Chapter 3
Beyond Classroom Walls: How Industry Partnerships Can Strengthen Pre-service Literacy Teachers' Identities

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Abstract In this chapter, we investigate how a particular partnership between a faculty of education and industry may provide pre-service teachers with experiences that strengthen their understanding of literacy and, as a result, enhance their practices as teachers of literacy. We draw on our work in the 'Read Like a Demon' program, a partnership with the Melbourne Football Club in Victoria, Australia, which aims to increase upper primary students' engagement in independent reading. Our focus though is on the professional learning and identity work of the pre-service teachers (PSTs), who volunteered to participate in the program. Through listening to the stories of the participants, we show how working in alternative sites to schools can provide PSTs with opportunities to evaluate their professional knowledge and reflect on the influence of political and theoretical landscapes on their practice. The PSTs participating in this program identified an increased confidence both in working with a multi-literacy lens and in appreciating literacy as an everyday, situated practice.

Introduction

In an ever changing and complex landscape of teacher education reform, with increasing levels of accountability for teachers, new and innovative practices and pedagogies are needed to support beginning teachers entering the workforce (Kriewaldt, Ambrosetti, Rorrison, & Capeness, 2018). Accountability measures, such as a recent call in Australia for pre-service teachers to be 'classroom ready' when they graduate (TEMAG, 2014), can be seen as situated within wider debates surrounding pre-service teachers' (PSTs') competence, particularly in the area of literacy teach-

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ing. Compulsory personal literacy and numeracy testing for all teachers, debates to raise the ATAR scores for entry into education programs and the media's relentless coverage of perceived poor performance of Australian students in literacy (see also Parr, Diamond and Bulfin, in this collection) add to the complexity and heightened sense of turbulence within literacy teacher education. This leaves university educators needing to respond to policy demands without compromising the theory–practice nexus that is critical for reflective teachers of literacy.

Government-funded reports on initial teacher education, such as *Action now: Classroom ready teachers* (TEMAG, 2014), traditionally characterise PST learning as clearly divided between university course work (which provides theory) and blocks of school-based professional experience (which provides opportunities for practice). However, this demarcation can potentially lead to a disconnection between theory and practice (Darling-Hammond, 2012, 2016) as PSTs struggle to see either the worth of theory or how theory relates to practice in classrooms, or they wonder why research driven practices are not being implemented in schools. In addition, this approach to teacher education can result in fragmentation of knowledge and skills within courses, with limited or no attention to helping PSTs make connections between theory and practice (Kosnick, Menna, Dharamshi, & Miyata, 2017). Furthermore, Kosnick et al. (2017) caution that isolated and decontextualised ways of teaching literacy in initial teacher education can potentially impede PSTs' ability to see the 'big picture of literacy' (p. 61). This begs the question of how university-based teacher educators can ensure PSTs finish their degree 'classroom ready' to enter a complex professional landscape.

We three authors, teacher educators and researchers in Monash University's Faculty of Education, came to the writing of this chapter having worked together in the kind of innovative university-industry partnership program that might offer useful answers to this question. The program was called 'Read Like a Demon' (RLAD), and our experience with it leads us to believe it can empower PSTs to view literacy practices through creative and critical lenses. This chapter will show how the PSTs we worked with in the program believed their participation had a positive impact on their own identity as pre-service teachers of literacy, and how it improved their confidence to explore different pedagogical practices, including a much broader range of literacy practices.

The 'Read Like a Demon' Project

The 'Read Like A Demon' (RLAD) project is an ongoing collaborative partnership between Melbourne Football Club (MFC) and Monash University. In the study we report on in this chapter, two of the authors, Kelly and Jane, worked closely with the pre-service teachers, while the other author, Debbie, acted as a critical friend, facilitator and champion of the partnership. The project was aimed at primary school aged children in Years 3–6. It was designed to present Australian Football League (AFL) players as engaged readers in order to promote reading as a valuable life

skill for the Grade 3–6 children, to encourage independent reading for pleasure and to facilitate varied literacy practices. Several connections with players were designed through face-to-face school visits and digital presentations. The project aimed to stimulate independent wider reading in the young people and to provide Monash PSTs with an opportunity to engage with a voluntary professional experience program, which is additional to, and different from, their mandated school-based professional experiences. These placements range from 10 to 20 days in length, providing a total of 80 days of professional experience across the teacher education course. The project ran across much of the academic year, with varied experiences on offer to strengthen pre-service teachers' professional knowledge, broaden their view of pedagogical practices and build their confidence. In the project, the pre-service teachers were positioned as competent colleagues, with Kelly and Jane acting as critical constructivist mentors (Wang & Odell, 2002) to guide, challenge and extend the PSTs' work through ongoing professional discussions.

