

Getting Better Teachers in the Bush

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This chapter explores concepts of identity, difference and disadvantage through a self-study that focuses on preparing teachers to teach for diversity. I consider influences of my rural, working class background in a homogeneous setting as it shapes my professional identity as a teacher educator. I begin the self-study by reflecting on my early teaching career and work as a language and literacy teacher educator at a regional university where I began to carefully consider the discursive resources that students in regional and rural settings bring to teacher education. A decade on, in a different but somewhat similar university, I am still grappling with ways of raising awareness of diversity and discussing issues of race, social class, gender and ability and implications for teaching and learning. In this chapter I use the process of self-study to examine my own practice as a teacher educator using the implications from my doctoral studies as a focus.

Circumstances of Being ‘Rural’

I was born and raised in a small farming community in rural Victoria, a post-World War Two child born into a family of three generations of rural white Australians who were born, raised and educated in similar circumstances. Mootown [a pseudonym, as are all place names in this chapter] had a population of around 200 and the majority of families ran very small sheep and mixed farming properties of under 1,000 acres and supplemented the family income through outside work such as bee keeping (my father’s primary source of outside income), droving sheep, shearing

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and shed hand duties, wood cutting, hunting foxes and rabbits and laboring on larger district farms and vineyards. Similar to 'other working class families we supplemented our livelihood by, 'living off the land,' growing our own vegetables and meat, and 'making do' in tough times by harvesting what was available on the land such as wood and eucalyptus leaves for fuel and oil, and fish, wild rabbits, ducks and kangaroos for food. People often shared resources and skills, as 'work in kind' or on a bartering system, out of necessity in order to remain self-sufficient and to provide the best that they could for their families. It was a tight knit community of people, many with shared ancestries, and, due to geographic isolation and constrained economic times, most families had limited experiences of life outside Mootown. Resembling most rural small towns in the area at that time, the town also lacked any ethnic diversity in the population. Community experiences were centered on maintaining stable community foundations: school, churches, community hall, cemetery, recreation reserve and local government. Now, reflecting on this particular circumstance of 'being rural' in a small, somewhat isolated rural town in Victoria, I gain further understandings of myself as 'rural' and some of the factors that have impacted on my identity and practice as a teacher educator. I am partly, a product of generational rural working class circumstances from a largely homogeneous community.

My primary school was a small rural school of between 20 and 25 students from a few local well-known families, who had lived in the rural district for many years. The school played a vital role in this community and parental involvement in school matters, from working bees, fund raising, ground improvements to keen audiences and participants at school concerts, sports, art and craft days, nature walks and bird watching, was very strong. In my early life, one aspect of 'being rural' was a connection to community and this perceived sense of community was positive as the links between school, home and community supported me personally and socially.

Mr. Illot was my teacher for the duration of primary school. He lived across the road from the school with his wife, and raised eight children for the term of his appointment at the school. He was well respected as a teacher and as a member of the community and regularly engaged in cultural and social events of the town. Cultural routines and activities for 'Mootown kids' included: mid-week netball and football practice in the winter months, tennis and cricket practice in the summer, and competitions with other small town teams on the weekends; piano practice and tap dancing classes at the local hall; school and homework; bike riding, fishing and rabbiting; and farm chores. The school served an important role as a center of social activity and cultural meaning, helping maintain local traditions and particular identities of rural communities (Theobald and Wood 2010). I had a sense that Mr. Illot knew me well as he would incorporate our home and community interests and experiences in school activities and build on what we brought to the classroom. Through a perceived close teacher-learner relationship my early schooling was memorable and positive in this small rural school. Now on reflection it is difficult for me to question this romanticized construction of my early life in Mootown, both in and out of school, as I still see it as supportive and comfortable.

Generally, I was considered a ‘bright and enthusiastic student’ with a strong will to succeed, according to school reports. With 20 or so students allocated to seven different grade levels in one room, the implementation of classroom routines and management may have been problematic, but from memory it was surprisingly orderly. Students didn’t generally talk over each other during class time or participate in the ‘wrong’ task, allocated to higher or lower grades. This, however, was my weakness, as I could not resist answering any question regardless of the grade to which it was directed. While there were some competitive aspects of this arrangement, Mr. Illot treated this with good humor and firmness, pointing out that others needed a chance to answer and I should wait until the question was directed to my grade. Looking back it seemed as if he was a ‘good teacher’ although until now I had not considered any personal and social concerns he may have had in relation to teaching in the same rural school for several years (Sharplin 2002).

I was raised by my maternal grandmother who lived nearby, reportedly largely due to the size of the family home and limited space for my father’s sibling to move in after the death of my paternal grandparents. I grew up with strong discipline and routines, and was encouraged to learn to be independent quickly. My Nana taught me to be ‘true to myself’, ‘make my own way in life,’ ‘not to depend on others (meaning men),’ ‘to study hard,’ and to ‘get a good job.’ I developed a strong sense of self-understanding and identity, and to be grounded in ‘where I came from,’ but to strive for a ‘better life,’ a life outside the rural area and to see and experience the world with all the diversity it offered. I think she viewed a lot of ‘rural life’ as unsophisticated and monotonous as I can remember her annoyance when she would listen to *Dad and Dave* or *Life With Dexter* on the radio when rural characters were portrayed as backward and somewhat stupid, and gender stereotypes were frequently played out in the plots. Most of all, I think she objected to the slow talking ‘uncultured’ Australian speech, and some of the characters in these programs who were dimwitted with little ambition or sophistication. She was partly resistant to the rural stereotyping and humor derived by making rural people the butt of jokes, but the radio was always on in our house, for entertainment, ‘company’ and connection with the outside world. These kinds of shows delivered negative rural messages and imagery through the use of humor (Schafft and Youngblood Jackson 2010).

From Rural to Regional

It was a natural progression for students from Mootown Primary School, and other rural schools in the area, to travel to the closest regional town to attend the secondary public school. Throughout my schooling I was encouraged by my grandmother to pursue the best education I could and, to this end, she scrimped and saved her government pension to pay for as many opportunities she could to extend my experiences educationally, culturally and socially. I remember how excited, and slightly anxious, I was to participate in a school trip interstate. It was partly sponsored by the Masonic Lodge, who supported ‘needy’ kids and partly funded by my

grandmother's pension. This was part of my transition and 'natural progression' from farm life to the wider world with all its diversity. From these experiences I learned that if I wanted the best of anything I needed to go outside the rural community to find it.

My siblings and I attended one of the two government secondary schools of around 600 students. One school was for those considering a 'professional' vocation and the other for students entering 'trade areas' of the workforce and my grandmother chose the high school because she hoped I would gain employment as 'a professional'. Throughout secondary schooling I was encouraged to 'do something with my life', which implicitly meant furthering my education, as moving back to work on the farm was an option for the boys in my family but girls were encouraged to find a job or a husband.

