

Developing Teacher Competencies in Multicultural Societies A Case of Initial Teacher Education in Australia

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Introduction

This paper explores initial teacher education programs in Australia and clarifies the features of curriculum frameworks from the perspective of student diversity. Increasingly multicultural societies have an impact on education and student achievement. Educational challenges posed by family background, socio-economic context and migration status are not only strongly linked to student performance, but they determine student performance over and above the school's influence (OECD, 2010, p.13). This trend requires teachers to develop their ability to acknowledge individual student differences and accommodate their needs, as teacher quality and their practice have a great influence on students' academic achievement (e.g., Ramsey, 2000; Darling-Hammond, 2000; OECD, 2005). Accordingly, teacher education needs to be re-conceptualized and reformed.

This is particularly true in Australia. The country has accepted many immigrants following the national policy of multiculturalism, and consequently there have been many people living in the society who have different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. However, the diversity in its society, originally brought by immigrants, is now also heavily influenced by other factors, including gender, disability, religion, socio-economic status, and geographical locations. As such, it is now imperative that Australian school teachers develop competencies to deal with increasing student diversity in their classrooms.

In Australia, each state and territory government has jurisdiction over their respective school education system and the teaching profession. Nevertheless, all state and territory governments are now promoting national consistency of teacher registration and accreditation of initial teacher education programs, under the auspices of Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), which is a national body established in 2010 and funded by Australian Governments. However, at the time of the study, there is as yet no unified national system implemented. Therefore, in this paper, the state of Queensland serves as the focus, which has been continuously undertaking proactive reforms in school education over the past decades and teacher education is one of the state's key priorities.

This study has two research questions. The first question is how the initial teacher

education curriculum in Australia is constructed. And the second one is what aspects of diversity issues are incorporated in the curriculum and how they are studied. In this paper, the author, after reviewing some literature on teacher education, explores the state's guidelines for the approval of pre-service teacher education programs, which officially provides the recommended framework of programs in the state and is most powerful determining factor of curriculum development. Then, the curriculum of one university will be examined as a case study in order to analyze its constituent principles from the view point of diversity, which will help to clarify its features.

Literature Review

As for educating teachers for diversity, Zeichner (1993) identifies 16 key elements of effective teacher education, indicating that students are helped to develop a clearer sense of their own ethnic and cultural identities, they are helped to examine their attitudes toward other ethno-cultural groups, and they are taught various procedures by which they can gain information about the communities represented in their classrooms. The effectiveness of those elements are verified by many subsequent studies, and they suggest some better ways of developing teacher education curriculum.

Villegas *et al.* (2008) examine how teacher education in the U.S. has responded to student diversity over 50 years. Within the study, Sleeter offers a thoughtful analysis of the preparation of white teachers for diverse students. She states that, at the pre-service level, teacher education programs commonly attend to the theory-practice linkage through university-based coursework and school-based learning experiences. In addition to these, it is suggested that teacher education prepares sites of out-of-school cross-cultural community-based learning experiences. And she states that these sites offer different kinds of knowledge and experiential resources, which have the potential to interrupt racist attitudes and understandings, when intentionally connected (p. 563)

Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005) state that beginning teachers must be prepared to teach a diverse student population, and they must be prepared to take into account the different experiences and academic needs of a wide range of students as they plan and teach. They also identify knowledge that beginning teachers need to acquire, which includes how to tailor their curriculum and instruction, how to find out more about communities, families, and individual students, and how to examine their own cultural assumptions to understand the mechanisms that shape their starting points for practice. Darling-Hammond also identifies some features of effective teacher education programs; a common core

curriculum grounded in knowledge of development, learning, subject matter pedagogy, and assessment, taught in the context of practice; well defined standards of practice and performance used to guide the design and assessment of coursework and clinical work; extended clinical experiences that are interwoven with coursework and are carefully mentored; strong relationships between universities and schools; use of case study methods, teacher research, performance assessments, and portfolio examination that relate teachers' learning to classroom practice (Darling-Hammond and Baratz-Snowden, 2005).

