

Supervision and assessment of the early childhood practicum: Experiences of pre-service teachers who speak English as a second language and their supervising teachers

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FINDINGS ARE REPORTED from the third phase of a small exploratory study that aimed to understand how pre-service teachers from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, and those who supervise them in early childhood settings, experience practicum assessment, and the extent to which practicum assessment takes into account pre-service teacher diversity. Discourse analysis (Foucault, 1972), applied to interviews with pre-service teachers and supervising teachers, revealed a persistent 'discourse of denial' of cultural difference on the part of supervising teachers, who nevertheless genuinely attempted to negotiate the inevitable challenges posed by the supervision of CALD pre-service teachers. The paper concludes that supervising teachers were at pains to produce and perpetuate a liberal humanist discourse within which all human beings are 'the same' or should be equal, even as they attempted to recognise CALD pre-service teachers' learning styles and needs.

Introduction

The practicum is an integral component of teacher education courses, but it can be problematic for pre-service teachers from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, particularly in relation to supervision and assessment (Cruikshank, 2004; Ortlipp, 2006; Phelan et al., 2006; Santoro, 1999). This paper reports key findings from the third phase of a small exploratory study that aims to understand how pre-service teachers from CALD backgrounds, and those who supervise them, experience practicum assessment, and the extent to which practicum assessment takes into account pre-service teacher diversity.

Earlier papers (Nuttall & Ortlipp, 2009; Ortlipp & Nuttall, 2008) reported findings from the first two phases of the study. In phase one, data was generated through analysis of early childhood practicum handbooks volunteered by four Australian universities (two in Victoria and two in New South Wales). In phase two, semi-structured interviews were conducted with early childhood pre-service teachers who speak English as their second language. In this paper,

we briefly summarise findings from the handbook analysis and pre-service teacher interviews, then report more fully on the semi-structured interviews with early childhood educators who had experienced the role of supervising teacher for pre-service teachers from CALD backgrounds.

Given the very limited research in this area, the study was primarily exploratory and the small scale of the study reflects our intention of identifying and testing important concepts in the form of a pilot, which might help us frame more extensive investigations in the future. The three main research questions were:

1. To what extent do present approaches to the assessment of the practicum, as described in key university documents (e.g. practicum handbooks), take into account the diversity of the pre-service teacher population, and the ways in which their supervising teachers might respond to and support this diversity?
2. What are the particular and characteristic struggles (if any) that pre-service teachers from

CALD backgrounds face in successfully meeting the assessment requirements of their practicum placements in early childhood settings?

3. What are the perspectives of teachers who have supervised and assessed CALD pre-service teachers, particularly any challenges and/or opportunities they have experienced?

Context and rationale for the study

This study stands at the intersection of several pressing issues for initial teacher education in Australia. First, there is the issue of teacher supply in early childhood education. There is an increasing need for degree-qualified early childhood educators, to the extent that the Federal Department of Education, Employment, and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) is funding an additional 1280 pre-services places in early childhood teacher education across the three years from 2009 to 2011 (DEEWR, 2009). This strategy is itself a reflection of increased investment in early childhood education, driven by the influence of human capital theory in governments' thinking about education, child care and the economy (Brennan, 2007). Many of these 1500 teacher education candidates are likely to be women who have migrated to Australia from countries where English is not the main language in everyday use and who have arrived in Australia to find that work in early childhood education settings is one of the few employment avenues open to unqualified migrant women.

Second, there is an acknowledgement that graduates of teacher education programs need to be well-equipped to work with diverse students, including refugee and migrant children, within a global market in education (United Nations High Commission for Refugees, 2004). Third, there is the extent to which Australia's economy relies on the participation of full-fee-paying international students, including pre-service teachers (DEST, 2005; Ryan & Carrol, 2005). Most importantly, there is the issue of 'unrecognised and unconscious ethnocentrism' in communicating with CALD pre-service teachers (Han, 2006, p. 28; Hatton, 1996), including the lack of cultural sensitivity on the part of supervising teachers in the practicum (Cruikshank, 2004). This is both an issue for teaching and learning, and an issue of human rights.

Note that this study is not only concerned with the experiences of 'overseas' pre-service teachers. Many pre-service teachers in Australian universities appear (and may position themselves as) Anglo-Australian but are second-, third- or fourth-generation descendants of the large number of migrants to Australia during the past century, and do not speak English as their home language. By inviting CALD pre-service teachers in general to participate in the study, not just international students, we hope to be able to compare and contrast

the experiences of pre-service teachers who may be (incorrectly) assumed to speak English as their first language with those who clearly do not. We did not include Indigenous Australian pre-service teachers in our interview sample. This was not because we wish to see these pre-service teachers excluded from participation in empirical work in this area, but because we understand Indigenous students face challenges which are additional to, as well as similar to, non-Indigenous CALD pre-service teachers (Fleet, Kitson, Cassady & Hughes, 2007). We believe the practicum experiences of Indigenous Australian pre-service teachers are worthy of study in their own right.