Moving from a small rural primary school to a much larger regional secondary school was difficult to begin with. I knew the small number of Mootown kids who had left primary school before me but I didn't know any students in my year level. In addition, I got the impression I was a 'country kid' who was a little out of touch with modern trends in appearance and demeanor. I was also placed in remedial English and Math classes for a term, which was puzzling to me as I wasn't aware that I was behind other students throughout primary school. By the end of secondary schooling my learned belief was that, if I wanted the best of anything, I needed to go away from the isolated rural community to find it.

Two years after me, my younger brother, and then 2 years after him my youngest brother, were also placed in 'catch-up' or remedial classes. Many years later, and on several occasions since, my brothers and I have spoken of our fond memories of Mootown primary school, but we've also discussed the 'problems' of being educated in a small town. Fond memories of close bonds with families and friends and our teacher were mixed with bewilderment over our perceived 'substandard education.' This links with stereotypes that being rural is partly deficient and the condition of living in a rural area creates deficiencies of various kinds, particularly with respect to education (Theobald and Wood 2010, p. 17).

For my brothers, who still live and are raising their families in Mootown working the family farm, now a vineyard, the problem didn't go away. Both brothers were on the local school council for several years when their kids attended primary school and they were determined to give their kids better opportunities than they perceived they had themselves. Many years later, in a conversation about our early schooling, one brother recalled a secondary teacher at a parent teacher interview, labeling his eldest son as 'slow' and explaining that this was common because, 'most kids who come from Mootown need support of some kind'. During such discussions my brothers would argue and probe and demand some answers from me, after all I was training teachers so what the hell was I doing about it? If I had been doing my job, '...there would be better teachers in 'the bush', who helped the 'slow kids'. I have reflected on these words many times throughout my professional life as, on the one hand experiences of living in Mootown had been a positive experience, but on the other hand it was deficient with respect to education and exposure to diversity. Factors impacting on deficiencies related to peoples' life experiences, which may be

limited due to isolation, as well as factors related to schooling, such as a lack of material and human resources.

In this chapter, I will reflect on the ways that my professional path has intersected with my goals to improve my practice in teaching about teaching. At the time of writing this self-study I had returned to teacher education after several years of working with teachers in rural settings and the self-study was an opportunity for me to, once again, ‘... grasp the sense of excitement’ (Loughran and Northfield 1998, p. 8) at improving my professional practice as a teacher educator. As a doctoral candidate at my previous university in Goldridge just over 10 years ago I had begun to examine ways of preparing largely monocultural pre-service teachers for teaching diverse students. A focus for my doctoral studies was what students brought to teacher education and the meanings they were making of their early teacher education experiences yet I had only just begun to reflect on my own practice and what I bring to teacher education. The self-study was an opportunity to ‘practice what I preach’ (Loughran and Northfield 1998, p. 7) and through interactions with my previous work, literature and colleagues I aimed to better align my teaching intents with my teaching actions (Loughran 2007).

In the sections that follow, I will retroactively reflect on particular phases of my professional career, describe how these experiences led me to my doctoral study, and then I will use the findings of my doctoral dissertation to reflect on my past and current professional decisions and practices. I am using the process of autobiographical writing in this self-study in order to inform the ways my past experiences shape how I now prepare teachers for diverse student populations.

Teaching in Regional and Rural Areas

Like many rural working class females who completed their secondary education at that time, I went on to attend teacher’s college as a ‘bonded’ preservice teacher in the nearest provincial city with a training college. In exchange for a small government funded studentship and course fees, ‘bonded’ students were required to teach in rural and regional public schools for 3 years in any location in Victoria. For many working class young people, especially girls, this was the only way to gain access to tertiary education.

I graduated 3 years later and began teaching in a rural school, determined to be the best rural teacher I could. I spent the next 15 years of my teaching and professional life in small schools in and around a large provincial city in regional Australia. My professional experience involved 8 years as a primary and junior secondary school teacher and 5 years as a literacy and numeracy curriculum consultant for Catholic schools in regional and rural towns. In the role of curriculum consultant I worked with teams of teachers in the region to plan, implement and evaluate curriculum and policy changes within school and system educational settings. I undertook this work with a firm commitment to provide access to quality professional development through a model of teacher change which valued partnerships between

teacher/practitioner and curriculum consultant/researcher through collaborative research and action research projects involving reflection, decision making, implementation and further reflection (Carr and Kemmis 1983; Elliot 1984; Shon 1983). Central to the process of professional development was valuing teachers' prior knowledge and understandings of language and literacy learning and teaching, and literacy learners, and providing ongoing stimulus and support, or coaching, for teachers in order to facilitate change (Joyce and Showers 1982; Showers 1985). Informed by research and further study on 'teachers and change' (Johnson 1989), I undertook this work with an understanding that there are various ways teachers come to interpret, understand and respond to change proposals, because their actions were mediated by their past experiences, prior knowledge, socio-cultural backgrounds and 'professional growth states' (Joyce et al. 1983; Rowe 1992). As I now reflect on this work with rural teachers and professional development through coaching I am aware of how it has shaped my practices in preparing pre-service teachers.

Working as a Teacher Educator in a Regional University

I commenced the role as a language and literacy teacher educator at Goldridge University with a belief that preservice teachers' past experiences, prior knowledge and competencies, and cultural and linguistic resources mediated the ways in which they would come to understand, interpret and respond to teacher education. Therefore, my university pedagogical practices needed to value, affirm and utilize students' identities, past experiences and prior knowledge and also challenge them to examine and reconstruct what they knew in coming to know teaching. This then implied a certain teacher education process and pedagogy which was characterized by personal reflection and critical analysis of educational theories and practices. If I aimed to model the kind of teaching I hoped teachers would engage in – teaching that is based on the idea that their own students construct knowledge – then this implied a certain kind of teaching. Rather than passive listening, teaching must actively engage students in reflection, critical thinking, analysis, inquiry and debate.

I worked as a language and literacy teacher educator and researcher for the next 15 years and my work was self-reflexive and filled with conjecture and detours. I constantly grappled with the difficulties I was having in raising issues of diversity and of the notion of education as a site to value and cultivate diversity and address inequities. In this work I was reminded of the inequities in literacy outcomes for rural isolated, ethnically diverse, disadvantaged and indigenous student populations, as evidenced by various standardized tests, and I continued to be troubled by my brother's plea to 'get some better teachers in the bush'. Changing conceptions of the nature of language and literacy, and what it meant to be literate, changes in school language and literacy curriculum and programs (Lo Bianco and Freebody 2001), and the preparation of teachers to teach literacy in schools categorized as 'disadvantaged' and 'multicultural' also shaped the decisions I made.

The students in the teacher education program at Goldridge University remained largely ethnically homogeneous and could be described as 'Anglo and Celtic Australian'. In many ways, we had shared identities. The majority shared the positives of being rural, although a few of them saw their experience as debilitating in terms of experiences and opportunities as the following student explained:

I came from a small town called Appleton, do ya know it? God, I thought Appleton was the centre (sic) of the earth; I'd never been anywhere else. It's like you live there all your life and you get buried there in the cemetery, it's that kind of town. Do ya know what I mean? Thank God I managed to get out. If you were like my family you never went very far for most of your life. (Hope-Rowe 2003, p. 249).

