Australian Teacher Education Association Conference

2005

Title: **Managing diversity and difference: developing support initiatives for NESB students in teacher education programs**.

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Within the last twenty years we have witnessed the rapid changes brought about by globalization of the world's economic, political, technological and environmental systems. At the same time there has been increasing demands on teacher education (TE) programs to prepare teachers who will recognize the challenges within multicultural education settings and have the skills and expertise to work with these. In turn schools are expected to be staffed by teachers who will be able to teach for equity and diversity and interact effectively with colleagues, parents and children who are different from them in race, ethnicity, class, language and national origin.

The commodification and globalisation of education and the widespread introduction of policies informed by rhetoric of internationalisation and equity have introduced a mounting pressure on universities to successfully manage the increasingly diverse student population. However the decline in government funding to universities has made it more difficult to work with the diverse needs of students. Changes brought about by university policy and strategic directions have influenced the management of universities and have impacted on the main education business of universities. Since 1995, Commonwealth funding per university student has continually declined (NTEU, 2002). In order to overcome this shortfall, universities have been forced to adopt an entrepreneurial approach through increased commercial operations and partnership arrangements to expand their sources of funding. Many are responding by broadening their student base with full fee paying domestic and overseas students and other commercial partnership arrangements.

As a result of the globalization of education, in the twenty-first century, teaching has evolved as a profession that requires members to have higher education qualifications that ensure theoretical knowledge as well as a practically grounded expertise. Pre-service teacher education is now only available as a university degree program defined by both theory and practice that must first be accredited by the discipline's regulatory authorities. Regulating bodies such as the former Queensland Board of Teacher Registration (now known as Queensland College of Teachers clearly define the professional standards of practice that graduates are expected to meet by the time they have graduated from their pre service program. Here the emphasis is on developing graduates who will become members of the teaching profession with the unique characteristics, the knowledge, skills and attitudes required of teachers working in a multicultural society.

A complex set of interrelated factors are preventing the full realisation of this occurring because we are not encouraging or supporting the development of a teaching profession that clearly reflects the growing changes in society. While there is an increased emphasis on professional standards and accreditation at the same time the emphasis on developing a consumer-based university culture has meant that frequently university policies take precedence over professional and industry requirements. At times the teaching profession itself fails to reflect the composition of a multicultural society because of its attempts on the one hand to satisfy the standards of employing authorities and regulating bodies and on the other hand to meet the diverse needs of its clients.

In this paper I locate and examine the tensions that exist between the political agenda of the university and the development of professionalism of pre-service teachers. I question how well university policies support and reflect the professional standards and requirements of teachers in current TE programs. I describe an ongoing small-scale project introduced at a university campus that attempts to overcome some of the challenges faced by TE students who come from a Non English Speaking Background (NESB) as they negotiate their way through the demands of everyday school life during their teaching practicum.

Historically, from the beginning of the mid 1980s, extensive and complex changes to Australian universities in general, and teaching began with a series of government reviews and reports (Dawkins, 1988, 1989; Nelson, 2003; Vanstone, 1996; West, 1998). For example, Dawkin's Green and White papers (1988, 1989) fore grounded the development of mass education that led to increased university places, increased the emphasis on the economic value of higher education, and introduced the vocationalisation of higher education accompanied by corresponding industry demands on higher

education. The government of that time considered these educational changes would lead the push for economic reform. More recently, Brendan Nelson's *Our Universities: Backing Australia's future* (2003) signalled the intention of the current government to use legislation as a means for driving the cultural, educational, social and economic change they argued was necessary for the 21st century. Many of these amendments have introduced significant changes to policies, strategic directions and plans and to the governance of universities that have led to a commodifed, globalised and technologised higher education system.

The major driving force for the changes to Australian higher education has been a concern to increase full fee paying students. The importance of international students to the Australian economy is highlighted by Myton's (2002) report that in the year 2000, international students generated $3.7 billion for the Australian economy of which $2 billion went to university budgets. According to Batorowicz (1999) by the end of the 1990's Australia was the third largest exporter of education in the world after the USA and the UK. At this time international students represented 10% of the total student body (Gatfield et al., 1999). Gatfield et al. point out that the historically higher education managerialist approach on the issue of quality (that is it is the responsibility of the supply organisation to define, measure and evaluate quality standards) is now being challenged by a consumer approach which sees the market determining what quality is required. Margison and Considine (2000) argue that frequently the market, particularly for international students, is driven by a commercial and entrepreneurial spirit rather than academic excellence. The result of this is the rise of what Margison and Considine refer to as the "Enterprise University" (p.4) described as a one-dimensional institution dominated by the business of profit seeking.