Research about CALD pre-service teachers

There is some research into initial teacher education with respect to diverse teacher education candidates, and the need for teacher education programs to prepare culturally sensitive and competent teachers (Allard & Santoro, 2004; Ball, 2000; Milner, 2003). These authors also conclude there is little research about the cultural competence of teacher educators, including the educators in schools and early childhood centres who play a significant role in the supervision and assessment of pre-service teachers during professional placements. This is troubling, given the need to increase and retain the numbers of CALD students in teacher education programs (Hartsuyker, 2007; Prime, 2001).

Many of these pre-service teachers in Australia are from neighbouring Asian countries (Santoro, 1999; Han, 2006), and some authors have expressed concerns about the retention rates for these students and the difficulties they face achieving success in course work and the practicum (Cruikshank, 2004; Clark & Flores, 2001; Han, 2006). Santoro's (1999) case study of the experiences of two Chinese-born-and-educated pre-service teachers on placement in two different Australian secondary schools suggests that racist discourses exist in schools and impact negatively on pre-service teachers' placement experience. These findings are consistent with research into performance-based assessment, which indicates that assessor prejudice regarding race, appearance, language and ethnicity has the potential to affect judgement, particularly in high-inference performance-based assessment (Gillis & Bateman, 1999; Villegas, 1997). These findings suggest the practicum assessment process may not be equitable for pre-service teachers from non-English-speaking backgrounds.

However, there is little research that specifically examines professional placement curriculum for hidden cultural expectations. In a small study exploring tertiary supervisors' perceptions of the practicum assessment process (Ortlipp, 2006), analysis of practicum documents (handbooks of requirements, assessment procedures and

approaches) showed that the assessment process used by the early childhood teacher education program reflected Anglo–Australian values and expectations. According to the tertiary supervisors who took part in this study, students from particular cultural backgrounds found it almost impossible to take the initiative in discussions of their achievement and participate as an equal in triadic (student–university–field supervisor) assessment. Villegas (1997) points out that there is a clear equity challenge involved in developing methods for assessing teacher competence, particularly the challenge of ‘finding effective strategies for guarding against assessor bias and for preventing miscommunication derived from cultural differences between the assessed and their assessors’ (p. 275).

Theoretical, methodological and ethical frameworks informing the study

The theoretical informants to the study reflect our separate but overlapping preoccupations as researchers: in the case of the first author, concepts derived from post-structuralism, particularly Foucault’s (1980) analysis of power-knowledge and how this phenomenon can be identified through interrogation of the discursive nature of social relations; and in the second author’s case, the attempt to understand the shared, complex processes of professional learning in institutional settings through the use of Engeström’s (2001) ‘third generation’ of cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT). While these approaches share common concerns, particularly the ways social relations and contexts afford and/or constrain particular forms of knowledge, we do acknowledge that they have fundamental ontological differences. These are principally the idealist nature of post-structuralism versus the materialist stance of CHAT. But we argue that adopting these frameworks in tandem allows us to address the weaknesses of each. For example, Engeström (2008) has recently argued that his formulation of CHAT pays insufficient attention to issues of power and how it circulates within learning systems; a Foucauldian perspective can sensitise researchers to these features.

An example of this ‘in tandem’ approach played out in our analysis of the nature and function of the practicum documents brought together for the study. Drawing on post-structuralist principles, we used Fairclough’s (2003) approach to critical discourse analysis to conduct a fine-grained analysis of the documents themselves. At the point of the interviews with the supervising teachers we drew, by contrast, on Engeström’s work to help us understand how such handbooks function as mediating artefacts within the complex activity system known as ‘the practicum’.

The interviews with pre-service teachers and supervising teachers were initially coded using *a priori* constructs such as ‘communication’ and ‘expectations’, then open

coded for unanticipated findings. We also tried to remain alert to important narrative vignettes, using Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) typology of narrative content. In this paper we report on our use of discourse analysis (Foucault, 1972), undertaken to identify the discourses within which supervising teachers locate and make sense of their supervision and assessment of teacher education pre-service teachers from CALD backgrounds.

Interview participants were recruited from an early childhood teacher education course in metropolitan Victoria that enrolls significant numbers of pre-service teachers from CALD backgrounds, both as full-fee-paying international students from non-Anglophone countries (principally in south-east Asia) and as Australian residents or citizens who do not speak English at home. Care was taken to ensure that participants were not recruited until their results in practicum studies had been finalised, and the recruitment and interviewing of pre-service teachers and supervising teachers participating in the study was designed to ensure their participation was not made known to university staff, including interview transcripts being de-identified prior to analysis by the authors.