My experience as a teacher had been with largely homogeneous populations of students and my experience of preparing teachers for diverse students was a reflection of my professional and lived experiences in rural settings. My view of rural as 'deficient' was fore fronted in these experiences. Therefore, I faced the problem that many teacher educators do. How do we as teacher educators prepare teachers for diverse school populations when we ourselves have limited direct experience?

Similar to other mainstream teacher educators, I believed I was doing important work, and that this attention to diversity was largely uncharted terrain in universities with largely homogeneous student populations and teaching staff (Cochran-Smith 1995; Epstein 1993; O'Shannessy 1996; Rosenberg 1997). However, teacher educators who have undertaken this work are well aware that there are no ready-made or easy answers and the only certainty may be, '... uncertainty about how and what to say, whom and what to have students read and write, about who can teach whom, who can speak for whom, and who has the right to speak at all about the possibilities and pitfalls of promoting a discourse about race and teaching in pre-service education' (Cochran-Smith 1995, p. 546). In addition, while it may be possible to raise students' awareness, or to enhance their dispositions for teaching in diverse settings, such work barely begins to address the problem of preparing them to successfully teach children with diverse cultural and linguistic resources and to address disadvantage. However, when I began to research my own practice in 1998 for my doctoral thesis it was not with a 'corrective' attitude, rather I sought to examine my understanding of the perspectives of a cohort of primary preservice teachers in order to recognize how their past experiences, prior knowledge, attitudes and competencies may have mediated how they responded to teacher education.

My doctoral research examined the ways in which identity, difference and cultural diversity were written about and talked about by a group of second year preservice teachers in the Bachelor of Education (Primary) Degree course. The research entailed reading a range of educational texts concerned with identity, difference and cultural diversity: academic publications, policy and media documents, university documents, autobiographical writings and interview transcripts. In my doctoral research, I adopted a discursive approach (Foucault 1979) as I was interested not just in linguistic forms but contexts in which linguistic forms are used. I examined the discursive resources (verbal, interactional and nonverbal) of the particular group of students in my class and the resources that were made available through the course assignments, texts, and assessments as well as the general university experience.

The primary unit of analysis of identities and difference, and cultural diversity in particular, was discourse. Discourse is about what can be said and thought, how it can be said and who can speak, when, and with what authority (Hall 1992).

The genesis of the study for my doctoral thesis was partly personal experience of many years of living and working in regional and rural areas in Victoria that, while some changes have occurred in more recent years, have remained largely ethnically homogeneous populations that can be described as ‘Anglo and Celtic Australian’. I had worked with teachers, principals and schools system administrators in the region for many years and continued to have ongoing involvement in teacher professional development and programs for at-risk students (Country Education Project 1994; Prain et al. 1992). While a teacher educator as a graduate student in the regional university of Goldridge, I had developed what were essentially ‘hunches’ about preservice teachers’ and teachers’ lack of awareness and concern for issues of socio-cultural and linguistic diversity and implications for teaching and learning.

Preservice Teachers’ Discursive Constructions of Diversity

In the language and literacy education course that provided the focus for my doctoral study, my colleagues and I aimed to raise students’ awareness and challenge their assumptions when considering the needs of learners and the selection of teaching resources and approaches. In my teaching across 4 years of the Primary Education Degree at Goldridge, I claimed to present students with various theories and approaches to language and literacy learning and to assist them to develop a repertoire of skills and techniques for classroom teaching with diverse student populations. I also espoused that, to treat ethnic, cultural and linguistic differences as simply matters of ‘individual differences’, and in some way natural or neutral, does not address critical aspects of literacy learning for diverse students, and multicultural appreciation and understanding for all students. In addition, back then when I reflected on such issues and implications for language and literacy teacher education, I was aware that the educational decisions I was making were influenced partly by the university course structure and the curriculum design, content and pedagogy, and partly by my identity and past experience as well as a particular student population.

As a white middleclass, middle aged, female teacher educator, I began to question if I was paying sufficient attention to particular aspects of my role in pre-service teachers’ learning, including the acknowledgement of the power of my position and the impact of my social and cultural biography on their development. It may be that, as a teacher educator, I was unknowingly maintaining existing systems of privilege through who I am, what I taught and how I taught it. With limited course material that related to diversity, and homogeneous student and staff populations this may have been the case. I may also have paid insufficient attention to students’ past experiences in various communities and schools in relation to their contact with people from non-mainstream backgrounds and their memories of learning (and teachers of) language and literacy. The challenge for me became to find ways to assist pre-service

teachers to consider how their personal histories and prior experiences influenced their perspectives on teaching and learning, and help to make this knowledge explicit (Weinstein 1989).

Written autobiographies, including cultural and linguistic profiles, of a cohort of 150 second year preservice teachers and interviews with 30 students formed the primary sources of data in my dissertation. In addition, I collected and analysed university documents as data about the particular institutional context and teacher education course. I treated the data generated in the case study as text and employed Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approaches informed by critical, post structuralist and feminist perspectives to theorise about preservice teacher's discursive constructions of identity and diversity. Foucault (1972, p. 49) described the constructing character of discourse as defining, constructing and positioning human subjects as discourses, 'systematically form the objects about which they speak'. In other words, discourses don't just represent social entities and relations they construct them. Teacher education is a site where dominant sociocultural discourses compete to construct and position teacher educators and preservice teachers in discourses of classroom practices, staffrooms, and educational curriculum and policies (Britzman 1991; Cochran-Smith 1995, 1997, 2000). Knowledge gained from such research is partial, situated (according to the particular social and historical context) and relative (to the researcher's understandings and world) (Wetherell et al. 2001).

I was interested in how preservice teachers take up discourses, and assume subject positions, and use them to formulate and articulate versions of the world in the particular context and historical time. In students' written autobiographical pieces their discursive constructions of their identities and past experiences were read as the discursive resources they brought to teacher education. What students spoke about in interviews was read as the resources that were available to them explicitly, through university course work and field experiences, and implicitly, through the university environment.

In their autobiographies, students showed limited constructions of their identities and it should be noted that over half the student cohort did not complete cultural and linguistic profiles. They simply chose to ignore it, perhaps because they lacked conscious awareness that they had identities including ethnicity and/or culture(s), or they had difficulties in describing themselves and their families in terms of culture (Epstein 1993). Perhaps they did not think of themselves as cultural beings, a term they reserved for other more easily identifiable groups (Gillespie et al. 2002; Nieto 1992), or they did not see themselves as part of the multicultural picture (King et al. 1997; Rosenberg 1998). While many students did not take up the invitation to write and to talk about identity and culture in direct ways, they did choose to describe the influences of families, rural communities, rural schools and religious affiliations in shaping their identities.

