacher education is ‘a spatialised experience operating across a number of spaces that may or may not be linked ideologically and/or physically’ (p.881). As teacher educators, we have not sufficiently engaged pre-service teachers in the practices associated with multiple spaces of learning in



metropolitan settings let alone remote communities. Therefore pre-service teachers on the whole bring a silence to their understanding of place-based pedagogy in their teaching practice. An important aspect of this silencing is found in the limited understanding of critical pedagogy of place-based education. Gruenewald (2008) suggests a critical pedagogy of place ‘encourages teachers and students to reinhabit their places, that is, to pursue the kind of social action that improves the social and ecological life of places, near and far, now and in the future’ (p.314). Gruenewald offers some sound logic in how to reposition education agendas around understandings of place that also have a respectful ethical dimension to the work of teachers. Sommerville (2010) adds that ‘place has the potential to offer alternative storylines about who we are in the places where we live and work in an increasingly globalised world’ (p.331). One of the dangers of this work is that the locus of the pre-service teachers’ work is in the school and as such they are not hearing the storylines from the past about the land they are visiting. They are also missing out on hearing stories about the present struggle of the custodians of the land, or making links between these struggles and the failure that Indigenous students experience in school.

### **The Danger of Marginalising a Decolonisation Agenda**

Hook (2012) proposes a ‘decolonising pedagogy depends on non-Indigenous people considering the conferred benefits they have inherited as a result of European invasion’ (p.117). There is some evidence that the pre-service teachers were negotiating these ideas. As Penelope identified:

*We learn so much British and Asian history... I mean this is what happened in our country that we don't know much about and we're not ever going to know about because a lot of its secret but I don't know it just intrigues me.*

Penelope does make a link between how narratives from the past are privileged to construct a history that they learn about at school. While some knowledge is secret, there are many stories that are silenced as a direct result of the inherited benefits of European invasion. Penelope has not made links between this privileging of history and the struggle of reclaiming ownership of Indigenous knowledge as identified by many Indigenous researchers (Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Martin, 2008; Moreton-Robinson, 2006; Nakata, 2007b; Rigney, 1997; L. T. Smith, 1999). The danger is that these kinds of struggles for Indigenous control of parts of the curriculum is problematised by pre-service teachers who leave with limited understandings about the role knowledge and discourse play in repositioning an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander curriculum.

This is not to say that many of the certainties about their cultural identity held by the student teachers were not disrupted by their experiences and that they did not become mindful of their limited understandings of Indigenous knowledge. Jane reflected on a talk about her learning from an Aboriginal elder.

*I felt so naïve when we had (an Aboriginal elder) come out and talk about how little that we know as educated people about these people in our country*

The danger of this professional experience is that this kind of learning is sporadic and dependent on the teacher educators designing learning experiences with elders in each community. To a large degree this kind of learning is not embedded in the school cultures where the pre-service teachers are teaching. Likewise, the pre-service teacher handbooks for this professional experience do not require the pre-service teachers to show evidence of their

negotiated learning about Indigenous knowledge. As a result the pre-service teachers are not part of the "counter-colonial re-narrativization" (Ritchie, 2012, p. 75) that needs to take place in a school curriculum to support a repositioning of Indigenous knowledge in education. Jane suggested:

*I've got up here like I see everything through my white eyes and ... there's some big questions that I've sort of been thinking about and also the purpose of the education and what the elders want for the next generation. I don't have any answers.*

Jane has made a big start seeing notions of whiteness and how her cultural assumptions are framing her experience. Importantly the answers Jane was seeking were not found in the school or in the practices she was seeing in the community. There is a danger that answers relating to the place of Indigenous knowledge in education are not made explicit to the pre-service teachers. Although she has been living and working in the community for three weeks, Jane has not reached an understanding of decolonisation agenda. This has important implications for the AITSL standards as well. There is a danger that Jane feels she can now comply with the very general AITSL standards 1.4 and 2.4 without a deep understanding of a decolonisation agenda proposed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders researching in this field.

### **The Danger of not Upholding the Linguistic Human Rights of the Children**

Linguistic majorities take it for granted that their education will take place in the medium of their own language (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000, p. 499). When a linguistic minority wants to use their language as a medium of education, the struggle becomes one over a linguistic human right. In the communities where the pre-service teachers complete their professional experience in the NTGEP, many children prefer to speak an Aboriginal language, with English often being their third or fourth language. Where education systems and teachers are not prepared to provide education in the students' preferred language of communication, the students' human rights are being violated.

Pre-service teachers who visit these communities are not in a position to educate the students in their first language. As a result Tony identified the language barrier as a problem in his teaching.