The effect of globalisation on universities has been a significant growth in student numbers, increasing flexibility in course delivery and structure as well as a move to integrate students within a diverse multicultural environment. Singh (2002) claims that the importance of globalisation lies in the opportunity it has presented for active participation of students from different linguistic backgrounds whilst enabling students and academics to build a cosmopolitan identity. This has enriched the university culture itself by raising an awareness of the new skills required to negotiate these differences and diversity society in the 21st century. Globalisation has also meant that both the student and academic university population has grown in indigenous, cultural and ethnic diversity.

The changing nature of student populations has introduced with it the legislative responsibilities and commitments that Australian Universities have to fulfil in areas of equity and social justice to ensure that specifc groups that have previously been disadvantaged through past practices and policies are included in and provided for by higher education. Since 1990 five equity groups in addition to Indigenous Australians have been recognised as being disadvantaged in their access to higher education. These include people from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB) as well as people with disabilities. The groups are supported under the Higher Education Equity Programme. As a result of equity practices the student population of universities consist of a diverse range of people that reflect the diversity of the community they serve. Students are now drawn from a diverse range of ethnic, cultural and soiciocultural backgrounds. The emphasis on equity acknowledges a commitment to greater inclusiveness in higher education and this is witnessed by the plans and programs universities have developed to address the previous disadvantages. The policies of internationalisation and equity bring with them a growing number of students who either have English as their primary language or are second or third generation children from an NESB. However, these students frequently require a diverse range of learning needs. This diversity increases the complexities that are met with in developing an inclusive learning environment. It is often the case that students, in this case I refer to TE students, experience considerable difficulties meeting the requirements of their academic program. Here the requirements are in the teaching practicum, where proficiency in English language is crucial to success as practising classroom teachers.

For example, university admission policies provide an area of tension particularly in the selection of students for TE programs. Admission to this undergraduate program in universities is often based on the admission level of the applicant, target numbers and/or quotas, where admission level is the basic measure of academic merit for tertiary admission purposes determined by the relevant tertiary entrance

procedure authority. Other admission criteria may be specified, for example a pre-requisite of year 12 English. Overseas NESB applicants need to demonstrate that they have a satisfactory command of English before being considered for entry into these programs. Such admission requirements reflect the academic ability of applicants to undertake the program.

Despite students having to satisfy English language requirements before they can gain university entrance various studies have found that many NESB students experience a range of difficulties in coping with their academic program because of poor English language proficiency. For example, Ramburuth (2002) concluded from the study that English language competence might not be the sole issue. Rather there are a number of complex issues related to managing the language and learning of students within specific disciplines and subjects. Ramburuth, unsurprisingly, found that a significant number of international students scored lower in a test of English language competence and required extra support in this area. Further, those students with poor language competence tended to receive below average academic results. The major outcome of the study was the recognition of the need for an increase in strategies to assist these students in their language and learning. Although generic support services were beneficial the study concluded that students require help in learning within specific courses and disciplines. Thus, support needs to both faculty and subject specific.

Pantelides (1999) found that despite international students meeting the English language admission requirements of the university, many students discover their English language proficiency is inadequate to meet the requirements of their program. A study by Mulligan and Kirkpatrick (2000) found that fewer than one in 10 NESB students were able to understand the content and intent of their lectures very well. Of particular concern for TE students are studies that have found that students many students are experiencing difficulty understanding everyday language. Batorowicz (1999) analysed the problems faced by international and non-English speaking students, and found the main problem was that of language particularly in the area of oral language. Robertson et al. (2000) report that language comprehension and competence as well as understanding colloquial language pose the greatest problems to NESB students. Importantly it is not only those students who come from overseas that are experiencing difficulties with English language proficiency. As well students who come from migrant families also experience difficulties. Many university students have arrived in Australia as children or adults without English as their primary language. Cahill (2002) cautions that we are not responding appropriately to the needs of students from immigrant and refugee families. Nor do we respond adequately to students who are Australian born and have NESB parents. Both these cohorts of students that are growing in numbers seldom seek support in their programs. Moreover their language difficulties are hardly ever recognised and understood. Despite the policy directives universities are generally unable to value and promote cultural and linguistic diversity within the institution because the Commonwealth government is not funding programs under the multicultural umbrella. Therefore, the move towards greater internationalisation as a means of enhancing university revenue and broadening the cultural interchange and experience of both domestic and international students raises a number of concerns that to date have not been adequately addressed. Some of these concerns relate to student performance in professional practice settings. We discuss these issues in a later section. The following discussion now focuses on the importance of professional standards for the teaching profession and why these must be incorporated in curricula and relevant university policy.