In reading across the interview data I could examine how they were positioning themselves and others in preparing to teach in the context of the particular regional community and university. Most had had limited contact with cultural and linguistic diversity in the community, at university and in schools and little formally acquired knowledge. I concluded that, students' discursive resources for analyzing differences

and teaching in diverse settings were limited. It could also be contended that deficit discourses predominated in many of their accounts. The most generous conclusion I came to regarding cultural and linguistic diversity was that the pre-service teachers were, at best, lacking in awareness, and at worst unashamedly racist. In reflecting on why I too did not share adverse views on diversity for this self-study I surmised it was partly due to my grandmother's encouragement for me to see and experience a diverse world, even though she had not. She had provided real and vicarious opportunities for me to be open to diversity through cultural and social experiences and through reading. We would read and talk about the lives of people in other places for hours, and I developed a passion for reading biographies, usually about the lives of women in other places. Perhaps as a result, I spent most of my savings in my early career on travel.

Finding a Way Forward: Acting on the Goals of the Study

Some of the implications arising from my doctoral study, called for action at governmental and teacher education sector levels and others were pertinent for teacher educators in general and, in particular, teacher educators in universities with largely 'monocultural' student populations. Those that were relevant at governmental and teacher education sector levels, such as the need for more systematic and on-going auditing of teacher education course in terms of content and provision, and how and why teacher education courses are accredited and by whom, were largely not in my sphere of influence at the conclusion of the study. However, implications for course development and university classroom teaching and those that related to the particular institution, such as a need to review pre-service teacher course units and field experiences in order to widen their experiences, were within my range of influence.

Implications for course development and teaching were as follows:

- Proposition 1. Teacher education course components should include substantial components on diversity and inclusion in Australian schools with a particular focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in the Australian context.
- Proposition 2. Teacher education should provide opportunities for pre-service teachers to explore and to clarify their own identities and cultures in order to open up discourse on diverse groups and students with diverse cultural and linguistic resources.
- Proposition 3. Teacher education has a major role in opening up discourse around difference, cultural diversity and issues associated with multiculturalism, immigration and racism in university classrooms.
- Proposition 4. Teacher education must be regarded as an important site for examining social justice and equity issues.
- Proposition 5. Studies in Language and Literacy are an important site for considering issues of cultural and linguistic diversity. Social justice and equity issues

associated with continued underperformance in English literacy among some groups of students in Australian schools warrant particular attention.

Proposition 6. Particular attention, evaluation and direction should be provided for teacher education in mono-cultural settings so that issues of diversity are not dismissed or minimized as irrelevant or inappropriate in particular locations. (Adapted from Hope-Rowe 2003 pp. 305–313).

Before I left my doctoral program, we used findings from my study to make changes in the curriculum of the teacher education program. In terms of course development, associated with Propositions one and five, mapping of changes in the documentation of core units in Language and Literacy across 4 years of the program showed increased inclusions of topics on diversity and inclusion. Teaching English as a Second Language (TESOL), Aboriginal English, Community and Family Literacies and Teaching Students with Additional Needs were included in ‘core’, rather than ‘elective’ units. This was a shift from a sole focus we had previously on the modes of Language and Literacy (reading, writing, speaking and listening) and can be partly attributed to the efforts my colleagues and I were making in order to raise awareness of diversity and teaching students with diverse socio-cultural and linguistic resources. In addition, students were encouraged and assisted in undertaking school-based and other field experiences with diverse student populations and/or in diverse community sites. As field experience co-ordinator, an administrative role I undertook for 2 years, I encouraged and assisted students to undertake field experiences in multicultural settings and in remote and rural areas, with a particular focus on working in Aboriginal community schools.

In terms of teaching I had become increasingly aware of a need to rethink, review and refine my own curriculum and pedagogy in the university language and literacy units I taught in order to foreground issues of diversity and disadvantage. On reflection now, I believe I did this as a conscious effort to raise standards and opportunities for students with low socioeconomic backgrounds, Indigenous students, those with limited English skills, those from remote areas and students with disabilities (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, Melbourne 1998).

Leading Change in the Bush

I began this chapter by recounting and reflecting on some influences of my early life and schooling in rural and regional settings and on the professional path I took to teacher education. I then examined my early teaching career and how and why my research interests and teaching practices developed at Goldridge University. I now turn to consider a decision I made to leave teacher education to take up a 5-year appointment as a Cluster Educator in a group of schools in a rural setting. In reflecting on this decision now, for the purposes of this self-study, I believe I was trying to regain some important contact with schools that was partly lost through my university work. The change provided a degree of personal and professional renewal.

I moved to live in ‘the bush’ and was based in a Preparatory to Year 12 school, commonly known as ‘P-12’, or ‘consolidated’ schools, in an isolated rural town and serviced the school and three small feeder schools. The P-12 school had around 300 students and a staff of 12 equivalent fulltime teachers and each small school had three teachers with a teaching principal. Classes were multi-aged, with several family members in the same room, and each time I went to one of the feeder schools I felt like I had come full circle and was back in Mootown Primary School.

My role was to ‘transform the middle years of schooling’ so that students could have the best opportunity to make smooth transitions from the primary to secondary years of schooling and to improve student outcomes and retention rates. Improved literacy levels were deemed to be the key, as many students in the outlying schools were considered ‘disadvantaged’ and ‘at-risk’ of not completing secondary schooling with the optimum levels of literacy and numeracy necessary for further education or the workforce. The role involved curriculum development, teacher professional learning and community engagement. This was another opportunity for me to pursue a goal to improve literacy outcomes for students in rural schools, an issue reminiscent of my own schooling when I left Mootown to attend secondary school.

In terms of curriculum development I formed professional learning teams of teachers across Years 5–8 to write interdisciplinary inquiry-based units of work on topics such as Health and Wellbeing, Sustainability and Australia and our Asian Neighbours. Teachers designed rich problem-based tasks for multi-aged groups of students utilising the Productive Pedagogies model (Mills et al. 2009). For teacher professional learning I provided seminars on literacy across the curriculum, writing in the subject areas, digital literacies, thinking skills across the curriculum, personal and co-operative learning and inquiry-based methods. Community engagement, the third element of the role, occurred through parent-teacher seminars, shared development of the schools’ strategic and annual implementation plans, and parental involvement in curriculum activities such as gardening, growing vegetables, cooking, waste management and tree planting. Wider community involvement occurred through activities at the Bush Nurse Centre, the Community Bank and through community groups such as Landcare and the local Eel (music) Festival.