Monash PSTs (in the second, third or fourth year of their undergraduate double degrees) were invited to participate in some or all of the program's elements depending upon their availability and interests. Jane and Kelly noticed that the combination of high interest and professional accountability for the work completed resulted in high levels of motivation to produce innovative work of a high quality. Units of work that the PSTs have created for work with selected texts or animated book reviews were published on the program's website, which can be accessed by experienced teachers in schools. This is in contrast to the usual approach to unit development in teacher education degrees, which sees work submitted for assessment but unlikely to be shared with professional colleagues or peers.

The focus in the program was on literacy as an everyday, situated practice, with Kelly and Jane promoting reader engagement as the key objective in the PSTs' work. This motivated the pre-service teachers to consider how they could foster literacy learning in inspiring ways. Their work on the project included: facilitating the writing and publication of Grade 3–6 children's work; using innovative literacy practices such as augmented reality to engage readers in literature analysis; designing and implementing an engaging literacy focused activity at the 'Gala Day' for 250 students at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG, the home ground for the Melbourne Football Club); and creating innovative digital content such as videos of literature conversations with football players and using animation software to create multimodal literacy texts (see examples in Figs. 1 and 2).

To participate in this program, the PSTs needed to have a strong understanding of effective literacy practices. For example, when supporting the football players in their visits to schools, PSTs needed to ensure that they had a deep understanding of the text the players would be reading. They also needed to be able to interject carefully during the discussions so that the focus remained on the players' literacy contributions. The PSTs' contributions to the program were expected to be of the highest quality and they were encouraged to engage with their PST colleagues, and the authors, in critical professional discussion during planning and after implementation of each aspect of the program in which they have participated.

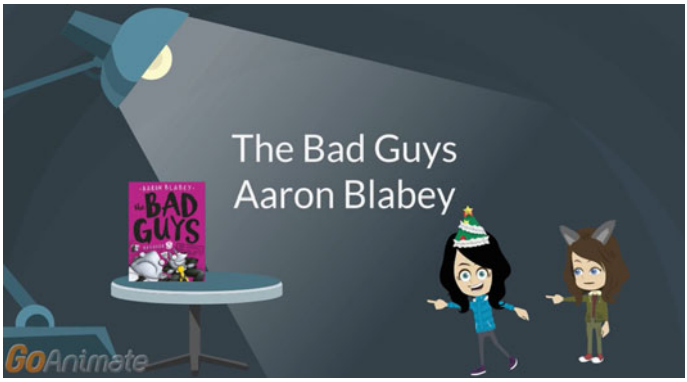

Fig. 1 Screenshot of the opening of a multimodal reflection about *The bad guys*, by Aaron Blabey. This was created by reluctant readers in the RLAD program, supported by PSTs using the app 'Go Animate'. Images courtesy of GoAnimate, Inc.

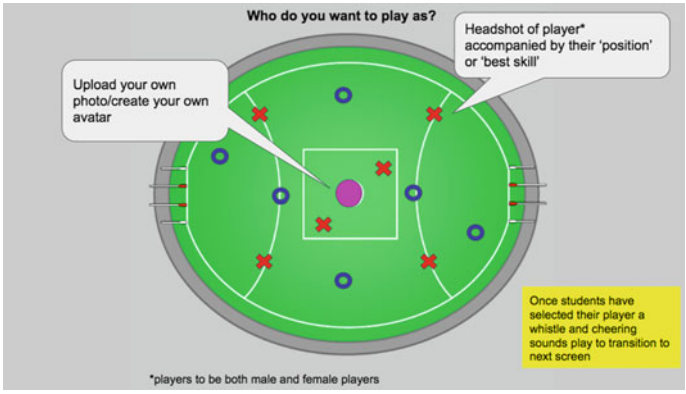

Fig. 2 Screenshot from a digitised book report template created by a group of PSTs in the RLAD program. The template is interactive and allows students to respond to questions such as 'what is a setting?', while reflecting on the book using Luke and Freebody's (1999) four resources model