*So for every single child in the classroom there's a language barrier there... and so I suppose from a teacher perspective that's made me really look at how I teach and using visual cues and hand gestures and explaining something like a million ways so that there's understanding there because you can ask them to do something and they might just stare at you and it's not that they don't know how, it's like they don't understand what you're saying and that's just a huge thing in any classroom because there's going to be a million kids out there that don't have an extensive vocabulary or from ESL.*

Tony recognises the need to overcome the language barrier and does this with gestures and visual cues but does not see teaching in the students' first language as a strategy for learning. The transferrable learning for Tony is the use of these strategies to other contexts where they will encounter ESL students. By not tackling the issue of linguistic human rights there is a danger that the pre-service teachers are unaware of the important role that first language can play in supporting Aboriginal students' pedagogy. Sally reflected that:

*Obviously our supervising teachers have had experience in these kids and they know the techniques that do and don't work and you know my teacher especially she's always given me clues when I'm teaching. Like I don't know if my kids aren't interested when I'm standing up at the board she'll kind of give me a little eye movement that I know, that I need to be trying something different, but yeah I guess it's a lot of trial and error.*

The pre-service teachers are not experiencing classroom teaching in the NTGEP where the linguistic human rights of the students are systemically supported by the Department of Education. Many of the bilingual programs were closed in the Northern Territory over 10 years ago with a change of government. Speaking about the benefits of bilingual education in an address in 1998, Marika-Mununggiritj (1999) argues the need for Aboriginal languages and culture to be recognised as part of the mainstream curriculum. She argues that by not convincing policy makers who control mainstream education of the need to include local agendas, 'reconciliation is an empty word and an intellectual terra nullius' (Marika-Mununggiritj, 1999, p. 9).

The ESL mentality is part of the problem here, geared as it is towards scaffolding students into English rather than respectfully working at the interface between languages, at the interface between cultures and worlds. It has to be noted that the pre-service teachers are not working in institutional settings where the linguistic human rights of their students are recognised. There is evidence from Sally that the complexity of language teaching is reduced to techniques that appear to work rather than a deep discursive analysis of what is happening in this kind of teaching. The limited time to grapple with these complex issues of language(s), cultures and worldviews is an inherent danger of the program where rudimentary ESL scaffolding might take precedence.

Their lack of understanding of the complexities of speaking a language other than English means that the predominantly mono-lingual English speaking pre-service teachers are not fully aware of the differences between oral language and written language, or the special demands placed on students when they are required to write formal English. They tend to equate a capacity of students to engage in informal conversations with the capacity to handle the challenge of school writing, failing to appreciate the difference between speech and writing. As Karen identified:

*I was expecting not to be able to communicate as easily with the students as I have been. I know you want to talk about that later but I've been really surprised here, all of the ESL students can have a decent conversation with them and some of them you know obviously it's not their first language so you do have a little bit of difficulty there but I think I was prepared for worse than what it is I guess.*

There is a need for pre-service teachers to decouple the success they might experience with informal talk and the more formal academic work students complete as part of their schooling.

### **The Danger of Reverse Culture Shock**

Reverse culture shock, or re-entry adjustment, is a common enough experience among people who have spent time studying and/or working in places outside their geo-cultural hub (Brown & Montemurro, 2011; Gaw, 2000; Schupack, 2011). The concept of culture shock was originally used by Oberg to explain people undertaking fieldwork in culturally different environments (McCombe & Foster, 1974). The disruptive, unsettling, disorientating features of culture shock experience were subsequently observed in people after they returned home

from various kinds of culturally different environments. As Jackie commented;

*It was my birthday when I was away and when I came home my mum had this really nice bag for me and I said mum I don't need it, so I've kind of been looking at that bag with guilt now but she wants me to have the bag. It's a really nice bag. It's an orange big hang bag from Country Road, it's really nice, I do like it but I just feel so bad.*

This kind of transformative learning does not fit easily into the AITSL standards, where it is more or less a matter of steady progress through the accumulation of the knowledge and skills required to be an effective teacher. What Jackie is identifying, by contrast, is an experience of being radically dislodged from her conventional attitudes and values, involving a marked disorientation with regard to how to negotiate everyday situations. The extent to which the debriefing sessions of the NTGEP, however, can adequately identify and address this shock is an open question. As Jackie identified, the experience of the NTGEP provided an opportunity to reassess her disposable income in the knowledge that students she was teaching were living close to the poverty line.

*I think yeah I do feel quite guilty about some of the things... the amount of money that I would spend on clothes just on one piece of clothing. Like how much I would spend say \$100 it just seems a bit absurd.*

For Jackie, her teaching experience caused her to reassess her material possessions.

*I had a massive clean out when I got home, I was like I'm chucking all this stuff out, cleaned out my room, I was like I don't need all this stuff.*

There is a need to support students in their re-entry transition, or re-entry adjustment after a period of study or work elsewhere (Knell, 2006; Tohyama, 2008). The kind of learning the students have experienced challenges teacher educators to reconsider how they might best build on that learning.