What I Learnt from My Experiences in the Bush

I had returned to a rural area in Victoria to help improve learning outcomes for middle years students and for this self-study I reflected on the experience in relation to my current practice as a teacher educator. I read back through the cluster educator reports I had submitted each term to the region over those 5 years and initially deduced that my efforts to transform the middle years were filled with challenges and frustrations and that there was more conjecture than certainty in the work. There were successful professional development projects such as the Digital Storytelling workshop that resulted in some wonderful student productions and the less than successful projects such as the Reading to Learn techniques (Rose 2005) delivered

by visiting consultants. Throughout this work there were teachers who participated willingly and enthusiastically, embracing change, and those who stood on the sidelines watching or unwilling to change what they had been doing and thinking about teaching and learning throughout many years in the same school. In reflecting on my time in the bush more deeply for this self-study I concluded that the experience grounded, confirmed and strengthened aspects of my on-going work and research on teachers and change with teachers (Rowe 1992) and provided new challenges in relation to rural education. For example, access to resources and quality professional development, and a lack of teacher awareness of socio-economic and cultural and linguistic diversity in teaching language and literacy.

I had spent over 15 years at Goldridge University prior to this and, in a sense, I had lost touch with the needs of middle years students and the literacy demands in transitioning from primary to secondary schooling where students were encountering more demanding subject knowledge and literate competencies through extended tasks that were frequently multi-layered and multi-dimensional. I came away from 5 years in the bush with a renewed conviction that literacy is a concern for all teachers (not just primary and English teachers) and how critical it is that teachers explicitly teach literate practices that are new to middle years students. I also gained first hand experience in working with older 'at-risk' readers and writers with histories of disengagement and marginalization and, aside from developing my knowledge and skills of policy and program development for Literacy Support Programs, I was able to re-examine how schools, curriculum, educational practices, testing and the discourses surrounding success and failure in literacy may work against 'at-risk' students. Through my work with older 'at-risk' literacy learners in general and adolescent males in particular, who were transitioning to apprenticeships or searching for employment, this work strengthened my belief that there is a need for on-going school support and intervention programs for older 'at-risk literacy learners' (Rowe et al. 2000).

On reflection now, I can speculate that my experiences of living and working in the particular rural community during this phase of my professional career helped me to re-connect diversity and educational disadvantage in a rural context. Back in Goldridge teachers from several surrounding rural schools had had on-going concerns about the lower than expected levels of literacy of many middle years students, often associated with socio-economic disadvantage. Back then I had been reading studies of literacy practices in disadvantaged schools and, in particular, those that focussed on the perspectives of students, rather than teachers, and the positive work that was going on in schools with '...highly talented, committed and experienced teachers' (Comber et al. 2001, p. 261). Rather than painting a bleak picture, such studies drew attention to the importance of re-examining teacher-learner interactions around literacy, the socio-linguistic resources that students bring to school and the literacy practices made available to them. Viewed this way the relationship between disadvantage and outcomes are complex but also more positive.

I had opportunities to interpret diversity and disadvantage through a language and literacy lens first hand which confirmed some of the propositions associated

with my earlier research. There were several English as an Additional Language (EAL) students who were new arrivals to Australia, or had moved from metropolitan areas, and a larger Maori population from New Zealand who had settled in the area for work, shearing sheep. The EAL students' parents had taken the opportunity for residency under the Australian government skilled migrant scheme. In this scheme, adult migrants who have skills and credentials where there are shortages in regional Australia can gain residency.

The government had created a funding scheme for new arrivals to remote areas. This funding was used to provide language support for those who did not have English language skills. Through this funding scheme I was able to examine teaching approaches and instructional practices that reflected diverse students' needs and re-examine readings from my doctoral studies that urge teachers to evaluate teaching approaches and instructional practices to consider the effects on minority groups (Comber et al. 2001; Delpit 1986; Dressman 1993; Lensmire 1994; Martin and Rothery 1986). For example, while working with new arrival EAL students from Croatia I observed how, for literacy instruction to be successful, it needs to be compatible with and emerge from the cultural experiences and traditions of the learners (Dyson 1993; Fordam and Ogbu 1986; Heath 1983; Kale and Luke 1991). Moreover I found ways to affirm and utilise the diverse resources they brought to school (Au 1993).

Challenges in my work as Cluster Educator in a rural setting were associated with a lack of resources and professional development opportunities for teachers as well as support for specific Literacy Support Programs for improved outcomes for students with low socio-economic circumstances. Since the provision of quality professional learning is not always accessible to rural teachers, I applied for specific funding through various philanthropic and systems schemes such as the Quality Teacher Program, to enable teachers to attend professional development programs in regional and metropolitan settings and to bring educational consultants and curriculum leaders to the schools.

From my early family life and schooling in Mootown I had learnt that there were simultaneously positive and negative aspects to living in rural communities. From my work as a cluster educator I had learnt that there were positives and negatives in working in rural schools in terms of resources, teachers' aptitudes for change, access to professional learning and professional socialization (Sharplin 2002).

Returning to Teacher Education in a Regional University

Three years ago, I obtained a position in a large regional secondary school as a teacher and co-ordinator of Additional Needs Programs. In addition to my secondary school position, I accepted a part-time position in teacher education at the regional campus of Sandy Bay University in a coastal regional city. I brought several years of experience of teaching and coordinating pre-service and in-service teacher education units in language and literacy at a regional university and a passion to

teach in teacher education again. In addition, I brought collective experiences of years in rural schools working with teachers and ‘disadvantaged’ students. I brought recent school-based experience of diversity and difference in terms of students with disabilities and additional needs, Indigenous students and new arrival (EAL) students. Therefore, as a part time lecturer, I reasoned that my dual role as a secondary teacher and teacher educator would keep me grounded and allow me to pursue a social and educational vision of justice and equity in my future work.

I began the process of becoming a teacher educator again by reflecting on phases in my professional career and reviewing the propositions from my doctoral dissertation. I had left Goldridge University with, what I now considered, ‘unfinished business’, given the idealised list of implications in my dissertation and, on reflection of, my own practice. In commencing teaching I decided that, in order to provide opportunities for pre-service teachers to explore and to clarify their own identities and cultures in order to open up discourse on diverse groups and students with diverse cultural and linguistic resources (Proposition 2), I should acknowledge my own subjectivities in teaching. I would talk about my past personal and professional experiences of living and working in rural and regional areas and foreground my sense of place and identity, and the resources I bring to teacher education. I would use my past and recent teaching experience to provide examples to clarify and support the educational philosophies, theories and practices espoused through the unit aims and the enactment of those aims in classes and assessments. I would draw on my particular field of study as a language and literacy teacher educator, educational consultant, and teacher to critique examples of system, school and classroom practices in relation to rurality, diversity and disadvantage.