Industry-Based Partnerships

Industry-based partnerships such as the 'Read Like a Demon' Program can offer pre-service teachers a space to develop their professional knowledge and identity free from the constraints of formal performance evaluation, which can limit their ability and willingness to explore ideas and practices. Sachs (2001) suggests there are two dominant discourses in the teaching profession, managerial and democratic. Both discourses have significant impact on pre-service teachers' practices during their professional experiences, and they have a strong influence on teacher identity as well, but in different ways. The managerial discourse is laden with accountability regimes, such as high-stakes testing (which has implications for how teachers implement

the curriculum—i.e. how much teaching time is devoted to preparation for these tests?) and professional standards (which can lead to uniform teaching practices rather than teaching that is focused on enhancing learning). Sachs (2001) suggests that the influence of the managerial discourse sees a desire for "designer teachers who demonstrate compliance to policy imperatives and perform at high levels of efficiency and effectiveness' (p. 156). This managerial discourse is evident in the current TEMAG agenda, with pre-service teachers striving to comply with a set of professional standards in their work in classrooms, which may or may not be supportive of students' particular needs in that classroom.

The democratic discourse, on the other hand, promotes collaborative work between all education stakeholders. In this discourse, teachers can work together to contribute to a field of knowledge that reaches beyond their classrooms to the broader community (Sachs, 2001) and, this connection can increase the complexity, depth and relevance of their work. This democratic discourse reflects the potential of industry partnerships, with pre-service teachers making connections between their university work on literacy learning, their classroom experiences and the wider conceptualisation of literacy as an everyday, situated practice.

One approach to bridging the apparent disconnect between teacher education and school classrooms can be through pre-service teachers engaging in professional practices where the context of the teaching and learning is more important than centrally generated educational outcomes in deciding what and how to teach. Industry-based partnerships that enable pre-service teachers the necessary time and space to negotiate these complex aspects of their work, and their professional identity, supported by an extended mentor relationship, are widely seen as a valuable addition to teacher preparation (Ricks, 1996; Kolb, 1984).

Shaping Identities as Teachers of Literacy

Teacher identity is a multi-faceted concept that emerges along personal and professional dimensions, and is temporally situated in different contexts (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Mockler, 2013). For all primary school teachers, their identities as teachers of literacy are important to their broader teacher identity. According to Rodgers and Scott (2008),

> Contemporary conceptions of identity share four basic assumptions: (1) that identity is dependent upon and formed within multiple contexts which bring social, cultural, political, and historical forces to bear upon that formation; (2) that identity is formed in relationship with others and involves emotions; (3) that identity is shifting, unstable, and multiple; and (4) that identity involves the construction and reconstruction of meaning through stories over time. (p. 733)

Furthermore, Rodgers and Scott state that 'teachers should work towards an awareness of their identity and the contexts, relationships, and emotions that shape them, and (re)claim the authority of their own voice' (p. 733). This has implications for the work that is done in teacher education courses.

Hargreaves (1998) points out that teachers' work is complex, difficult and demanding, and that teachers are required to engage in 'intellectual' and 'emotional' work as well as organisational work (i.e. organising and exercising some control of their own work). Such a broad frame can be used to investigate what it means to be a professional teacher in a variety of contexts and from a variety of perspectives. All aspects are vital in the development of the pre-service teacher's professional identity. Focussing on only one or two of these aspects does not address the multiple demands on a teacher's professionalism and can hinder the development of PSTs' professional identity. The TEMAG (2014) report's emphasis on developing 'classroom ready skills' ignores the importance of the intellectual and emotional work of teachers. The impact of this disconnect between teacher education programs focussing on all aspects of teachers' work and the reality as addressed in professional standards, coupled with the demands of managing in complex workplaces, can result in pre-service teachers losing sight of the deeper understandings they have developed through their teacher education courses. This shaping of teacher identity, especially PSTs professional identity that occurs in response to the interplay between beliefs, knowledge and situational pressures (Palmér, 2016) needs careful attention and development rather than a checklist approach, such as is often encouraged in relation to professional standards.

Bullough (1997) and Korthagen (2004) highlight that teacher identity is of vital concern in initial teacher education as it is teacher identity that forms the 'basis for meaning making and decision making' (Korthagen, 2004, p. 21) about pedagogic practice. As university-based teacher educators work to bring together the theoretical frameworks and policy-driven practice, they set up the conditions for PSTs to begin to consider the personal and professional tensions that may arise in school settings. Given that literacy is increasingly positioned within a contested and politically charged discourse of professional reform, PSTs' reflection helps them to develop an authority of voice that is often referred to as 'identity work' (Mockler, 2013). Therefore, the current discourse of professional reform and debates surrounding literacies and the resultant impact on teacher identity cannot be ignored (Adoniou & Gallagher, 2017; Korthagen, 2004; Mockler, 2013; Sachs, 2001).

