

## Preparing Pre-service Teachers for Multicultural Classrooms

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*Abstract: Cultural diversity is evident throughout schools in Victoria, Australia. Many students are new arrivals from war-torn countries including Sudan, Afghanistan and Iraq. To what extent do teacher training courses in Victoria prepare pre-service teachers to cater for the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) students?*

*This paper reports findings from a qualitative study on pre-service preparation for teaching CALD students in mainstream secondary schools. It investigated ways in which CALD student needs are addressed in secondary teaching courses in Victoria. Data included course outlines, questionnaires completed by forty-one final year pre-service teachers, and interviews with four final year pre-service teachers.*

*Findings revealed that the majority of pre-service secondary teachers feel that their teacher education courses lack a focus on cultural and linguistic diversity in schools. Course content analysis supports this. Courses need to be updated to address the needs of teachers of CALD students, and consequently of the students themselves. This paper provides practical ways to begin this process.*

### Introduction

#### Pre-service Teacher Education in Victoria

In 2008, 2362 students accepted an offer to study an education degree at a tertiary institution in the Australian State of Victoria (Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre, 2008). Those enrolled in a Bachelor of Education are trained over the period of four years, concurrently with another general degree such as Arts or Science. In addition, some universities offer a one year postgraduate Diploma of Education following completion of an undergraduate degree. Pre-service teacher education courses for secondary school teaching are offered in eight universities across Victoria. They are the Australian Catholic University, Ballarat University, Deakin University, La Trobe University, The University of Melbourne, Monash University, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) and Victoria University. A recent publication by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development in Victoria (DEECD) states that, "In 2007, 110,383 students in government schools (20.5 per cent) were from language backgrounds other than English" (DEECD, 2008, p. 7). Therefore teaching graduates are now entering schools which are rich with multiculturalism, and a diversity of ethnicities, cultures, and languages.

#### CALD Students in Victorian Schools

In 2007, over 20% of students in government schools were classified as CALD students, although not all were eligible for English as a Second Language (ESL) support. According to the

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's 2007 ESL report, "A student is defined as having a language background other than English if either the student or one or both parents was born in a non English speaking country" (DEECD, 2008, p. 7). In 2007, 39,341 students (35.6%) met the criteria for ESL index funding (which meant English was not the main language spoken at home, and students had been enrolled in an Australian school for less than five years). A total of 5549 ESL students were newly arrived in Australia in 2007 and approximately 188 languages were spoken in their homes. In 2007, the highest numbers of students were born in China, India, Afghanistan, the Philippines and Sudan (DEECD, 2008, p. 7).

Students who arrive in Australia with little or no English can enrol in a specialised ESL school or centre for two to four terms (six months to one year). Many are taught English in an intensive ESL program in one of nine language centres or schools in Victoria. Regardless of their English language proficiency at the end of four terms, these students must then attend mainstream schools. Once in mainstream settings, intensive English classes are no longer provided. Sometimes specialised ESL classes are offered to replace English classes, but this is not always the case. In mainstream settings, the onus falls on the mainstream subject teacher to cater to the needs of ESL students. Some students never attend a specialist ESL school. Instead, their first formal schooling in an English-speaking country occurs in a mainstream school.

Of the 5549 new arrivals in 2007, a total of 1672 (30.1%) enrolled in English language schools or centres. Of these, 678 were primary students (18.4% of total primary newly arrived students), and 994 were secondary students (53.2% of total secondary newly arrived students) (DEECD, 2008, p. 18). This indicates the necessity for mainstream secondary teachers to be trained in the field of ESL education as eventually these students enter mainstream secondary schools. Teachers need to feel confident in their ability to cater for the English language needs of CALD students in their specific subject areas.

### **Current Teachers and ESL Training**

Of the 424 teachers involved in delivering secondary ESL programs statewide in 2007, 83.0 % had a specialist ESL qualification, 16.3 % did not have an ESL qualification and 0.7 % were studying for an ESL qualification (DEECD, p. 32). These figures indicate that not all 'specialist' ESL secondary teachers have qualifications in the area. If ESL specialist teachers are lacking training, what preparation do mainstream teachers receive in the area of CALD student needs? Evidence of the diversity in Victorian classrooms above clearly indicates a need for knowledge about CALD students in the classroom.

### **The Research Problem**

A consideration of these factors generated the following research question: To what extent is training about CALD student needs included in pre-service teacher degrees, as part of specialist methods or general teaching units?