Enacting the Propositions at Sandy Bay University

To reflect on my work in developing and teaching the education units, I reviewed study guides, power points and class outlines together with my class follow-up reflective notes, readings, resources and assessments. This formed a corpus of data I could use to reflect on course content and my current practice as a teacher educator. With an understanding that key starting points for Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) are social issues and problems (Fairclough 2001), I focused on how pre-service teachers are constructing themselves and others in coming to know teaching. In an initial reading I became aware of some overarching changes in my thinking and practices in relation to the doctoral propositions and, in further readings I was drawn to specifics in relation to particular aspects of my teaching and how pre-service teachers were defining, constructing and positioning human subjects in terms of diversity, difference and disadvantage. In Fairclough’s (1989, 1992, 1995) model of CDA there are three interrelated and overlapping processes of analysis namely, text analysis, processing analysis and social analysis (situational, institutional, societal), which are tied to three interrelated dimensions of discourse- texts, discursive practices and social practice. For example, in analysing texts of classroom interactions

and discussions I would return to analyse class materials and readings and my reflective notes on particular teaching practices in this regional university at this particular time. I attempted to move between broad social formations and micro textual analytic work as a process of describing, interpreting and explaining (Luke 1995; van Dijk 1993).

For the purposes of this self-study I selected the second year unit, *Teacher-Learner Relationships*, as a focus because I have been more involved in the development and teaching of this unit and the cohort was in the same program year as those who participated in my doctoral research. I began the analysis by reading the power points and class outlines I had developed for the unit. At the same time I moved back and forth to the study guide developed by the Unit Chair to see how the decisions I was making were influenced partly by the university unit structures, readings and assessments and partly by the pedagogical choices I made as influenced by my identity and past experience as well as the particular student population. I then examined the class activities and my reflective classroom notes on students' responses in order to reflect on my practice in relation to my previous work.

The unit, '...focuses on how building effective teaching and learning relationships can support safe, inclusive, engaging and challenging learning environments' (*Teacher-Learner Relationships Unit Guide, Trimester 1 2014*). With this broad goal I read across the study guide and class materials and considered recurring topics associated with concepts of teacher-learner relationships, identity and difference. The unit calendar lists the sequence of topics and the readings associated with each topic. Attributes associated with learner-teacher relationships include communication skills, learner self-esteem and efficacy, thinking skills and positive classroom management. Categories associated with identities and differences include: cultural and linguistic diversity; indigenous education; social class and inequity and learning disabilities and difficulties. In the sequence 'identity' and 'difference' are positioned up front in week two with class content and materials focussing on students with diverse cultural and linguistic resources and Indigenous education. The general attributes of communication, self-esteem, thinking and classroom management come later and are linked to the attributes of learners in order to '...understand how the diverse resources of learners may impact on their relationships and their learning' (*Teacher-Learner Relationships: Unit Guide, Trimester 1 2014*). While the unit guide states that, 'students will explore concepts of diversity and equity related to disability, gender, ethnicity, language, and family background (*Teacher-Learner Relationships: Unit Guide, Trimester 1 2014*), gender is not a topic for specific attention and rural education is not included as a separate topic.

Constructing Profiles and Examining Identities

When I was preparing preservice teachers at Goldridge I would not have spoken up front about my rural background, but as a result of my learning since then, I begin the unit by sharing aspects of my identity and show photos of the small rural school

I attended in Mootown to contextualise the idea of close teacher-learner relationships through links between school, home and community (Powerpoint 1, 'Introduction to Teacher-Learner Relationships'). I theorise how the school serves as an important space for social activity and cultural meaning making, helping maintain local traditions and particular identities of rural communities (Schafft and Youngblood Jackson 2010, p. 2). I recount the ways my teacher Mr. Ilott incorporated home and community interests and literacies, and I make connections to literacy pedagogy that proposes that for literacy instruction to be successful, it needs to be compatible with and emerge from the cultural experiences and traditions of learners (Dyson 1993; Fordam and Ogbu 1986; Heath 1983; Kale and Luke 1991). I give my views on attending and working in small and rural schools and I talk about the inequities in outcomes for rural isolated and ethnically diverse students. I recount my experiences of deficiencies and tell them about my brother's plea to "get some better teacher's in the bush".

In enacting proposition two from my dissertation, I provide opportunities for pre-service teachers to explore and clarify their own identities and cultures and to open up discourse on diverse cultural and linguistic resources of students they are preparing to teach (Weinstein 1989). In order to encourage dialogue I use a simulation activity where I ask them to position themselves in the room according to where they were born in relation to me. We then move to where our mothers, fathers and maternal and paternal grandparents, and great grandparents were born. I then provide information showing recent demographics of teachers and students in Australian schools and asked them to reflect on our collective identities and consider the populations of students they are preparing to teach.

I ask them to construct personal profiles using a concept map. I prompt them as I too make jottings on family, gender, location (metropolitan, regional, rural), contact with diverse groups, social class, languages spoken and written, religious affiliation(s), relationship 'status', schooling, travel and work. They participated with enthusiasm and when one student called out, 'What about recreation, that's part of our culture and identity?' others contributed and we continued to talk and make jotting on rituals, routines, symbols, lifestyles, food and recreational activities.

In reflecting on preservice teachers' responses to these activities now for the purposes of this self-study I recalled how preservice teachers at Goldridge University had difficulties in constructing personal profiles in comparison to this group. The willingness of these students may have been due to the interactive and dialogic nature of the practices I chose as well as my willingness to share my background and experiences. In addition, unlike the previous cohort, they were challenged to consider implications of the mismatch between the demographics of Australia's school population and the teaching population and their future practices as teachers. At the same time, however, some questioned why it should be a problem at all, as they would do their best to cater for 'individual differences', regardless of diversity (Reflective Notes 20/3/2014).

Talking About Diversity

In order to discuss diversity in relation to teacher-learner relationships topics for weeks 3 and 4 are: cultural and linguistic diversity; Indigenous education; and social class and inequity. I put 'diversity' up front by highlighting education as a site to value and cultivate diversity (Powerpoint 3, 'Identity and Difference'). In the past I would have focussed on mainstream (language and literacy) practices and raised issues of diversity in relation to them as an 'add on'. I provide Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data on Australian demographics and patterns of immigration and settlement and discuss social constructions of identity and difference as 'deficit' and 'resources'. I have adopted the use of the term 'resources' rather than 'backgrounds' in order to avoid conceptualising culture and language as something in the background or the past, rather than dynamic and forward looking (Comber 1998). In the lecture I propose that 'differentness' in people is an ordinary part of human experience but that inclusion is a political position that challenges the way societies attach values to people so that some are considered more worthy than others. In examining population profiles and the distribution of peoples across Australia I talk about the inequities in outcomes for rural isolated, EAL and Indigenous students and those from socio-economically disadvantaged groups. However, I take particular care to point out the problematic nature of data on student outcomes that is derived from standardised testing that can privilege mainstream students.

From the onset I urge pre-service teachers to be mindful of the language they use in referring to diverse learners. For example, there are implicit messages in using 'EAL (English as an Additional Language) learners', rather than 'ESL (English as a Second Language) learners'; 'Students with ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder)' rather than 'Autistic students'; and 'Students with disabilities' rather than 'disabled' or 'retarded' students. I explain that messages conveyed by the language we use are powerful and persistent and that teacher education is a site where dominant socio-cultural discourses compete to construct and position teachers and learners.