In Australia, Hickling-Hudson (2004) argues that most teacher education courses, across the globe, are still founded on a model of cultural hegemony characterized by a narrowly Western ideology shaping the content, structures and processes of learning. She states that preparing teachers for cultural diversity is a centrally important goal of teacher education in the context of the harrowing ethnic conflicts and the changing ethnoscaples of our globalizing era. And she gives some comments on strategies in the U.S. and Australia that could improve multicultural content and pedagogy in the teacher education degree.

In the multinational research, OECD (2010) extensively examines teacher preparation in many countries to identify how teachers are prepared for the increasing diversity of their classrooms. The research explores the concepts underlying diversity in various contexts and finds the common challenges and benefits which countries are currently experiencing in their teacher education. And the findings of the research helps strengthen initial and continuing teacher education to give teachers the tools required to effectively respond to their diverse students.

Based on the findings of the preceding studies, the remainder of this paper considers pre-service teacher education in Queensland.

Pre-service Teacher Education in Queensland

Currently there are 10 teacher education institutions in Queensland. All persons employed as teachers in Queensland schools are required by law to be registered with the Queensland College of Teachers (QCT), a statutory authority primarily responsible for the registration of teachers. The widely accepted method of registration is to complete the teacher education programs approved by QCT, and those who have finished the approved programs are required to be registered.

QCT has developed *The Program Approval Guidelines for Pre-service Teacher*

Education (the Guidelines), which describes the essential components of the programs in order for them to be accepted by the authority. *The Guidelines* are intended to be used to design, review, and implement teacher education programs for the purpose of registration. That is, *the Guidelines* should be a key determining factor informing the curricula.

The Guidelines regulate that pre-service teacher education programs are equivalent to at least four years of full-time academic study and include professional studies amounting to the equivalent of not less than one year of full-time academic study. Programs consist of professional studies in education, discipline studies, and include embedded professional experiences. The embedded professional experiences are not less than 100 days' professional experience, with a minimum of 80 days' supervised professional experiences in schools and other equivalent educational settings (QCT, 2011). *The Guidelines* also require for graduates to understand federal and state policy initiatives, such as meeting the needs of Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and the individual learning needs of students of a non-English speaking background. *The Guidelines* just provide the outlines of the programs, and there are no specific subjects or credit numbers regulated. Universities have great autonomy in the design and delivery of curriculum and pedagogy content.

The Guidelines include *Professional Standards for Queensland Teachers (The Standards)* at graduate level, which reflect the state's mission for teacher education and outline the capabilities that graduating teachers should possess in order to start their career as teachers. Graduating teachers are required to develop a wide ranging professional and disciplinary knowledge base and skills within the context of a rapidly changing society, all of which are necessary for effective beginning teachers.

The Standards consist of ten categories and each standard comprises a set of practice, knowledge and values statements. The title of each standard is a concise action-oriented statement of a key aspect of teachers' work. The practice statements focus on how teachers apply their understandings about learners, the curriculum and teaching and learning in working with students, their families and colleagues. The knowledge statements identify the body of knowledge that underpins effective practice and the values statements describe the behaviors that communicate the qualities valued by teachers and schools (QCT, 2006). The each standard (STD) is as follows:

- STD1: Design and implement engaging and flexible learning experiences for individuals and groups

- STD2: Design and implement learning experiences that develop language, literacy and numeracy
- STD3: Design and implement intellectually challenging learning experience
- STD4: Design and implement learning experiences that value diversity
- STD5: Assess and report constructively on student learning
- STD6: Support personal development and participation in society
- STD7: Create and maintain safe and supportive learning environments
- STD8: Foster positive and productive relationships with families and the community
- STD9: Contribute effectively to professional teams
- STD10: Commit to reflective practice and ongoing professional renewal

The Standards cluster around three key facets of teachers' work. The first cluster [STD1-STD5] focuses on teaching and learning and the teacher's role. The second cluster [STD6-STD9] highlights the way in which effective teachers build relationships, both within and beyond the school. And the third cluster [STD10] underlines the commitment of the professional to reflective practice, professional renewal and ongoing contribution to a vibrant profession. While each standard highlights a distinct aspect of professional practice, it is important to recognize that the standards are interdependent and interconnected. Similarly, within each standard, the practice and knowledge components are interdependent (QCT, 2006).