Literacy Learning and Teaching

An important facet of PSTs' literacy identities is a deep understanding of literacy practices, of how literacy develops, and of how as teachers they can pedagogically teach and support literacy learners. To continue to explore how industry partnerships can powerfully contribute to literacy teacher identities, a discussion about the complexity and shifting nature of literacy in the twenty-first century is needed.

History has shown that defining literacy is a contentious issue. Definitions of literacy are fluid, dynamic, and exist within changing political, social and historical paradigms (Green, Cormack, & Patterson, 2013). Our study is set within a body of

socio-cultural literature that understands literacy to be situated and a social practice (e.g. Auld, Doecke, & MacGilp, 2014; Barton & Hamilton, 2000), and this social practice consists of a range of complex and contextualised communicative practices. This literature sees literacy as more than just a set of decontextualised reading and writing skills. The notion of skills has expanded to be considered as components of multi-literacies (Bull & Anstey, 2010; Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; Kress, 2003; New London Group, 2000) that are used in particular ways in particular contexts and vary across these contexts. It is what people do *with* multi-literacies and this action speaks back to the very heart of literacy as socially embedded acts of meaning making (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; Knobel & Lankshear 2014).

This focus on meaning making also broadens the construct of literacy to include the evaluation, synthesis and creation of multimodal texts that contain gestural, visual, spatial, linguistic or aural modalities (Bull & Anstey, 2010; Kress, 2003; Walsh, 2010). Consequently, literacy for twenty-first century education policy could be defined as a set of communicative acts which enable users to encode, decode, interpret, respond to, and derive and create meaning from a myriad of print, visual, oral, nonverbal multimodal texts (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2014).

The definition of literacy proposed in 2012 by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) appreciates the points we have been making above about the complexity of literacy in the twenty-first century (Andreas, 2012). However, the OECD definition also explicitly recognises the dimensions of curiosity and motivation, which are not evident in the Australian Curriculum definition. This captures an aspect of literacy teaching and learning that some consider to be missing in the current outcomes-based learning agenda across the world (Wrigley, Lingard, & Thomson, 2012).

The current enthusiasm for outcomes-based learning, and improving student performance in standardised tests, can overshadow the embedded complexity of literacy as it is presented in curriculum documents. For example, in Australia Donnelly (2014) suggested that in an effort to improve international literacy testing results, teachers should return to a 'chalk and talk', 'back to basics' approach that he links to China's successful standing on measures such as the PISA and TIMMS scales. Cautionary words about decreasing the scope of learning to that which is measured and deskilling teachers surfaced around the time that there was renewed interest in outcomes-based education (Smyth & Dow, 1998) and continue today (Doecke, Auld, & Wells, 2014; Wrigley et al., 2012). Teachers of literacy in this climate of accountability and reductionist pedagogies (Luke, 2005, p. 353) need a highly developed understanding of literacy in order to move their practice beyond bounded classroom contexts to enact a much richer understanding of literacy as meaning making. From this position, they can question the technocratic approach, which is part of the dominant educational discourse as one that sees improvement 'reduced to improved test results and an upward form of accountability… disconnected from pleasure and purpose' (Wrigley et al., 2012, pp. 9–98). These tensions in practice are not new (Auld, Doecke, & MacGilp, 2014), although some researchers do argue that they have intensified in

recent years (Stillman & Anderson, 2015). This study suggests that PSTs need to navigate these as part of the identity work they do.

Study Methodology

The research component of the project comprised a small-scale, qualitative study, which generated rich situated stories about participation in the program, and it allowed for multiple connections between the researchers and the PST participants over time. The overarching research question for the study was: *How did voluntary engagement in the Read Like a Demon program impact on PSTs' knowledge, confidence and sense of identity as teachers of literacy?* Teacher identity is an emerging personal, professional construct of anticipated self, and is continually negotiated in educational contexts. Therefore, a qualitative approach was selected to gather and interpret rich data. University ethics approval was gained from Monash University's Ethics' Committee prior to the commencement of the program.

Our research question required us to draw from a range of different data sources (interviews, an on-line open-ended survey, and written reflections) over time, with this data including personal and professional stories of participation in the program. In order to ensure trustworthiness of the data and analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), we monitored the processes of data generation throughout the process. Elements of trustworthiness included sustained engagement with the PST participants (Creswell, 1998; Maxwell, 2010); drawing on the researchers' extended experience in education partnerships, enabling an increased understanding of the culture (Patton, 2002; Willis, 2007); and the use of participants' transcripts to provide rich, thick description (Creswell, 1998; Greene, 2010; Maxwell, 2010).