In the third week we returned to our personal profiles and highlighted aspects of our identities that we considered to be most and least significant and began to look at the role of the social, cultural and political in shaping human identity. At this point I posed that we should consider aspects of our profiles that may have put us in positions of 'privilege'. I hoped that this may involve pre-service teachers in, 'in-depth and contextualized discussion of the ways learners are 'known' in classrooms, and the competing sociological, institutional and psychological discourses that influence and define teacher-learner relationships in schools' (Teacher-Learner Relationships: Unit Guide, Trimester 1 2014). They could then explore a range of attributes of learners and understand how the diverse resources of learners may impact on their relationships and their learning. In the following workshop we explored the idea of 'privilege' further and completed a round robin brainstorming activity termed the 'Hot Potato'. For this classroom activity students quickly rotate around to large sheets of paper or white boards and record their responses to different questions. The 'potato' is hot so you have to move quickly. The questions were

associated with practices that privilege: white, English speaking, middleclass students; heterosexual and Christian values; and those that advantage boys and girls. After completing the brainstorm table groups each take one question and read through the responses and opinions. They present a report as a summary of ideas to the class and select salient comments from the brainstorms.

Initially preservice teachers were puzzled by the proposition of ‘privilege’. One student adamantly stated, ‘No we were not privileged, far from it.’ In my reflections following the class, I read this statement as indicative of the student’s perception of a level of perseverance and hard work in achieving what she had. In addition, the use of the pronoun ‘we’ suggests that she spoke for ‘us’, as hard working rural and regional people. When I changed the question about ‘privilege’ to ‘advantage’ more students took up the discussion. They considered that living in rural and regional areas offered a lifestyle that was advantageous. It was described as “relaxed and safe” with “clean air” and “a friendly, laid back way of life”. I then asked them to consider if there were aspects in which they felt disadvantaged and to this question most answered, “No”. However, implicit in some students’ responses were challenges and negative sentiments, reminiscent of a small number of students at Goldridge, in relation perceived opportunities in rural areas, as Sam explained:

I left school early, because I thought I would work on the farm. But then there wasn’t much left of that so I retrained as a plumber. Well, have you ever been a plumber? It’s not easy work but it can pay pretty well. I tried it for a while, then I looked for something else. (Sam)

Why did you leave? (Judith)

Because I had a lousy boss, who didn’t pay the correct apprentice wage. And I couldn’t see myself doing it when I was older with a family, nothing left of the farm now, so that’s still not an option (Sam). (Week 3 Reflective Notes, 27/3/2014).

At this point I explained that I was the only member of my family to gain a tertiary degree, the majority of preservice teachers nodded, and without comment added ‘me too’.

In reporting on the privileging of various groups from the Hot Potato activity, group leaders in turn highlighted aspects of white mainstream middle class practices, heterosexual and Christian values, and gender. Summaries from the Hot Potato activity related to curriculum in terms of subjects taught and assessments in terms of tests as markers of success. For example, one of the salient points from the activity was ‘NAPLAN (National Assessment Program Literacy And Numeracy) tests tend to benefit the white middleclass by adhering to the ‘standard’ set by the middleclass’ and ‘The subjects taught even electives are still generally directed towards white middleclass traditions. It’s only recent that schools are including A & TI (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) perspectives.

Following the report on mainstream practices, one student commented that in the past, Aboriginal people didn’t have the same privileges as whites and she referred to the weekly text reading (Foley 2013). She reported how the Aboriginal author could only be educated until Year 9, that he had limited opportunities for employment and had experienced covert and overt racism. “He wasn’t privileged then”, remarked another student. “They are now”, uttered another student. Other students opted into the conversation and talked about the amount of money being “poured into” Aboriginal health and education for little gain, government welfare payments and a lack of accountability for Aboriginal parents in educating their children and keeping them

healthy. One student proposed that payments be stopped and there be a voucher system, where parents have to exchange tokens for goods and services to make them use the welfare system better. Another student recounted how his host teacher for his last practicum had “given up” on one Aboriginal student because his parents didn’t care about education. At this point I stopped the discussion and moved to the next group.

The group reporting on the practices in schools that privilege heterosexual and Christian values stated at the onset that most, if not all schools do this. Comments selected included: “Christianity tends to promote heterosexual ways of living in indirect teaching i.e. texts and teachers”; “There’s so much in our schools that is Christian- Easter, Christmas, Christian based festivities”. There was discussion of the privileging of Christian religious values and children who may be marginalization by this. Megan reported that:

It’s a fact that Christianity is in the mainstream curriculum and that in order to be accepted in the Australian community you have to be a Christian. You must believe in God in order to be a good person and to have an opinion. Those who aren’t Christian are expected to be quiet about their beliefs and those who believe in a religion other than Christianity are considered by many as ‘Un-Australian’. (Week 4, Reflective Notes, 3/4/2014).

The students’ reports on practices in schools that privilege girls, and then boys, focused on the subjects provided and taken up, and the types of tasks undertaken. Girls prefer, ‘specific subjects like textiles’, ‘arty subjects and drama’ and cooking, whereas boys prefer ‘PE (Physical Education) classes, where they generally outshine the girls’, ‘woodwork and other trade areas’. Girl’s preferences for reading and researching were contrasted with boy’s preferences for hands-on and activity based tasks. Gendered school practices were then linked to employment options and Judith summed up with the following comment:

Hands-on learning suits the boys and books are for girls. Girls aren’t encouraged to go on and do trades. Boys have a wider choice in future jobs because they can choose anything and it’s socially accepted. Whereas girls are expected to go into areas, which involve children and providing care for people who need it. Not much has changed really. (Week 4 Reflective Notes, 3/4/2014).

In reflecting on week four after class I realized that the activity had opened up an unsettling discourse in relation to Aboriginal people similar to what I had encountered many years ago at the time of my doctoral study at Goldridge. By associating aspects of identity and difference with ‘privilege’ in these activities I was enacting the intention of proposition three and I had provided an opportunity for the expression of racist views. On reflection for this self-study I realize I am still grappling with the ethics of doing this work, and lament a lack of substantial discussion and reading around social justice and equity issues.

Reading and Writing About Teacher-Learner Relationships

After analysing power points, the study guide and reflective notes on classroom interactions and discussions, I returned to analyse what students were reading at this particular time, and the assessments they were undertaking. There is a customized

text for the unit, consisting of chapters from five texts. The chapters were selected as provocation for critical thinking about diverse families, communities and schools (Bowes et al. 2012); education and society (Connell et al. 2013); teaching and professional experiences (Ewing et al. 2010); diversity, inclusion and engagement (Hyde et al. 2013) and classroom management (McDonald 2013).

There are three assessment tasks, which help build and evaluate preservice teachers' understandings of teacher-learner relationships through the themes above. Assessment one is a reflective learning log, utilizing Cornell Notes, and based on the unit readings and weekly reflection questions. Assessment two is a group task to research inclusive school environments and practices. Assessment three is a case study to demonstrate how a learner is 'known' and how his/her learning is impacted by his/her relationships in the context of a particular school and classroom.