In the cluster of teaching and learning, STD4 specifically focuses on diversity and requires teachers to understand that a variety of factors impact on the world view of individuals, such as gender, ethnicity, language, religious beliefs, socio-economic circumstances, and special needs. Teachers are required to identify individual learning needs and apply strategies which are appropriate for teaching students with particular needs. The standard also requires teachers to plan and implement activities that take account of the backgrounds, characteristics and learning styles of students. Teachers should have a sound knowledge of contemporary evidence-informed theories and research on teaching and learning, policies on diversity, ICT, and Australian Indigenous culture and history.

In addition to STD4, every other standard also contains multicultural or diversity aspects and requires teachers to address student diversity, being 'needs' as a key term. For example, STD1 refers to the different learning experiences for individuals, and requires to employ a range of teaching, learning and assessment strategies, which should meet their differences. Teachers are required to have knowledge about individual student's learning needs, including those with disabilities and learning difficulties, gifted and talented. STD2 refers to identifying the language,

literacy and numeracy needs of students and to intervene with appropriate strategies and support services. STD3 requires applying scaffolding techniques to assist students to achieve individual learning goals. STD5, which refers to assessment and reporting, requires adjusting assessment procedures so that students have different ways of demonstrating their learning progress and achievement. In STD6, there is a description of ‘supporting students in developing personal identity, values, a positive self-image, health and well-being’, and in STD7, safe and supportive learning environments in which any student can participate in learning are highlighted. STD8 refers to the positive and productive relationships with families and the community and STD9 refers to contributing to professional teams. The last standard, STD10, refers to reflective practice and ongoing professional renewal. These are all vital for teachers to deal with student diversity (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Darling-Hammond *et al*, 2005; Groundwater-Smith, 2007; Ramsay, 2000).

Teacher education institutions develop curricula which connote the content of the above-mentioned standards and guidelines, in order for their programs to be approved. In the next section, a curriculum offered by the Queensland University of Technology will be explored.

Curriculum of Bachelor of Education at Queensland University of Technology

Queensland University of Technology (QUT) is in Brisbane, the capital city of Queensland, and is the biggest university in the state, with nearly 40,000 students enrolled. It is a comparatively new university established in 1989. However, the teacher education there has the longest history in the state, as the faculty of education is traced back to the first teacher training college established in 1914. There are many teacher education programs set at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. Here, Bachelor of Education curriculum will be examined as it is the most common undergraduate program and has the largest number of students enrolled.

The Faculty of Education extensively redesigned their Bachelor of Education programs in 2003, as they conceived teacher education programs needed to change in order to correspond to Queensland’s rapidly changing society. The new programs value equity and diversity, and pursue social justice, so they accept the students’ different learning pathways to the outcomes (QUT, 2003, p.5). The university set *The Professional Standards* of QCT as learning outcomes of the program and students subsequently achieve all the standards through the program.

The curriculum consists of several types of subjects, which are all connected to one

another. Students take more than 32 subjects over the course of 4 years (Table1). Discipline studies are studied in the first three years, and the study focus gradually moves to professional studies. The subjects are set in systematic order from an introductory to a more professional phase. In particular, the ‘Teaching and Learning Studies’ subjects are sequentially arranged from 1 to 5 and they are closely connected to the Field Studies subjects (practicum). There are also many elective subjects, which allow pre-service teachers to develop expertise in teaching students from diverse groups.

Table 1 Curriculum Framework of Bachelor of Education (Secondary)

	Study Area	1st Semester	2nd Semester
1	Professional studies	Learning networks	Teaching and Learning Studies 1 : Teaching in New Times 【Field Research 10 days】
	Discipline studies	X×2 Y×1	X×1 Y×2
2	Professional studies	Teaching and Learning Studies 2 : Development and learning	Cultural Studies: Indigenous Education 【Field Research 10 days】 or Extension Discipline Subject
	Field Experience	Field Studies 1 【20days】	
	Discipline studies	Curriculum Studies1 X Curriculum Studies1 Y	X×2 Y×1
3	Professional studies	Elective or Extension Discipline Subject	Teaching and Learning Studies3: Practicing Education
	Field Experience		Field Studies 2 【20days】
	Discipline studies	X×1 Y×2	Curriculum Studies2 X Curriculum Studies2 Y
4	Professional studies	Teaching and Learning Studies4: Inclusive Education	Teaching and Learning Studies5: Professional Work of Teachers
	Field Experience	Field Studies 3 【20days】	Field Studies 4 【20days】 Internship 【20days】
	Discipline studies	Curriculum Studies3 X Curriculum Studies3 Y	Elective or Cultural Studies: Indigenous Education 【Field Research 10days】