In recruiting participants for the study, we began by publicising the project through Monash's Faculty of Education Facebook page and in short face-to-face presentations during cohort lectures in the campus-based course. Following this, we called for written expressions of interest from PSTs who wished to be involved in the project. These submissions suggested high interest levels for the project and all PSTs were invited to attend an online introductory session. Attrition occurred at this point as some PSTs did not attend this first meeting. During the session PSTs were invited to work collaboratively with Kelly and Jane to participate in activities and develop new resources as part of the project. Participation in varied aspects of the program was dependent on PSTs' availability and numbers fluctuated across the course of time. Jane and Kelly selected particular PSTs to create the digital book chats based on their demonstrated literacy knowledge through contribution to the project.

The initial use of semi-structured individual interviews and group interviews in 2016 was very successful in generating stories about the PSTs. This was extended in 2017 to include an on-line, open-ended survey and written reflections linked to a professional learning session run by Kelly and Jane. All participant data documents were assigned pseudonyms to de-identify PSTs involved in the research. Ultimately, the data set included seven online surveys, eight semi-structured individual interviews,

three group interviews and twelve written reflections over the two-year period. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

We used Polkinghorne's (1995) 'analysis of narratives' approach to make meaning from the stories in the data. Through all of this our main focus was on better understanding how the experience of participating in an industry-based professional experience impacted on the pre-service teachers' knowledge, skills and identity. Our meaning making was underpinned by our own reading and experience about the value of such programs for PSTs' professional learning and identity work. All documents—that is transcripts, surveys and reflections—were analysed inductively for emergent themes. These were professional confidence, literacy learning knowledge, agency and openness to critical reflection. Individual documents were read by the team independently. Any stories considered as demonstrating increased professional knowledge or awareness of self as a teacher of literacy were highlighted and discussed by the researchers. Through this process, we were able to identify some commonalities across participants, as well as providing opportunity to note and discuss particular examples that offered a different perspective (Kramp, 2004).

We adopted what Chase (2005) refers to as 'the researcher's authoritative voice' (p. 664) as we interpreted the participants' words and stories to identify themes. Our discussion of these themes in this chapter draws on multiple, lengthy stories of PSTs' experiences and their reflections upon these experiences. We also explicitly include our own voices as researchers, as we offer our interpretations of their stories. We recognise that interpretation, like all meaning making, has subjective dimensions, but we also consider Richardson (1995) who suggests that to silence the authorial voice 'not only rejects the value of sociological insight but implies that somehow facts' exist without interpretation' (p. 215). In this chapter, we restrict our discussion to three major themes with regard to professional knowledge and identity work. We refer to them as 'Stories of …': increased confidence; expanded content knowledge; and critical reflection.

Discussion

Stories of Increased Confidence

Overwhelmingly, PSTs reported a positive impact of their involvement in the project on their confidence, and subsequently, their teacher identity. For some, there was a moment where they shifted to seeing themselves as teachers rather than students. Along with this shift in identity PSTs also commented they were surprised at how much literacy knowledge they held and gained confidence in expressing this to the industry partners.

The democratic approach (Sachs, 2001) where teacher educators and PSTs worked as equals allowed a sense of freedom from managerial, outcome-based measures. Consequently, this enabled PSTs to develop confidence in their own abilities that may

not have been as possible during traditional styles of professional experience. The repositioning of PSTs as competent practitioners through Sach's (2001) democratic approach had a positive influence on their teaching identity. This is evidenced by Zoe's comment in an interview at the end of her involvement in the program: 'I think it has been good for my confidence. It was a relief that someone believed in me and that I could do this'.

Danielewicz (2001) highlights the importance of the social and collegiate aspect on positive identity development in teachers. This was often evident in the stories James told about seeing himself as part of a collegiate profession. In particular, he spoke about his involvement in 'that community aspect of the school life rather than just focusing on my classroom'. He went on to explain how he began to appreciate the ways in which his participation in the program enabled him to see the

> bigger picture and that you get people involved and also the idea of collaborating with my peers has been strengthened … We were all learning together and we had that sort of expert advice … Also, Jane and Kelly were learning with us and helping us through it, creating the resources…

James' story here is typical of the way most participants came away from the RLAD program feeling valued as fellow teaching professionals. This is in strong contrast to the tenuous position PSTs are in during traditional professional experience placements, which can be limiting on their development. In such circumstances, their confidence can be quickly shaken, especially when they choose to take risks in their pedagogies that do not align with their mentor teacher's practice (Anderson, 2007; Cattley, 2007). Anna spoke about the apprehension she felt on traditional professional experience placements and the subsequent disconnect that can emerge between theory and practice. For her, being on a traditional placement was invariably

> … so new and so scary at the time. And you've got someone watching you. You don't always remember all those things that you've learnt in Uni. You're sort of just in survival mode trying to just convey this one point of the lesson that you're trying to get across.