At the beginning of the 21st century the Review of Teaching and Teacher Education (2003) signalled the need for further support for higher education providers offering teacher education courses. Following this reviews, Brendon Nelson's White paper, *Our Universities: Backing Australia's Future* (2003) set out the government's blueprint for reform in the higher education sector. Four key principles of sustainability, quality, equity and diversity underpin the reforms and built around these are a number of measures to reflect and support the reforms. Of particular relevance to teaching is the additional funding support to be provided by the Commonwealth to teaching which is identified as one of the areas of National Priority. The increased funding goes to institutions offering programs in teaching and is to be directed towards the enormous additional costs associated with teaching practicum. The extra funding signals an emphasis by the government on the importance it places on teaching practicum in the preservice education of teachers. In response to the current and anticipated shortage of teachers the Commonwealth government has also introduced other initiatives to attract more people into the profession. The initiatives include exemption for teaching students from HECS increases. However,

while universities are being pressured and encouraged by the government to provide increased places to a wider range of students professional bodies are demanding strict observance of standards and regulations. While there is a community expectation that graduates from accredited university teacher education programs will be competent, ethical and trustworthy in all aspects of their practice, the question is how well are the complexities of these disciplines' professional practice reflected in and supported by current university policy?

I argued earlier that the rapid economic, political, technological and environmental changes of globalisation influences the expectation that teachers will prepare children to take their place as responsible citizens in a complex and diverse world. Following this, TE programs are faced with the challenge of embracing vocational as well as traditional educational aims while TE students are expected to become both competent practitioners and knowledgeable, life long learners. The theory practice nexus is an ongoing concern for teacher pre service education, with much attention given to how well graduates are able to bridge the gap between academia and industry and "fit into the system". The nexus is achieved by offering TE programs that are not only grounded in theory but also provide students with significant and quality teaching experiences. Further, the pre service programs require that students satisfy the standards set by their profession. Key stakeholders throughout Australian states such as the Queensland Board of Teacher Registration (2002) view comprehensive industry experience for teaching as extremely valuable and essential, and consider experience central to all TE courses that receive accreditation. In addition, teachers, once registered, have a professional responsibility to maintain the standards in order to renew their licence on an annual basis.

The demand for standards at both a pre service and post service level by the relevant regulatory body follows Bruhn et al's (2002) argument. He argues that it is essential for professions to be self-policing so they have the capacity to establish expectations, evaluate the profession's contribution to society and monitor the conduct of its members. Hence they are left with the ultimate authority to govern and regulate the profession and protect the profession and the constituents it serves. The professional standards required by the Queensland Board of Teacher Registration (BTR) of graduates from TE programs reflect both a national and an international concern regarding expectations of the level of skills, knowledge and level of professionalism of the teaching profession. Thus the BTR Professional Standards for Graduates (2002) serve

> *… as a measure of accountability of the readiness of graduating teachers for potentially fulfilling teaching careers…*(and indicates)*…what graduating students will know, understand and be able to do as a result of their preservice preparation* (p.5).

The standard most relevant to the thesis of this paper states that

> *Graduating teachers will exhibit a high level of personal proficiency in oral and written language and numeracy. […]. They will demonstrate communication skills in a range of social and cultural contexts. […]*(p.6).

The important point here is that the Professional Standards ensure that the person applying for registration to teach has gained relevant qualifications, and has competency in English language. Furthermore the expectation is that

> *Graduating teachers from non-English speaking backgrounds .. (will) .. be proficient in English language at the level of 7 on each area of IELTS (International English Language Testing System)* (p.6).

The assumption is that students will reach the specified level of English proficiency by the time they finish their TE program. However as I discussed earlier many students fail practicum as well as academic courses, become disheartened because they do not receive adequate support and frequently do not complete their TE program. Thus the opportunity to enrich the teaching population with teachers from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds is lost.

If the core business of universities is to provide a quality educational product then it becomes a responsibility of the institution to support all students. In particular if universities wish to commodify education so that it is a major export item they must ensure that they support those students who come in from other countries. I argue that despite the implementation of university policies informed by equity and internationalisation they frequently run counter to ensuring that the diverse student population they attract will be offered programs that will ensure success. In what follows I elaborate on

the attempts made by a School of Education on one Queensland university campus to overcome some of the challenges that are faced when both international and local NESB students enrol in TE programs. I discuss some of the challenges and barriers that had to be dealt with and outline the ongoing program that is has evolved.