Research conducted by Miller, Mitchell and Brown (2005) indicates that mainstream secondary teachers struggled when teaching CALD students who had low literacy and interrupted education. This is an increasing concern in recent times due to the changing nature of CALD students attending Victorian secondary schools. Miller et al. (2005) focused on a school in Melbourne with a large Sudanese population and found that mainstream teachers in this school had not been trained to teach this student group. They did not know how to locate or adapt suitable teaching resources for the student's low-level literacy needs, and deal with student's social and emotional needs, which often resulted in behaviour difficulties. The relationship between ESL

specialist teachers and mainstream staff was also problematic. Productive collaboration between mainstream and ESL staff did not occur, and mainstream staff lacked workplace support for professional development in the area of CALD student needs.

Brown, Miller and Mitchell (2006), described students with interrupted education in this Victorian school as having “been in camps, experienced trauma, lost members of their family, had minimal schooling and arrived with little or no literacy” (p. 150). The study investigated what happened to these Sudanese students once enrolled in a mainstream secondary school in Victoria. The results revealed that these students felt overwhelmed by the educational system in mainstream secondary schools. The teaching styles used in the mainstream made learning difficult, and extremely challenging for them. Problems with learning arose due to content literacy and because teachers often assumed prior knowledge. Subject specific terminology was difficult to understand, the language demands were too high, and group work was not always effective.

The students in this study indicated that current teaching practice in mainstream secondary schools was not effectively catering for their needs. Brown et al. (2006, p. 161) propose that “educational strategies, resources and policies that might best meet the needs of these students” should be created, as current teaching approaches were lacking in this area.

### **The Role of Pre-service Teacher Education**

The experiences and cultures of African students who have fled persecution and war differ greatly from the experiences of most Australian teachers and students. The educational and emotional needs of students from war-torn countries also vary greatly from those of other CALD students found in Victoria (Brown et al., 2006; Miller et al., 2005). The researchers stress that due to the changing ethnicities and experiences of migrant and refugees living in Victoria, it is crucial that pre-service teacher education prepares teachers to cater for the needs of CALD students.

The content of pre-service teacher education courses requires careful consideration to ensure that relevant and useful information is relayed to teachers. Many factors apart from practical strategies and curriculum content are salient when educating teachers in this area. These include attitudes, cross-cultural understanding and multi cultural awareness (Giambo & Szecsi, 2005; Youngs & Youngs, 2001) and promoting partnership between ESL teachers and mainstream subject teachers (Arkoudis, 2006; Davison, 2006; Doyle & Reinhardt, 1992; Lucas, Villegas & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008). Successful integration of CALD students into mainstream environments requires that teachers have training in the domain, and can work productively with ESL specialists. This is because the best environment to learn English is often in the mainstream classroom. Students need to attend mainstream classes to feel included in the whole school community, and activities which are useful for ESL learners are generally beneficial for all students (Doyle et al., 1992).

Pre-service teacher education needs to ensure that attitudes as well as strategies are addressed in regard to CALD student needs. Critical self-reflection and ways to assess pre-service students’ understanding about CALD student’s thinking and how to adapt to this should also occur, to improve instructional practices (Rhine, 1995). Education about cultural diversity also needs to be provided so that teachers are empathetic towards the cultural differences of their students (Youngs et al., 2001). However language development must be the ultimate focus for teacher education on mainstreaming students (Langman, 2003).

Attitudes and practices as well as past experience influence the way teachers cater for the needs of CALD students in the classroom and whether they regard catering for this group of students in a positive or negative light (Harper & de Jong, 2004; Penfield, 1987; Youngs & Youngs, 2001). Youngs and Youngs’ (2001) study of 143 junior high/middle school mainstream teachers found that those teachers who had completed a foreign language or multicultural education course, or who had ESL training, experience in another country, or who had previously worked with ESL

students and different genders held a more positive attitude towards educating and catering for CALD students compared with those teachers who lacked the above experiences.

Lacking education and experience in the education of CALD students can result in misconceptions about English-language learners and students from CALD backgrounds which is why teachers find it hard to meet their needs (Harper et al., 2004). Misconceptions may cause them to treat CALD students inappropriately. Harper et al. (2004) suggest that two basic assumptions are important for all teachers:

The needs of ELL (English-language learners) do not differ significantly from those of other diverse learners; the second is that the discipline of English as a second language (ESL) is primarily a menu of pedagogical adaptations appropriate for a variety of diverse learners. (p.152).

Youngs and Youngs' (2001) study suggests that if the goal is to promote positive attitudes toward ESL students on the part of mainstream teachers, exposure to cultural diversity appears likely to enhance appreciation of multicultural student groups. They write:

The more preservice and in-service teachers are exposed to diversity through ESL training, and work with culturally diverse ESL students, the more positive teachers are likely to be about working with ESL students. (p. 117).