X and Y mean the discipline areas selected by each student. 【days of school experience】

Source: Queensland University of Technology, *Student Handbook 2011*.

In ‘Teaching and Learning Studies 1: Education in new Times’, pre-service teachers develop an insightful and research-based conceptual framework, drawn from social theory and cultural studies, so that they may respond to the changing world. In ‘Teaching and Learning Studies 2: Development and learning’, pre-service teachers promote their own developments as life-long and autonomous learners. They also develop themselves as facilitators to promote children’s development. ‘Teaching and Learning Studies 3: practicing Education’ provides a sociological and cultural studies framework which provides an insightful explanation of how education is constructed and organized. It is the subject which contains a range of multicultural issues, and aims to develop competencies to address diversity from socio-cultural perspective. ‘Teaching and Learning Studies 4: Inclusive Education’ aims to enhance pre-service teachers’ understanding and appreciation of diversity, and they learn to engage in inclusive teaching. In the final subject of the series, ‘Teaching and Learning Studies 5: Professional Work of Teachers’, pre-service teachers share the responsibility for shaping their beginning career learning through a process of professional induction (QUT, 2011).

The Field Studies start in the second year and are distributed into 5 blocks of 20 days each. Pre-service teachers are assigned applied curriculum tasks, which are aligned to the subjects of both curriculum studies and professional studies, and as such academic subjects and field studies are linked to each other. The applied curriculum tasks are essential for integrating theory into practice. Pre-service teachers are encouraged to reflect upon the theory studied, while they engage in practice. Field studies are supervised by practicing teachers, but university academics are also involved and support the pre-service teachers, especially those deemed to be ‘at risk’. Pre-service teachers are assessed by practicum reports and the applied curriculum tasks. Internships are also mandatory for all pre-service teachers, which is set in the final year of the program.

The Standards are incorporated into each subject of professional studies as learning outcomes, including field studies subjects, and students are assessed with reference to the standards. For example, the learning outcomes of ‘Learning Network’, which is set in the first year and provides pre-service teachers an introduction to the application of Information Communication Technology across a wide range of contexts are as follows; 1) design and implement learning experiences that develop language and literacy and that demonstrate a sound fundamental knowledge of language forms and features and textual structures various texts [STD 2], 2) gather, form and critique knowledge from a variety of sources, but particularly from digital sources [STD3], 3) retrieve, evaluate and present information using appropriate technologies and demonstrate personal proficiency [STD9 / STD10], 4) build

consultative, collaborative and critical relationships that are embedded in learning networks [STD9], and 5) analyze professional learning networks across a range of contexts [STD6 / STD10]. It is vital for pre-service teachers to attain all of these standards in order to get the course credits. Therefore, this standards-based curriculum enables pre-service teachers to demonstrate all standards by the end of the course.

Features of pre-service teacher education curriculum

From the examination, the following features are identified about the curriculum. Firstly, multicultural or diversity issues are incorporated in each subject and pre-service teachers gain the competencies to address diversity through the learning of each subject. *The Program Approval Guidelines*, which formally regulate teacher education programs, is the primary factor determining curricula, and *the Standards*, which embrace the state's mission of teacher education outlining the minimum capabilities graduating teachers should attain, function as the learning outcomes of teacher education. Universities set *The Standards* in the learning outcomes of each subject and develop the curriculum in the way pre-service teachers gradually attain the standards. As such, pre-service teachers gain competencies required to address diversity throughout the curriculum.