The project developed because reports over a two-year period, from 2002 to 2003 (Table 1) indicated that a number of NESB students enrolled in undergraduate TE programs (Primary teaching) in the specific School of Education frequently experienced difficulty in their teaching practicum. Most of these students had been identified as requiring support in English language proficiency. In 2002 four of the eight NESB students enrolled in a TE program failed the teaching practicum. The other four experienced difficulties such as poor behaviour management and literacy and language difficulties. The result was that a significant number of the NESB students eventually failed to complete their TE program. It appeared that only a minority of NESB students were graduating as teachers. This raised equity concerns.

Table 1
Practicum Results 2001 - 2003

Student	1/02	2/02	1/03	2/03	Result
JT #	F -2 TP		AR – 2 L & TP	AR – 3 L & TP	Continuing
NT #	F - 3				W/D
TH #			AR- 2 L & TP	P - 3	CP
KM	AR - 4	AR - 5	F – 6 TP & L/N	AR - 6	CP
DK #				F - 6	CP
YO #	F - 3	D	D	D	W/D
DS	P – 4 AR	P – 5 AR	P –6 AR	Internship	G
LA	F –5 L	P –6 AR	Internship		G
MC	AR – 5 L/N	P -6	Internship		G
SA (GE)	AR – 2 L/N	Internship			G
NL			General L/N	P – 1	CP
AC			General L/N	P-1	CP
PN # (GE)			AR – 1	AR - 2	CP

 # = International Student; P = Passed; F = Failed; AT = At Risk; WD = Withdraw; L = Language difficulties; L/N = Literacy & numeracy problems; TP = Teacher presence; GE = Graduate Entry; G = Graduated; CP = Continuing program

The needs of these students while at times specific to circumstances and pathway to university shared some commonalties. Each student experienced difficulty communicating with children because of accented English language. Further, the students had difficulty managing the culture of schooling as well as the expectations placed on them during the practicum. Each student experienced a level of 'shock' when confronted with the realities of classroom life especially with regard to behaviour

management and what at times they perceived to be a relatively noisy, demanding and 'uncontrolled' Australian classroom. Each professed a strong desire to teach and has an ardent concern for children's' welfare and development. The specific difficulties that the students experienced were usually identified in the earlier practicums. Despite many of these students receiving support in the academic component of their program it was not unusual for them not to receive the same level of support during the practicum. In fact, in some cases practicum schools refused to take a TE student if they believed that the student could have some difficulties with English language proficiency. Some schools cited reasons such as children's inability to understand the TE student which led to disruption to classroom management and complaints by teaching staff and parents. Some other schools were unwilling to take the student if that student had failed a previous practicum.

In second semester 2003 a small University Teaching Grant wasm obtained to provide support for identified NESB students. The university awards Teaching Grants with the objective of supporting innovative teaching and learning projects of up to two years duration. The objective of the project was to plan and trial a support program for NESB students during their teaching practicum through the use of supportive supervising teachers during the teaching practicum as well as the introduction of a mentoring program. At the end of 2003 an audit of identified NESB students was conducted to determine their progress during their teaching practicum. At the beginning of 2004 informal discussions were had with those students who were identified as experiencing difficulties in their practicum. They reported difficulties not only with language but also with the culture of schooling. That is, understanding the expectations of and managing classroom behaviour. Most students agreed that it would be useful to have someone to talk to other than their supervising teacher about their teaching practicum because frequently their supervising teacher did not have time to talk to them and they did not feel comfortable in approaching them.

During the 2004 an effort was made to place students in schools with supervising teachers who would support the needs of the students. However of the total number of identified NESB students who undertook a teaching practicum in 2004 a significant number either failed or were "at risk" which means they were identified by their supervising teacher as experiencing major problems in at least one area of teaching during their practicum. Of the 7 NESB students who enrolled in a practicum in first semester, one passed, three were identified as being at risk, two failed, and one. In semester two, 3 of the 4 students enrolled in a practicum. Therefore it became apparent that TE students required more support than what they received from their supervising teacher.

With this in mind a mentor who was independent of the university and the practicum schools was employed. The mentor was an ex teacher who had extensive experience working in the area of TESOL. The mentor began work with one student, AC, at the end of 2004. The student was one of a small group of first year students who had been identified by lecturers in 2003 as experiencing difficulties in spoken and written English. In second semester 2004 AC failed her third practicum. She indicated that she required more work in the area of classroom management and planning. AC also stated she was very interested in becoming a teacher and would appreciate extra help in the areas she had nominated. She agreed to become involved in the pilot mentoring project.