Therefore it is crucial that pre-service teacher education courses address the issue of cultural diversity and expose pre-service teachers to multicultural issues in the classroom. Evidence suggests that this will help teachers to become more empathetic towards CALD students and to make more of an effort to cater effectively for their needs. Although more than just exposure is needed in the long-term, this is a first step to initiating much needed change and promoting awareness of CALD student needs. A concern which emerged from this study was the currency and breadth of lecturer expertise in mentoring pre-service teachers to support CALD learners.

A plethora of research into the most appropriate strategies for educating CALD students in the mainstream has been conducted, including work by Lucas et al. (2008). These strategies also need to be incorporated into pre-service teacher education courses. The most popular notion is that CALD students are most effectively educated in the mainstream when collaboration and team teaching takes part between the ESL specialist teacher and the mainstream subject teachers and when mainstream teachers have teaching experience in CALD student schools (Arkoudis, 2000; Arkoudis, 2006; Davison, 2006; Lucas et al., 2008; Miller et al., 2005). Collaboration can take part in a variety of ways, such as withdrawal, support teaching and team teaching (Creese, 2002). As defined by Creese (2002), "partnership teaching is where an ESL specialist works with a colleague within a subject area to develop the curriculum and improve overall provision" (pp. 598-599). Therefore it is crucial that course content provides practical strategies for collaboration between ESL specialist staff and mainstream content teachers.

As indicated in Arkoudis (1994, 2000, 2006), Davison (2006), and Miller et al., (2005), creating a relationship and working together productively is a difficult process for some. "ESL is perceived as being lower in the subject hierarchy of the school" (Arkoudis, 2006, p. 417) and thus teachers of ESL are subject to this stereotype as well. There is also a "need to conceptualise the relative roles of the ESL teacher and the ESL curriculum in collaborative work" (Arkoudis, 2000, p. 70). Davison (2006) argues that collaborative teaching must be reviewed and must be assessed so the successful aspects and approaches can be used to enhance teacher training.

There is evidence to suggest that the transition from isolated ESL classes to the mainstream environment by implementing collaborative teaching can be successful (Doyle et al., 1992). Over the past 20 years collaborative teaching has been taking place in schools. In Australia this occurred due to state government policy and student need (Davison, 2006). Likewise, in Victoria, ESL teachers have been working with mainstream teachers to plan curriculum for ESL students and engage in team teaching roles in some schools (Arkoudis, 2006; Doyle et al., 1992). This was a direct consequence of "the ESL teacher guiding the professional development of the mainstream

teacher and having the epistemology authority to influence mainstream curriculum” (Arkoudis, 2006, p. 416). However, collaboration does not always occur in practice, as demonstrated in Miller et al., (2005).

The fact that much research has indicated difficulties in ESL and mainstream collaboration suggests that more training needs to occur in this area. If all mainstream teachers were educated in how to cater for ESL students in their pre-service teacher education courses, and had been made aware of ways in which to effectively work with ESL specialist staff, then collaboration between ESL specialist staff and mainstream staff should theoretically be less problematic than at present. According to Davison (2006), “an ideal collaboration between ESL and content-area teachers requires the integration of content-based ESL teaching and ESL-conscious content teaching” (p. 457). It is important that language development is the focus, and that mainstreaming does not just involve ESL students attending classes with native-English speaking peers with no adaptations in pedagogy (Davison, 2006; Langman, 2003). Pre-service teacher courses should take the above factors into consideration.

## **Methods of the Study**

This qualitative study involved three stages. Firstly, unit outlines from each university in Victoria offering pre-service teacher courses were examined to see how many mentioned that they addressed CALD student needs. The second stage involved distributing a questionnaire to final year pre-service teachers and the final stage comprised an interview with four of these participants.

Participants were final year secondary education students completing their fourth year of the Bachelor of Education or the one year Diploma of Education. They were chosen as they were able to reflect upon the entirety of the course, and were able to inform the researchers of how confident they felt about teaching CALD students in the final stages of their degree. Participants were from a variety of teaching subject areas, and age groups, and were both male and female. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. All students had completed one teaching practicum at the time of data collection.

The first section looked at the wording of unit outlines, involving a search on a variety of salient phrases. Foremost were phrases which explicitly mentioned CALD students and their needs. Words and phrases which implicitly alluded to the inclusion of CALD student needs were also searched for. The data was presented in tables which defined the types of phrases and their frequency.

The questionnaires were chosen as a data collection source as they allowed many pre-service teachers to provide their opinions and share their experiences relating to this matter in a short time frame. Eighty surveys were distributed in four final year pre-service teacher education tutorial classes, and forty-one were returned. The classes were tutorials for a core unit that all pre-service teachers had to complete in their final year. Both Diploma of Education and Bachelor of Education students from a wide range of teaching methods were approached to take part in the survey. A total of nine participants also provided contact details for an interview and of these, four participants (who provided comprehensive answers in their questionnaire responses) were chosen to attend an interview.