Secondly, the curriculum adopts "Integration Approach" regarding diversity. There is at least one core subject set in the curriculum which focuses on diversity, and the other subjects also embrace diversity issues, including professional experiences. Furthermore, there are many elective subjects, in which students can expand their knowledge about diversity according to their interests and concerns. This approach enables diversity issues to permeate throughout curriculum and pre-service teachers to acquire multilateral competencies to deal with student diversity (Taylor, 1995). And it should be effective for contemporary teachers' practice, as in rapidly changing societies diversity issues are becoming more and more complex and multi-layered.

Thirdly, the curriculum is constructed with coherence and sequence. It is composed of three domains, discipline subjects, professional subjects and professional experience. Most subjects are compulsory and aligned with each other. They are set from introductory to higher-level study, and also from general to more professional study. Pre-service teachers normally take subjects in the designated order, and in this way they can develop their competencies in an effective sequence. The first year is an orientation phase and students develop their knowledge about discipline areas and understand the basic concept of education. They are also notified of *The Standards* which they should attain through the program.

Information Communication Technology skills should also be acquired in this phase. The second and third years are the period of enhancement, and pre-service teachers specifically focus on teaching and learning. They deepen their knowledge about the discipline areas and integrate it into pedagogies and curriculum. Education is explored in terms of it being a social institution as well. They participate intensively in field experiences and complete discipline studies by the third year. The final year is a transition phase for pre-service teachers and they develop highly professional and practical competencies. They also strengthen their ethical awareness as professional educators. Through these processes pre-service teachers attain whole standards and establish their own identity as professional teachers.

Fourthly, professional experiences are the core of the curriculum and function to integrate theory into practice. Although the integration of theory and practice in teacher education is imperative, they are often disconnected (Darling-Hammond and Baratz-Snowden, 2005). In Australia, the practical competence of teachers is highly valued and pre-service teachers are encouraged to acquire as much practical knowledge and skills as they can before they go into teaching. However, they should concurrently learn education theory as well, as effective practice has to be grounded in a solid theoretical underpinning. In Queensland 100 days of professional experiences (practicum) are required, and in the case of QUT they are divided into 5 blocks which are set in a consistent and systematic way, linking with theory subjects. Pre-service teachers are assigned to verify the theory through practice. Each practicum presents specific learning outcomes, and pre-service teachers clearly recognize what competencies they should develop. Throughout professional experiences they compile the investigation of theory they have studied, which leads to a synthesis of the theory and practice. As such, they gradually construct their own philosophy of teaching.

Conclusion

This study examined pre-service teacher education curriculum in Australia, focusing on the case of Queensland. The curriculum encompasses professional studies in education, discipline studies and embedded professional experiences. One or more subjects embrace elements of diversity issues as core components, such as cultural and/or linguistic diversity, special needs, and socio-economic backgrounds, depending on the educational philosophy of each university. Elements of diversity issues are also embraced in other subjects, and there is usually some overlap which connects subjects with one another. Professional experiences are regarded as the core of the programs and are tightly integrated with university-based learning. Consequently, the notion of diversity permeates all domains of study and students gradually develop their competencies to address diversity throughout the curriculum. The findings of this

study suggest effective methodologies of providing teacher education students with competencies to address student diversity.

Today's world is experiencing rapid change socially, economically, and culturally, brought about by recent globalization and the emergence of new information and communications technologies. This change affects school education and teachers' daily practice, one aspect of which is expanding student diversity. Teachers should utilize the benefits of the diversity that students bring to their schools and classrooms. They are charged with helping students develop the knowledge and skills for life in this complex, diverse and uncertain society. This applies to Australia as well. In the rapidly changing society of Australia, diversity factors are also changing and growing more complex and multi-layered. Australian teachers are required to respond flexibly to this change and develop competencies to acknowledge individual student differences and needs. Accordingly, teacher education institutions have redefined and reformed their programs. The result of the case study shows that the initial teacher education curriculum is constructed in the way that pre-service teachers can develop their competencies step by step to address student diversity. However, teacher education in the country is still facing a range of ongoing challenges. That is the reason all state and territory governments are now collaboratively doing reforms and seeking a national approach in the teacher registration and accreditation of initial teacher education programs, which is regarded as a key factor in improving teacher quality.

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