For the purposes of this self-study I analysed task two, primarily because it occurred in week five and I was interested in what and how preservice teachers were taking up ideas related to diversity and inclusive practices in schools. Task two requires groups of four pre-service teachers to become researchers in a school from their previous practicum and to assemble a portraiture. They observe, research and record demonstrated features of a school community that create a safe, inclusive, engaging and challenging learning environment. They take photographs and video recordings of school spaces; examine websites and other publically available documents, such as the strategic plan; collect artefacts, symbols and logos; and interview the principal, or delegate. From the data they construct a visual presentation to convey the way their selected school builds relationships and supports an inclusive approach. The exercise culminates in an 'Expo', where a member from each team takes turns to present information to their peers. For each 10-min presentation there is an audience of three or four, who make notes and frame questions for a 'Q & A' (Question and Answer) type panel discussion. This sets them up for critical reflection on diversity and inclusion. The tutor chairs the panel and directs questions to particular schools and team representatives for elaboration, clarification and justification of ideas presented in the Expo.

The Expo was busy, noisy and exciting with five groups espousing ideas on inclusive environments, programs and practices of their host schools and questioning and discussing the merits of various approaches to developing positive teacher-learner relationships. The activity created open and critical discussion on: inclusive approaches and programs; the stated, hidden and null curriculum; diversity in school communities; supporting positive behavior and resolving conflict; student voice and advocacy; and parental and community engagement.

At the time of completing this self-study, second year students were completing written reflections on task two and the overwhelming majority considered it to be a very positive learning experience with comments relating to individual and group learnings about diversity, inclusivity and teacher-learner relationships as follows:

I was able to further my knowledge on topics of inclusiveness amongst diverse learners, restorative practices and pedagogy. I was not only starting to notice the different ways in which schools can celebrate diversity, but began to understand the importance of it.

The school offers a Koori (Aboriginal) program that enables all students to take part in activities to promote cultural understanding and education. Some readings state that normalization of culture is a large part of schooling and that it is often the culture of power that is dominant, taken for granted and privileged over other cultures. We've talked about this in class, but the Indigenous program made this idea real for our group. They are currently facilitating multiple activities including a fire pit, at which they intend to have a whole school event, and an indigenous garden that will promote knowledge of native plantations and traditions.

The group learnt a lot by researching a rural and low socio-economic school. We learnt that schools are not just about education, they are about healthy lifestyles, sports, culture, differences and other aspects of life. I thought it was a great idea to plant a vegetable garden that is accessible to the school and wider community. It allows people access to fresh and nutritious food and educates students about fresh fruit and vegetables.

These extracts allowed me to reflect back on past limited efforts to raise awareness of diversity and inclusivity in the context of language and literacy teaching at Goldridge University and led me to conclude that these second year pre-service teachers were beginning to construct valuable understandings from readings, classroom experiences, fieldwork and assessments.

Learning from Teaching at Sandy Bay

In this self-study I consider influences of my personal and professional experiences in largely homogeneous rural settings on my efforts to raise awareness of diversity in teacher education. Through the autobiographical writing I have instigated links to disadvantage as I trace my work in rural and regional schools and students with diverse cultural and linguistic resources. In reflecting on my recent teaching at Sandy Bay in terms of the propositions from my doctoral studies, I have been confirmed in some practices and in others there is more to know.

In relation to the second year unit, Teacher-Learner Relationships, I am confirmed in the value of providing opportunities for pre-service teachers to explore and to clarify their own identities and cultures as a starting point for understanding and interpreting diversity. In my experience in two regional universities such experiences can open unsettling discourse about race and racism. That there is and perhaps always has been 'latent or covert' racism towards Australia's Indigenous population always needs to be investigated and challenged. I theorize that if racist discourses are ignored, then the constitutive nature of discourse works against the attainment of various educational sector policies in relation to Indigenous education and disadvantage, yet I confront uncertainty about how to manage the conversation once people reveal their racist views. I will continue to enact proposition three and, in opening up unsettling discourses associated with race and racism, I will endorse a process of self-awareness and self-reflection on how people's views and practices are shaped. When racist views are expressed I will challenge pre-service teachers to think about where their ideas and opinions came from, and what, when and who helped to shape them. I will explain that open expression of opinions is valued in my classroom, and that thinking about how our opinions are formed by own identities and experiences helps us to develop informed opinions.

I have first-hand knowledge, experience and opinions on living in rural and regional communities and working with diverse students in these settings. Therefore, I will continue to speak with students about my personal dilemmas associated with schooling – who I teach, what I teach and how I teach. I will share my personal and professional journey with them and explain how and why I have come to link, literacy, diversity, rural/regional and disadvantage. Student feedback over the past 2 years has highlighted the value of listening to my personal stories and concrete examples from my current practice in my dual role as manager of additional needs programs and teacher educator. In addition, student feedback suggests that using language and literacy as a lens to pursue a social and educational vision of justice and equity has grounded discussion of disadvantage and the privileging of mainstream practices in schooling.

In preparing two new third year units on curriculum and pedagogy with colleagues I will be mindful of beginning with the notion of pedagogies and curricula for diverse groups. In a time of early implementation of a national curriculum I will pose various pedagogical positions and encourage preservice teachers to critique and question practices and develop their own frameworks. In examining curriculum I will offer various educational theories and curriculum models within the national framework and assist preservice teachers to make decisions depending on diverse student populations and school contexts. These units are important sites for opening up discourse around social justice and equity and relationships between factors such as race, ethnicity, culture, class, gender and ability. In order to continue to develop the units I also need to examine other education units in the course in detail, especially with respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural information and perspectives. I also need to audit classroom practices in the units that aim to raise awareness of preservice teacher's identities and cultures in preparing to teach.

The journey continues. Throughout the writing of this self-study I have come to recognize the value of self-study as a form of professional development and unlike any I have experienced before. At the very least the process has helped me more fully understand the challenges and difficulties of reflective teacher education (Dinkelman 2003). In addition, the editors for this text consistently challenged my thinking on 'rurality', 'diversity' and 'disadvantage' as they interrogated the practices and pathways I took in writing and making connections with who I am and what I do as a teacher educator. Now I am prompted to find new ways for collegial interactions around my practice and spaces for pre-service teachers' voices to highlight alternative views and challenge my assumptions (Loughran 2007).

I have found some ways to proceed with reframing my practice in teacher education and I am aware that there is more to know. My brothers are now talking about the education of their grandchildren in rural and regional areas. We still question the quality of education in rural schools, but these days they are not so demanding of my efforts to do something about 'getting some better teachers in the bush'. Perhaps they have come to know more of the complexities of issues associated with diversity and educational disadvantage, or perhaps they recognise that I will continue to find ways to work with pre-service teachers that enable them to act effectively with diverse learners, or at least to develop the disposition to do so.

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