Interviews were chosen as they allow the researcher to obtain detailed information to expand and further investigate issues and themes present in the questionnaires. The number of interviews conducted was limited to four, due to time constraints. The interviews comprised fourteen semi-structured questions which were based on the participants’ experiences of educating CALD students on the practicum and the course content. Having semi-structured interviews allowed the researchers freedom to ask additional questions and investigate new issues and experiences arising from the interviews. The fourteen pre-prepared questions ensured that there was consistency in

topics discussed. Normal procedures of ethical consent were followed, including voluntary participation and confidentiality.

Of the four interviewees, three were males in their early-mid twenties and one was a female in her early twenties. One participant was enrolled in the Bachelor of Education. The other three were completing a Diploma of Education. Each student specialised in two teaching areas, which were combinations of English, Art, Chemistry and Studies of Society and Environment (SOSE). ESL method students were not interviewed as they are training to be ESL specialist teachers and their course does highlight CALD student needs and strategies for teaching these student groups. Coverage of CALD student needs in non-ESL specialist courses were investigated to ascertain how well future mainstream teachers are being prepared to cater for CALD student needs

Time constraints limited the number of questionnaires and interviews conducted, and meant that students at only one tertiary institution in Victoria could take part in the study. Time limitations also meant that pre-service teachers were approached at the end of Semester One and beginning of Semester Two, and not closer to the end of the year which may have offered insights into the entirety of the course. This was unfortunately not feasible.

In the following data, pseudonyms are used for all interviewees to maintain anonymity of participants. Data is presented from the analysis of unit outlines, the questionnaire responses, and the interviews. The data from the three stages are presented together under common themes.

Four major themes emerged as a result of analysis of the interviews. They are: the amount of coverage in pre-service teacher education relating to CALD student issues; exposure to CALD students on teaching rounds; confidence in catering for the needs of CALD students; and course improvements in the area of CALD student needs.

### **Pre-service Teacher Education and CALD Student Issues**

A total of thirty-nine pre-service secondary teaching degrees are offered in Victoria. Undergraduate degrees comprise twenty-eight of these courses and eleven are postgraduate courses. Analysis of this data revealed that a small proportion of units offered in both undergraduate and postgraduate courses mention that they address CALD student needs in unit outlines. The number of units in undergraduate courses that address CALD student needs vary from 36% to zero. The number of postgraduate units that address CALD student needs range from 25% to zero. The data also showed that the type of units which focus on CALD student needs vary depending on the specific tertiary institution. The majority of units which address CALD students tend to be general teaching units, which are taught to all students regardless of teaching areas, as opposed to units focusing on specific teaching areas such as English or Mathematics. Students specialising in curriculum areas that do not mention CALD students in their training are therefore missing out on a vital aspect of pre-service teacher education training.

The research revealed that units addressing CALD student needs are not only scarce, but are not available to all students. Some are electives, which are only offered to students enrolled in select courses, and are not chosen by all student teachers. Other units are only offered in certain years.

Questionnaire results indicated that few students believed that their units address the issue of catering for CALD students in mainstream classrooms. The majority of participants (63%) did not feel that any units in their course had done this. One response was, "I don't know if diversity has been catered for or not". Another response was, "After teaching rounds there were discussions amongst students who have experienced cultural diversity in schools. I volunteer with refugees from Sudan and have found this more useful than anything in this course". While personal experience was highlighted as being most beneficial to their learning, students did not refer to specific content relevant to the teaching of CALD background students.

The data showed that 37% of students believed that their course did address CALD student needs. Some indicated that it only did so in a theoretical sense and lacked practical examples (36%). For example, “I have been told I need to cater to diverse students but been given few, if any, actual methods. It’s been more talking about it, with little action or ideas as to HOW”. Others (43%) identified an ESL elective unit (entitled *ESL in content areas*) as the only unit which did so, but this unit was not available to all students, and was not chosen by all of those who had the option of studying electives. This unit appears to be extremely relevant and useful in addressing CALD students. One participant explained,

*“I have undertaken a unit on ESL learning in content areas, which involved developing strategies for inclusive education, including reading, writing, listening and speaking skill development. The unit raised my awareness of the background my students come from, and what I could do in my mainstream classrooms to cater for their needs”.*

Only three participants believed their course as a whole comprised of units which addressed CALD student needs, but they were not able to provide specific examples. The majority of questionnaire responses (63%) indicated that the units did not address this issue.