PSTs reported that when they were supported collegiately within their practice, the realisation that they could operate in an uncertain space and thrive was empowering. One anonymous comment in the online survey seemed to represent all PSTs' experiences of being challenged but also able to learn deeply. He/she appreciated 'being out of my comfort zone and learning more about behind the scenes of being a teacher'. Time and again, participants characterised their time in the RLAD program as quite different to a traditional professional placement. One explanation we researchers proposed for this was the way in which traditional placements expect PSTs to be always in control, and that indeed this is supposed to be a measure of their competence. This is what Sachs describes as the 'managerial' (Sachs, 2001) positioning of PSTs in an outcome-based competency model, where success or failure of PSTs relies so much on the mentor teacher (Anderson, 2007). While it is important to have teachers that are able to manage the complexities of classroom practice, she says, it is also important that they understand that uncertainty is part of learning to teach and a driver for critical reflection. One PST participating in the RLAD program, Megan,

showed this when reflecting on what she was able to do and learn when working out of her comfort: 'It was very difficult to suddenly be working with grade 3's and 4's. I had to really change my style of teaching, adapt, and it's really good to have learned that I can be very flexible in a moment's notice'. On the other hand, one anonymous PST, wrote in the online survey that she found a new affirmation of self in the fact that she could take control without the directive input of a mentor teacher: 'I am also more confident because I took control on Gala Day without a mentor teacher looking over my shoulder, constantly putting in her input'.

Although both lecturers were in always in attendance, and monitoring carefully the work of the PSTs in the RLAD program, the relationship they had established with the PSTs, and the expectations articulated at the start of the program, had already positioned the PSTs as competent. This came through clearly in Jessica's stories about her experience. She never expected that her lecturers, Jane or Kelly, would step in at any moment, given that they had demonstrated faith in her capacity to that point. Jessica explained in an interview how her role in organising aspects of Gala Day at the conclusion of the RLAD program had enabled her to take charge and see herself in a leadership role. Her experience leading the RLAD 'team' in this way helped to move her from feeling like a novice to someone who was able to make decisions and hold people accountable:

> It's a bit daunting having to email your mentors/lecturers and then tell them 'Do this, do that'. I felt a bit funny doing it. I hope I didn't come across the wrong way but, yeah, it made me professional. It was important for me to communicate everything to [C] because she had all the resources and I was always in between telling her things.

The impact of this democratic, collegial approach in developing confidence was a recurrent theme. Emily noted how her lecturers showed confidence in her and her peers:

> We did it all, it wasn't Kelly and Jane, they helped us a lot, they facilitated it and gave us ideas of what to do. But it was a chance for us to do our part, which was a really good experience, really worthwhile.

With the absence of power differentials, the professional conversations were seen as liberating for PSTs as they were invited to critique ideas and resources, and engage in complex design work. Having teacher educators working side by side with PSTs strengthened the connection between theory and practice. Naomi, in her final year of teacher education, reflected on her experience.

> I certainly feel like I am far more confident to go out and be a literacy teacher… I think before that I had some understanding but to put this all in practice was the bit that had previously been missing for me.

The challenge of bridging university-based and classroom-based practice is well-reported (e.g. Darling-Hammond, 2006, 2012; Zeichner, 2010), and the 'culture shock' of beginning teaching is frequently attributed to the associated rhetoric/reality gap (Aubusson & Schuck, 2013, p. 325). It is one of the key factors that has prompted the 'classroom ready' agenda. Working alongside their lecturers, the PSTs were discussing how theoretical frameworks might inform their work. Jessica wanted to know

that she could hold her own position, that she had professional knowledge of value and that she could use it. In her interview, she described her sense of 'empowerment' through 'being able to talk to our lecturers on the same level'. She addressed her follow-up comment directly to her lecturer-interviewer: 'We want to look up to you so when you want to hear what we are saying and give us feedback…it builds our confidence and gives us faith that we know ourselves and we know our stuff'. This comment speaks to the heart of her need to feel as though she held some agency in her decision-making.

Allowing PSTs to experience literacy teaching in contexts outside of the traditional professional practicum opened up a 'safe space' for these pre-service teachers to feel confident to explore alternative pedagogies, ways of teaching and more agentic professional identities.