The mentor and AC began the project at a Primary school that had in the past worked in several successful partnerships with the School of Education. A classroom had been chosen where the class teacher was willing to have the mentor and Ac come in and observe for half an hour each week. AC and the mentor then spent half and hour outside the classroom reflecting on what had been observed. AC then went back into the class and taught a small group and assisted the classroom teacher so that she could practice techniques she had observed. AC was then asked to write her reflections on what she had seen and learnt. These reflections were then given to the mentor the following week so that the mentor as a way of revising what had happened and so the mentor could assist AC with her written expression. The routine was repeated over 5 weeks. During weeks 3, 4 and 5 AC and the mentor viewed some short videos of two graduate teachers discussing how they went about planning and teaching literacy lessons. AC and the mentor were able to discuss issues that arose regarding planning. As well one of the teachers was recorded teaching a lesson she had planned. The benefit of this was that the class was one that had many behaviour problems so this provided a rich source of discussion

for AC and the mentor. Each week the mentor reported back to the academic project leader to evaluate AC's progress each week. By the end of week 5 which was toward the end of the Primary school year it was decided to terminate the project.

At the end of the 5 weeks both AC and the mentor were individually interviewed to discuss how they perceived the program. Both believed the program had been supportive and successful. AC stated that she had learnt a lot of ideas about managing and working with small groups because most of the classroom work was organised group work. AC said:

> *I used to look for hard and complicated activities when I taught at prac.*
> *Now I've learnt that activities don't need to be hard for children to learn.*
> *They need to be related to children's prior knowledge.*

She also stated that she now had a picture of how she wanted her classroom to be. The thing she liked most about the way the class was managed was that the teacher dealt with misbehaviour in a quiet way so the rest of the class was not disturbed. AC found that the written reflection helped her with her written expression because her mentor would suggest examples of different words to use. As well it was a way that the mentor could help her with her spelling. AC said that she learnt from viewing the videos that some teachers plan around process and other teachers plan around content. She observed that a teacher needs to know both her children and what she has to teach before she can plan. For AC the main strengths of the project was having a mentor who she could ask for advice, feeling relaxed in the classroom and working with small groups where she felt she had "a teacher presence". She observed that

> *I got more from this than prac. There's a tension at prac. You're being*
> *observed. When I went on prac I stood back. It was the teacher's room. I*
> *didn't want to disturb her.*

Many of these observations indicated that AC had developed some insights and understanding about the business of teaching.

When asked what she could have been done differently during the 5 weeks AC replied

> *I wouldn't change anything. It was perfect. It was what I needed.*

AC's mentor was also enthusiastic about the project. She was of the opinion that all the activities were beneficial. However she suggested that some slight changes could be made to the content of the videos so that one they covered both literacy and numeracy lessons.she observed that AC's positive attitude as well as the friendly and efficient classroom that they observed contributed to the success of the project. She was of the opinion that other students who came into the project would require an understanding of the meaning of teacher presence so that they would know what to observe in the classroom.

In first semester 2005 the project has continued and two more students have been included. AC will repeat her third practicum and arrangements have been made for the mentor to visit her several times to discuss planning requirements and other issues that may arise. Two other students have been included in the project. PN is a graduate entry student who has experienced difficulty in each practicum during her two year program. PN is now entering her internship. She will receive at least two visits a week from the mentor for the first 4 weeks of her internship. The mentor will support her with her planning and with other issued s that may arise. The other student, RS, who will be involved in the project is enrolled in the 4 year Bachelor of Education- Primary program and is on her second practicum. This student has been referred to the program by her program convenor because of difficulties she experienced in her first year academic courses as a result of difficulties in spoken and written English. The mentor will visit RS during her practicum to ensure she understands what is required of her during practicum. As well she will ensure that RS is aware of what she needs to observe in the classroom in areas related to class management. The mentor will remain in weekly contact with the academic project leader. This will allow the needs of each student to be closely monitored and the number and nature of each of the mentor's visits to be adapted to suit individual needs.

This paper began by arguing that while the inclusion of students from NESB backgrounds acknowledges issues of equity and reflects a commitment to greater inclusiveness in higher education it is not without its problems. The small scale project I describe highlights the many of the problems and challenges that inclusivity brings. If Australia is to compete successfully in the globalised education market then many of the problems and challenges that inclusivity brings must be addressed at many levels ranging from government through to practicum schools. More government funding is required for universities to support the needs of NESB students. Universities need to carefully assess the faculty

and discipline specific needs of NESB students so that adequate resources are provided to support students. Regulatory bodies and employing authorities may need to acknowledge the value of a multicultural teaching profession by taking an increased responsibility for supporting in particular the practical component of TE programs. Finally, there must be a space for NESB students to voice their experiences so that educators can learn what is required to prepare teachers for a multicultural society.

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