Interview data supports the questionnaires, in which 78% of participants stated that their course did not prepare them for the needs of CALD students. Interview participants explained that CALD student needs were “noticeably absent from the course”. The importance of studying an *ESL in content areas* elective was also made evident in the interviews. Bachelor of Education student Michael said that in his three and a half years of studying Education, the elective unit *ESL in content areas* was the only unit to address CALD student needs. The one year time frame of the Diploma of Education was highlighted as a reason why CALD student needs were lacking from course content. Interviewee Tom mentioned that there “doesn’t seem to be enough time” to address CALD student needs.

The Diploma of Education students explained that they study a unit on diversity in schools during second semester, which they anticipated would cover CALD student needs. However, based on the classes taught to date, they felt that the unit just “skimmed the surface” and did not teach them anything new about student diversity. Not all students undertake the diversity unit. Overall, both questionnaire and interview data indicates that units did not adequately prepare pre-service teachers to teach CALD students effectively.

### **Exposure to CALD Students on Teaching Rounds**

Most pre-service teachers who completed a questionnaire taught CALD students on their practicum. A significant majority of participants (78%) had completed their practicum in schools with a CALD student population. CALD students taught were from countries such as Vietnam, Afghan, Turkey, Malta, and Sudan. This highlights the vast array of cultures that pre-service teachers and qualified teachers are exposed to in Victorian schools.

Pre-service teachers articulated frustrations and difficulties experienced when faced with educating CALD students on their practicum. Comments included; “I had some ESL students in one of my classes. I didn’t have to teach them, however my supervisor did comment that she often felt that she didn’t really help them enough”; “Those who came from war-torn regions like Sudan, found it difficult to follow the rules of the school”; “The teachers at the school helped me understand the different needs of the students otherwise I would definitely not have been able to relate to them”; “I was very unprepared on how to deal with them and required a lot of advice from my teacher on how to simplify tasks and on how to grade them”. These comments highlight difficulties faced, suggesting that the course had not prepared pre-service teachers to deal with such situations.

All four interviewees undertook their practicum at schools which had CALD students. Sudanese students were taught by one interviewee named Chris, who indicated that his experience teaching CALD students was “problematic”, as he did not know how to adapt work to meet their needs. None of the interviewees noticed any adaptations being made by the regular classroom teacher to cater for the needs of CALD students. Only Michael commented that he saw a teacher provide a student with a “modified criteria sheet”. Perhaps this indicates that many current teachers are themselves lacking in this area or are trying to meet tight deadlines so have no time to address individual student needs. This is of concern for both student welfare and outcomes, and for pre-service teacher training. Pre-service teachers may not be receiving adequate training in CALD student education on their practicum, as supervising teachers may not be competent in this area.

Interviewees indicated some confusion about what was meant by ‘teacher modified work’, highlighting lack of exposure in course content. Chris and Michael both indicated that they believe that teacher aides and removing students from regular classes to attend ESL classes constituted modification. Chris commented, “For Sudanese boys they had a teacher aide which was very very useful. In fact, I wish I had one for every class”. From Chris’s experience, teacher aides: *“Assisted with the work just to cross that language barrier, but yeah so they would just help with the work but you know I didn’t speak to them, I didn’t arrange extra work with them um, they just came in and did their thing. It was great”*.

Chris felt that the problem could be shifted to someone else, namely a teacher aide. Chris did not view the teacher aide’s presence as an opportunity for collaboration, as he was not directed to converse with the aides. Therefore Chris did not view himself as working together with the aide, instead, he perceived a sense of distance between himself and the aide. There was a sense that Chris felt teacher aides were a necessity in the classroom, not a privilege. He also implied that regular classroom teachers had no responsibility to adapt student work because that was what the aides were for. The fact that Chris did not speak to them, and was not instructed to do so by his supervising teacher, indicated a lack of knowledge of how to best meet CALD student needs by taking advantage of opportunities to collaborate with teacher aides.

All pre-service teachers interviewed encountered CALD students on their practicum, except Ella, who did not have any ESL students with low literacy levels or academic needs in her classes. The other students felt frustrated at catering for CALD students, as their needs impacted heavily on classroom teaching. Chris felt vaguely annoyed at the responsibility at having CALD students in his classes. He commented that “I don’t have the skills and knowledge really for just one student in this class. I don’t have enough ESL experience to sort of know how to say do it yourself. I just don’t quite know how to put together the extra work to do”. The data highlights the reality that many Australian schools are extremely multicultural, and that the majority of teachers will teach CALD students during their career. The research indicates that they are not being trained to teach students with a CALD background.