Stories of Expanded Content Knowledge

The stories that the PSTs shared suggested that they felt the opportunity to engage with industry partners in this project added to their understanding of multi-literate practices across contexts. Shifting literacy practice out of the traditional school classroom and into different settings seemed to be significant in this. As stated above, the RLAD project explicitly focused on positioning PSTs as experts rather than novices, in contrast to the dominant discourses in teacher education that tend to position PSTs as novices and concentrate on their deficits (Le Cornu & Ewing, 2008). These views may not draw on the rich wealth of experience, ideas and pedagogies that PSTs bring with them to their teacher education. In an interview with Kelly, Amy was reflecting on a conversation she had with an industry partner. She was genuinely surprised and delighted that she had professional knowledge that could be considered 'expert' within the broader community: 'It made me realise how much I did know. I did not realise that other people [i.e. the industry partner] may not see the depth of literacy'.

In the interviews and online surveys, the PSTs told us that through creating and continually refining authentic literacy resources for the project, they found themselves engaging in a range of professional conversations (like the one Amy was referring to) and starting to self-assess. Sometimes, this brought into question their knowledge base, and in turn provoked other conversations and increased their motivation to continue to develop their own individual literacy content knowledge. The following story related by an anonymous PST in the online survey illustrates the type of thinking of many participants as they deepened their understanding of what knowledge was important about their practice and what literacy teaching knowledge they still needed to acquire:

> I have noticed that I have a lot of learning to do in this area. When listening to my peers in the [professional learning session], I felt as though I was lacking in my understanding or ability to teach writing at such a high level. However, I have implemented many practices covered and have noticed a steady improvement in my confidence when teaching writing, and the level of writing students have been able to produce …

This PST was gauging his/her understanding against that of their colleagues, the self-assessment being all the more powerful as the need for growth was recognised. We often heard stories from the PSTs about what they were now noticing about students' literacy development, and why. This enhanced pedagogical knowledge also appeared to be impacting on their confidence to be a teacher of literacy.

In the excerpt below from an interview, Megan is very articulate in explaining that her content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge were enhanced by participation in the project:

> I feel more confident teaching literacy at a high school level, especially after trying out some techniques on placement. I am not being trained in high school English [but] I feel more confident to incorporate literacy elements into all my classes without feeling that it 'wasn't my place'. All subjects can benefit from literacy input.

In Australia, all teachers are expected to embed the literacy knowledge and skills required for academic success in their different discipline areas (ACARA, 2014). Megan came to feel that her literacy knowledge was limited and she began to extrapolate from the professional learning session as to how she might now build her science literacy knowledge. In particular, her written reflection sheet showed she was keen to explore how she might incorporate her new knowledge of visual literacy. Megan had shifted her identity as a Science teacher and was able to test this new dimension of her identity on her next professional placement in a school.

Megan's story was echoed by Michelle, who came to recognise the increased benefits of using literature across different contexts: '[Participation in the RLAD program] gave me another way of looking at picture story books and bringing them into not just the primary classroom but the secondary classroom, which has inspired me to do that in my secondary pedagogy assignment'.

Through their involvement in the RLAD project, the PSTs appeared to increase their knowledge of, and skill in, teaching multi-literacies and multimodality across contexts. They acknowledged that reflective teachers of literacy need to identify that learning happens across boundaries and not just within the confines of their own classroom. We conclude our discussion of the stories aligned with this theme, by sharing Emily's comment of how she recognised that teaching does not just happen in the classroom and that to develop her literacy teacher identity she needed to take advantage of experiences which existed outside of traditional professional experiences: 'I recognise that I need to think about teaching in a different way, I suppose, I guess than just traditionally in a classroom'.

Stories of Critical Reflection

The most significant policy document driving curriculum and practices in initial teacher education courses in Australia, *Accreditation of initial teacher education programs in Australia: Standards and procedures* (AITSL, 2017), emphasises the importance of preparing graduating teachers to be able to engage in critical reflection.

The RLAD experience saw many PSTs prompted to examine what they knew and put into practice in the teaching of literacy. As a second year PST, Naomi attached great significance to her work on the program, not only as the best teaching she had done but also as an example of how she wanted to develop her pedagogy.

> I am so proud of my work [on this program. The questioning skills [I developed] are useful for my other assignment … I feel more competent after this … as I know what is a good question and what is not. I consciously abandon those nonsense questions… And this way I can make my lesson more engaging.

Naomi's reflection suggests she was moving towards critically interrogating her beliefs and taking a stand on what she had learnt about questioning. She displayed an awareness of her teacher self, and recognised a knowledge base that allows her to critique her own work.

James spoke of his increased appreciation of picture books as suitable texts with older students.