## Conclusion

The above discussion highlights that some of the learning for pre-service teachers is 'dangerous', which is hardly the way that the learning associated with teacher education is usually understood, where it is typically ratified by pre-service teacher questionnaires that are little more than customer satisfaction surveys. Something has undoubtedly been achieved by enabling pre-service teachers to confront the challenges of teaching in remote communities, requiring them to struggle with differences and complexities that had previously been completely outside their ken. There is a danger for pre-service teachers that 'no simple solution exists' (Partington, 1998, p. 2) in relation to these complex issues. Indeed, the pre-service teachers' comments throughout the article resonate with Luke's (2009) assessment that action is needed but what kind of action is unclear. Luke (2009, p.2) identifies that 'while there is clear consensus that the current educational and community situation requires action – the evidence on how to proceed remains unclear'. When reviews of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education can only identify the complexity of this work without any solution to kinds of actions required, it is hard for pre-service teachers to align the actions of their teaching practice with wider agendas.

The complexity of this work for pre-service teachers is compounded as they are entering sites that may perpetuate their already held beliefs that consciously or unconsciously marginalise the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Another complexity may arise

from the inadequate preparation for the pre-service teachers before the professional experience and/or the insufficient personal and professional support they receive during the experience to negotiate the dangers outlined in this paper. These complexities directly impact on teacher education and how pre-service teachers negotiate these kinds of lived experiences.

Rose's (2012) notion of professional blind spots is a useful way to contextualise the dangerous practices of this kind of work. Rose (2012) suggests that non-Indigenous teachers' understandings of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education is 'filled with half-truths and conceptual concoctions that distort and maim our national identity' (page 72). The dangerous practices in this research fall into categories of professional blind spots about Aboriginal self-determination, effective teaching of Aboriginal students and the impact of professional disruption on the personal lives of pre-service teachers. The dangerous practices span the ways pre-service teachers construct their practices systemically, pedagogically and personally.

Gorringe (2011), Smith (1999) and Pearson (2011) all contend that Indigenous voices will only be heard once they have active control over education. The dangers outlined in this research identify the problems that are perpetuated when pre-service teachers are not fully aware of the mechanisms in place to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander control over their education. An implication is that programs such as the NTGEP are part of a temporary solution until Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have control over their education. Being cognisant of the work of MATSITI is of critical importance here so the pre-service teachers know their work in schools is framed by this national agenda while they are teaching in schools in Australia. As teacher educators, the authors of this paper could reduce the dangers of this work by framing the temporary nature of this work of the pre-service teachers on these professional experiences. By not framing this work as temporary, the locus of colonisation remains a threat to dangers of this kind of work.

There is, however, an alternative way to conceptualise the work in the NTGEP. When articulating the role of non-Maori teachers in supporting Maori perspectives in an early childhood context, Richie (2012, p. 75) suggests that non-Maori teachers are regarded as 'intercultural inter-allies' when they support the work that has positive consequences for education and self-determination of the Maori students. Kendall (2013) argues that 'allies expect to make some mistakes but do not use that as an excuse for inaction' (p.182). Pre-service teachers can see themselves as intercultural inter-allies in supporting the learning of students and the repositioning of parental and community control of education as a way forward in the NTGEP. The dangerous practices would be reduced where the non-Aboriginal pre-service teachers and teacher educators had a strong sense of the purposes of these alliances that lead to full student participation and community control of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. Pre-service teachers can play an important role in effective teaching when their practices are aligned to the ontological and epistemological grounding of the community (Osbourne, 2003). The experience in teaching in a remote community provides pre-service teachers with opportunities to change their world view through an active learning with another culture that has the power to change their future teaching (Jay, Moss and Cherednichenko, 2009). Being open to these kinds of changes is essential for pre-service teachers to overcome their blind spots that perpetuate the dangers of this kind of work. The relationality that underpins the alliances that are formed through pre-service teacher experiences is an ontological safeguard against the dangers perpetuating in the profession. Through these relationships pre-service teachers are given opportunities to challenge their world views to reflect the aspirations of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their communities. The experiences of working as allies prepare pre-service teachers to negotiate the dangerous practices found in the diverse contexts in which they will be teaching. The focus on the dangerous practices is illuminating for teacher

educators to review the ethical and political dimensions of this work and the kinds of pre-service learning experiences we are providing at the university. In writing this paper the authors have realised the importance of outlining such dangers in their induction sessions with the pre-service teachers embarking on these professional experiences.

Given the focus on the active participation by pre-service teachers in this kind of work, there is a real danger that waiting and listening might be overlooked as a way to build these alliances which are informed by community ideals. The literature strongly identifies the need for non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers to listen to community members as a way of forwarding educational opportunities for students and teachers (Herbert, 2007; Osbourne, 2003; Smith, 1999). Perhaps the alliances formed as a result of the pre-service teachers engaging in deep listening to community members offer an important way pre-service teachers can have agency over the dangers outlined in this paper.

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