### **Confidence in Catering for the Needs of CALD Students**

The findings demonstrate that a very small number of pre-service teachers feel confident that they will be able to teach CALD students, without support from colleagues and without having studied an ESL unit at university. Participant responses indicate that lack of experience and training in how to adapt lessons are major factors contributing to lack of confidence in this area. Students commented as follows: “I can barely even cope with the non-culturally diverse students who are behind”; “Not right away, but gradually I have confidence that I will learn these important skills”; “I don’t feel I have learnt anything in this course to cater for the needs of linguistically and culturally diverse students”. These comments indicate that there is a serious lack of CALD student



information in teacher training courses, and that pre-service teachers believe they will learn techniques for educating CALD students when teaching full-time.

A total of twenty-three participants said they do feel confident about educating CALD students in the future. However, none of these students credited their teaching course as a whole with being the reason for this confidence. Of these, eight students said that they would only be confident educating CALD students with support, generally from the school in which they were employed, five students said that they felt confident due to experience on their practicum, one student said they feel confident only due to the fact that they had undertaken the *ESL in content areas* elective unit/ESL teaching method, and one person indicated that they felt confident due to personal reasons. Eight participants said they felt confident, but did not elaborate on their answers.

The data indicates that the majority of pre-service teachers do not feel confident about educating CALD students. Those that do feel confident have experience working with ESL students, assume that their school will provide support, or they have studied a specific ESL elective. It seems the lack of attention given to this issue in the teaching courses is impacting greatly on the pre-service teachers' ability to cater for the needs of CALD students in mainstream classrooms, and their confidence in doing so.

Michael, who was completing the Bachelor of Education and therefore had three more years of experience than the Diploma of Education students, commented that it will be his own personal experiences and "school resources" at his place of employment that will assist him to cater for CALD student needs throughout his career, not the pre-service course content. This is of concern due to the fact that he has had three years of teacher training and still feels unprepared to teach CALD students. All interviewees assumed that support would be provided by their place of employment. The implication is that their teaching course had not equipped them with this support.

### **Course Improvements in the Area of CALD Student Needs**

The majority of pre-service teachers who took part in this questionnaire felt that their course could be improved in the area of CALD student education (97% in total). Suggestions included incorporating more practical strategies to address CALD student needs in teaching method units, and making an ESL unit a core subject. These requests were also desired by the interviewees. They too suggested that a compulsory unit dedicated to ESL student needs would be ideal. Interviewee Michael had completed an ESL elective and continually reiterated the importance of studying the 'ESL in the mainstream unit' throughout his interview. He stressed that it was invaluable to his training and commented that the ESL elective unit was "the gold amongst all other subjects".

The questionnaire participants and interviewees made it clear that practical experience gained on their practicum was invaluable to their teacher training. They both suggested that all pre-service teachers should undertake a teaching practicum in a school with multicultural student populations. Ideally, they would like to spend more time in schools during their teaching course.

Both interview and questionnaire responses indicated that practical examples in content areas and specific training in ESL education including teaching experience with CALD students were desired by most pre-service teachers.

### **Where to from here?**

The research has revealed that there is a critical gap in Victoria's teacher education courses. The findings indicate that a large number of pre-service teachers feel as though they are entering the workforce without the skills necessary to educate CALD students. Closer analysis of the unit

outlines confirms these findings. They indicate that very few units in Victorian university pre-service teacher education courses address CALD student issues. Therefore only a small number of teachers are entering the workforce with the necessary skills and awareness to create inclusive classrooms for CALD students. This is a concern due to the increasing number of school aged students in Victoria who are from CALD backgrounds. It is essential that in a multicultural society, CALD students receive the best possible education. If pre-service teacher courses are not addressing this area, CALD student needs will be compromised in the classroom. In order for CALD students to achieve academic success, new directions such as the following should be considered.

#### **Pre-service teachers**

Preparing teachers to cater for multicultural classrooms should be addressed from the onset of their teacher training. Such preparation should be seen as an overall part of teaching as opposed to a separate area. The skills and strategies used will also be useful to support other students with language or literacy difficulties.

There are many different ways in which CALD student needs can be incorporated into pre-service teacher education courses. The only constraint is time. Both the one year Graduate Diploma and the four year Bachelor of Education are overcrowded with an array of contextual, policy and curriculum issues and theories. The following suggestions take this into consideration. The aim is to incorporate a larger focus on CALD student needs without compromising other teaching areas or overloading the curriculum further.

#### **Make a focused CALD elective part of the core program**

In both Bachelor of Education courses and Diploma of Education courses, pre-service teachers have the freedom to choose electives which allow students to delve into areas that they are passionate about, and add depth and greater enjoyment to their studies. However, in many cases the number of electives is limited, as not all units run every year and some are only run during the day or during the evening. Despite allowing students the opportunity to investigate areas of interest in detail, having the skills necessary to teach CALD students overrides the importance of individual choice. Therefore this option would involve replacing one elective unit with a compulsory unit focusing on teaching CALD students in mainstream classrooms.