> I would have been less inclined to use picture books because of them being seen as, I guess, children's books, but now I have the confidence to say, 'Well no, it's not just a children's book, … Moving into junior secondary school, the ability to stand up for picture books and say we're not just reading this because we're kids. We're going to read it from an analytical perspective. And I wouldn't have done [it] otherwise, I don't think, without the program.

During the project, James had seen different approaches to those taken in his traditional classroom placements, and this caused him to rethink the decisions he had previously made. He anticipated some resistance to the move, although it is not clear whether that might be from students or colleagues. Nevertheless, he felt confident to make his case for this approach to literacy teaching having seen them used in novel and extending ways such as literature conversations and augmented reading experiences.

The AITSL *Standards and procedures* document also speaks about the need for graduating teachers to be able to engage in collaboration with more experienced colleagues as fundamental to their development. However, traditional professional placement experiences, particularly across the primary years, are usually focused on specific classroom contexts. This can result in limited access to other teachers' practices and insights into team planning. The literacy teaching experiences that the PSTs had in the RLAD project were outside more formal learning settings, such as school classrooms and university workshops, and this appeared to give them new insights into what might be possible when teachers work more collaboratively. Another possibility opened up by the PSTs engaging in collaboration was what we have previously termed 'identity work'. As they worked more closely with teacher educators and peers, they began to re-imagine their identities as teachers of literacy.

In one interview, Jade related a story of working in a collaborative teaching space. In the excerpt from the transcript of that interview below, she contrasts her experience of compulsory group tasks in university coursework units with volunteer work in the RLAD program, and shares how this impacts on her ability to have professional conversations. She prefaced her story with the comment that teamwork was a 'really big' part of her RLAD teaching and learning, and that it had a lot to do with the

voluntary nature of the program. However, while teamwork was often a very positive dimension,

> there were definitely occasions where you felt like someone wasn't contributing, and [you need] that ability to have those polite adult conversations… 'Can you please do this part, so I can then do my part?' That was something I gained. Because at uni with group work, you all have to do it, but group work in the RLAD is voluntary, so those conversations become even more important, I suppose

Jade implies that her identity as a collaborative teacher who is able to manage the tensions of the workplace, had not been addressed in professional placements she had undertaken. In this project, the authenticity of the PST-created resources heightened the need for collaboration amongst PSTs. Jade learned that having those difficult conversations was a skill she needed to work in a team. She went on to explain that she saw this as part of her professional identity as a teacher.

Vu and Dall'Alba (2014) suggest that collaborative reflection between teaching colleagues can improve 'levels of criticality'. This seemed to be borne out in Zoe's and James' reflections. James appreciated that collaboration was crucial for his ideas to be examined and to learn with others: 'It's given me those different perspectives whereas I might have only been into my own way of thinking beforehand so it's been good to get that different perspective'. Zoe highlighted that through her conversations with peers and with Jane and Kelly, her views of literacy and literacy pedagogy shifted: 'It has allowed me to be more objective … [to] move away from the way I was taught and be open to different teaching styles … [to be] more creative and think outside the box'. And finally another PST reflected, in the anonymous survey, on how his/her pedagogy and knowledge of literacy had been challenged by interactions with others, prompting a deeper level of critical reflection on future pedagogic practice: 'This program has allowed me to engage in professional conversations, challenging how I will teach reading, writing and responding to texts in my own classroom'.

Conclusion

The rich and varied stories shared by the PSTs who participated in this study have been presented here under three interconnected themes: stories of increased confidence; stories of expanded content knowledge; and stories of critical reflection. Considered as a whole, the stories suggest that although traditional professional experience placements in school classrooms provide many opportunities for PST learning and skill development, it is valuable if these placements can be complemented with engagement in professional experience beyond school classrooms. This type of complementary professional experience opens up spaces for PSTs to take more risks with their learning, and allows them to be positioned as competent colleagues and experts in their field within the wider community.

Our presentation of PSTs' stories from the RLAD program shows them experiencing high levels of professional freedom, autonomy and agency outside of the

competencies-based standards used to assess teacher 'classroom' readiness in mandated professional experience. The study also shows the powerful impact this freedom has on their professional identity. After participating in the RLAD program, the PSTs often spoke about themselves as knowledgeable and agentic teachers, able to engage in critical, creative and collaborative thinking around literacy in the twenty-first century. When PSTs are directly supported by and with teacher educators in industry placements such as the RLAD program, they are highly likely to experience the powerful nexus between theory and practice, and start to see how theory can drive their future pedagogic practice and their identity development as teachers of literacy.

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