The unit should include information about different cultures in order to raise cultural awareness and sensitivity; information about student needs in the classroom; and techniques and strategies for dealing with CALD students in mainstream settings. This recommendation has also been made by Lucas et al. (2008), who suggested that this unit should “address language-related understandings for teaching ELLs and the pedagogical practices that flow from them” (p. 370). It should be taught by a competent faculty member who has expertise and personal interest in the area. In addition, a vast range of practical strategies should be provided and pre-service teachers should have practice in devising classroom work for CALD students (Lucas et al., 2008). Many participants in this study suggested that a compulsory unit on CALD student needs would be ideal in enhancing their teaching skills, therefore this option would be readily embraced by many pre-service teachers.

### **Incorporate CALD focus into existing units**

A second option is to incorporate skills and strategies relating to CALD student needs into existing units. This approach was also suggested by participants in this study. This option may be conducted as a holistic approach, whereby examples or techniques discussed in classes are related to CALD students. Instead of making CALD student needs a separate area, belonging to ESL cohorts only, it could be part of the course as a whole. One way to ensure CALD student needs are being met in each unit is to assign an assessment task which relates teaching CALD students to the pre-service teacher's subject method. A constraint of this approach is that it overcrowds the curriculum and adds extra pressure on lecturers to cover even more content in a limited timeframe. Concerns with this option were also expressed by Lucas et al. (2008) for similar reasons.

### **Summer units**

Pre-service teachers could attend additional extra-credit units over summer that specifically focus on teaching CALD students in the mainstream. This could be optional (the incentive being extra credit). The curriculum in pre-service teacher education courses is already crowded, as indicated in the interviews. Having a summer unit would not overburden already busy semesters and would allow pre-service teachers the opportunity to focus specifically on this area of teaching without the distractions of additional units.

### **Languages and linguistics**

Some researchers have found that when teachers have a background in linguistics and in learning second languages themselves, they are more understanding and compassionate toward CALD students (Giambo & Szecsi, 2005; Harper & de Jong, 2004; Penfield, 1985; Youngs & Youngs, 2001). Consequently this improves their teaching practice when faced with CALD students. Pre-service teachers with a background in languages and linguistics can relate to what the CALD students are going through, and can use their own language learning experience and knowledge of linguistics to enhance their teaching strategies. A somewhat radical option to enhance teacher training in the area of CALD student needs could be to encourage pre-service teachers to learn a foreign language and/or undertake a unit in linguistics as part of their Education degree. This could be an effective way for teachers to gain skills in the area without explicitly learning educational theories. These units could be taken as electives or could be offered as summer units. These units could not only assess their content knowledge of the language/linguistic features, but also require pre-service teachers to write assignments relating to teaching CALD students. In the assignments pre-service teachers would be required to draw on their language learning experience and linguistic knowledge to inform their teaching practice. Alongside practical teaching experience in a school with CALD students and other Education units, this may be an effective approach to raise awareness of CALD student needs in mainstream classrooms.

### **Online study and forums**

The final option would be to encourage pre-service teachers to undertake further study relating to the area of ESL students once they have graduated. One effective way to do so is to enrol in an online unit. This may be an existing course on ESL informed strategies for the mainstream, a university unit, or a new course developed specifically for this purpose. Studying online provides greater flexibility for teachers. Teachers could also receive time release to

complete the work, and the courses could be fully funded, as occurs for teachers seeking TESOL qualifications in some Victorian government schools.

Another option is to develop online forums where mainstream and ESL teachers can engage in professional discussions relating to CALD student needs. Effective teaching techniques can be discussed in a secure environment. Advice on areas such as assessment, reporting and curriculum design can also be shared. Teachers will also be able to design units of work with colleagues from other schools using this technology and teachers can share teaching resources by uploading/scanning files. The amount of time spent on the forum could be counted towards teacher professional development for the VIT.

The above ideas may only be effective as short term solutions. At the very least, they will raise awareness of CALD student needs and of the different teaching strategies required to teach effectively in plurilingual and multicultural schools. If pre-service teachers bring this awareness with them into the classroom, then this is a good start.

### **Practical experience in schools**

But is a good start, as suggested above, really enough? Is it perhaps time to concede that practical wisdom in addressing these problems does not necessarily reside within the confines of university faculties of education, or in textbooks and papers on educational theory, but also and perhaps primarily within multicultural and linguistically diverse schools? This is not to say that schools currently have all the answers, but it does acknowledge that this is where the problems are situated, and it is primarily within that situation that practical answers are to be found.

Within many of these schools there will be teachers who have developed particular skills in working with CALD students and these teachers could act as mentors. In this case, the role of the university supervisor would be to act as a facilitator working in a triangular relationship with the student teacher and mentor, where the expertise of all three participants is continually being renegotiated in the course of resolving the practical difficulties that arise. Admittedly, this will seem like a step too far in the direction of school-based teacher education for some in the profession, but perhaps it is time to think beyond the status quo. It may be worth recalling that though the school-based teacher training in the UK was eventually imposed by government, some major universities such as Oxford (Internship Scheme) and London (Area-based Scheme) had already successfully pioneered the school-based approach. In the case of London, that was strongly motivated by the need to address the multicultural and linguistically diverse classrooms of London schools.

Adopting this approach in Australia will strengthen ties between universities and schools. It will place pre-service teachers in a practical multicultural learning environment where they will be guided and mentored appropriately. This technique differs from merely placing pre-service teachers in a multicultural school to undertake a teaching or observation practicum. In this situation, the pre-service teacher may or may not be mentored appropriately. The experience of being placed in such a diverse teaching environment without a supportive supervising teacher may instill fear and hostility in the pre-service teacher, which will directly negatively impact on their teaching and consequently CALD student learning.

Placing university lecturers in direct consultation with an experienced ESL teacher mentor and the pre-service teacher themselves, will provide confidence in the type of training and techniques delivered to the pre-service teacher. Currently university lecturers in Australia spend hours merely talking about teaching CALD students. Instead, university lecturers, as experts in the education field, should consider going into schools on a regular basis, working alongside experienced ESL teachers. University lecturers and experienced ESL teachers should practically demonstrate how to cater for CALD students in the classroom, and support pre-service teachers to

cater for CALD students throughout their teaching practicum. This approach entails significant professional learning and growth for both lecturers and pre-service teachers, but ultimately the real benefactors could be the CALD students themselves.

## Conclusion and Implications

This study highlights the need for a review of current pre-service teacher education in Victoria. The results indicate that most courses do not effectively prepare teachers to meet the needs of CALD students. Consequently, many pre-service teachers do not have relevant skills, or confidence in their ability, to teach CALD students. This causes CALD students to continue to struggle in the classroom, as seen in previous studies (Brown et al., 2006; Miller et al., 2005).

This study found that units taught in pre-service teacher education did not address CALD student needs. While electives focusing directly on CALD student needs appear to prepare pre-service teachers in this area, these electives were not offered to all students, and were not chosen by all students who had the choice. In order to ensure that pre-service teachers are trained to meet the needs of this student population, CALD student needs should be addressed in all units taught in pre-service courses. Alternatively, a core unit specialising in CALD student needs could be made compulsory for all pre-service teachers. Information on modifying curriculum, teaching strategies and awareness of the cultural, social and emotional needs of CALD students should also be covered in pre-service teacher education. More techniques and practical strategies for educating CALD students are needed in pre-service teacher education courses.

Studies conducted by Arkoudis (2006), Davison (2006), Doyle and Reinhardt (1992), Langman (2003), and Lucas et al. (2008), provide evidence of appropriate content to be included in such pre-service teacher training. For example, positive attitudes toward multiculturalism, cross-cultural understanding and multicultural awareness should be included (Giambo & Szecsi, 2005; Youngs & Youngs, 2001). In addition, it has been argued that activities catering for ESL student needs are beneficial to all students (Doyle & Reinhardt, 1992). Inclusive environments are paramount for effective CALD student education. Most importantly, pre-service mainstream teachers should be trained in how to collaborate effectively and team-teach with ESL specialist teachers (Arkoudis, 2006). These strategies could be combined with pre-service teacher suggestions from the questionnaires and interviews conducted in this study, to create pre-service teacher training courses which adequately prepare teachers to meet CALD student needs in the mainstream.

The value of practical experience in relation to CALD student education was highlighted in this study. The majority of pre-service teachers undertake their practicum at schools with highly diverse student populations. For some pre-service teachers, this was frustrating and daunting. This indicates the need for teachers to be better prepared to teach CALD students, and to have the confidence and skills to do so effectively.

All students attending secondary schools in Victoria have the right to receive the best possible education. Therefore, pre-service teacher training institutions have the responsibility to ensure that all Victorian secondary teachers are equipped to cater for CALD students in mainstream classrooms. Pre-service teacher education courses need to be updated to meet the needs of Victoria's increasingly diverse society.

This study demonstrates that much is still to be done in raising awareness of CALD students, their needs and ways to teach them effectively. Practical solutions have been suggested in this paper in the anticipation that they will be considered by tertiary institutions. Implementing some of these strategies will not resolve all related problems. At the very least, they are small steps towards creating a more inclusive classroom environment for CALD students in mainstream secondary schools.

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