Findings from the analysis of practicum documents and interviews with CALD pre-service teachers

An earlier paper drawn from this study (Ortlipp & Nuttall, 2008) provides a detailed description of how the practicum documents—which included handbooks, assessment pro forma, and unit study guides—were analysed. In short, we identified a startling contrast between the expectation that pre-service teachers would learn to teach culturally and linguistically diverse students and the possibility that the pre-service teacher might her/himself be from a non-Anglo–Australian background. There were 46 discrete items across the data set that exhorted pre-service teachers to:

... plan and implement curriculum that is responsive to group dynamics, children’s needs and interests and that acknowledges gender, cultural, ethnic and developmental differences (Unit description, Preschool placement handbook, University 3).

or

... observe and respect the culture/custom of the school/centre at all times (Pre-service teacher placement responsibilities, Preschool placement handbook, University 4).

By contrast, only one item in the data set hinted at the possibility that pre-service teachers might:

... differ in background, prior experiences, personal styles, beliefs, values, interests, strengths and learning styles (ECE handbook, University 2).

A second feature of these practicum materials was the expectation that the pre-service teacher will be proactive in initiating discussions about their work with the supervising teacher and will take an active role in evaluating themselves and contributing to the assessment process:

It is important ... that [pre-service teachers] have the opportunity to explain their decisions and behaviour. This is part of developing their confidence and skills in evaluating themselves ... as well as learning how to justify and defend their work. At the same time, [pre-service teachers] need to demonstrate compromise and conciliation ... (Child care placement handbook, University 4).

But these are practices that are privileged within a 'western' discourse of teaching and represent western ways of speaking, acting, interacting, thinking and being an appropriate pre-service teacher (Ortlipp, 2006). Through the assessment criteria and the roles and responsibilities of pre-service teachers outlined in the practicum handbooks for each university, the documents produce, reproduce and circulate particular understandings of what it means to be a 'good' or 'appropriate' pre-service teacher on professional placement. Early childhood pre-service teachers are constructed as: professional, reflective, creative, respectful, responsible, cooperative, courteous, enthusiastic, confident, and someone who uses her/his initiative. Supervising teachers are required to interpret these requirements and criteria and, in doing so, draw on their own cultural understandings of what it means to be an appropriate early childhood pre-service teacher undertaking placement in an Australian early childhood service.

Our interviews with pre-service teachers from CALD backgrounds are an attempt to get closer to the lived experience of assessment on the practicum for these pre-service teachers. In Nuttall and Ortlipp (2009), we describe the case of Sue, a Singaporean Chinese student, and the breakdown of her final practicum in her four-year undergraduate program. In our analysis of the transcript of the interview with Sue, we were struck by the characteristic features of her experience we have each (and separately) observed during many years as teacher educators. On the basis of this analysis, we hypothesised that the path to 'failure' on the practicum proceeds in a predictable sequence. First, the supervising teacher either overlooks or misinterprets, or acknowledges at only the most superficial level, the pre-service teacher's 'difference':

Sue: I got the sense from the teacher that 'You are Asian, you are this, this, this'. So [the teacher had] that mindset of 'You are like that' but, in fact, I am not, but it's really hard to erase that image in her head.

Second, the supervising teacher draws on racist typologies to orient their own cultural knowledge to that of the pre-service teacher. These stages are then closely followed

by a third, when communication (poorly established from the start) finally breaks down:

Sue: My relationship with her is just that we don't talk, we usually wouldn't talk to each other, because if I do say anything it would be a very short answer, like, there's nothing to say.

By this stage, the pre-service teacher faces a turning point: to conform or to rebel. Sue conformed, to the extent that she imitated her supervising teacher (e.g. by raising her voice at the children, '... just doing what she says you're not doing, but that may not be your belief or how you would have done it'). The fifth and final stage of this sequence is the reflection or de-briefing phase, either with a university staff member or a friend; in Sue's case, this happened both with her lecturer and with the interviewer.

Sue aligned her behaviour with that of the supervising teacher, conforming to her expectations for practice and submitting to the teacher's judgement that Sue's approach to teaching was inappropriate. Sue's practicum manual, like that of all four universities, stated that she was expected to be proactive in resolving differences with her supervising teacher, but Sue told the interviewer, 'I felt intimidated if I do it [i.e. be proactive] and I tried to avoid that aggressive argument so I usually just take it in'. Sue's decision to 'just take it in' speaks of the embodied experience of institutional violence; Sue told the interviewer she eventually had to seek counselling to help get over her experience on this placement.

Note that the breakdown of Sue's practicum is not the issue per se in the context of this study; pre-service teachers of all backgrounds can struggle with professional expectations. The salient point about Sue's experience is that everything she attempted and encountered on her practicum was understood through the rubric of 'difference'. Sue's previous practicum placements had all been very successful, yet even then she was primarily positioned as 'Asian', with supervising teachers suggesting to Sue, 'Why don't you talk about where you come from with the children?', and, Sue said, 'things like that.'

We do not claim that Sue's experience is universal or even typical for CALD pre-service teachers. Each of the pre-service teachers interviewed so far has had their own, distinctive, stories to tell. But the interviews do share one salient feature: the erasure of the pre-service teachers' diversity through discourses of denial. It is to this finding that we also turn in our analysis of the interviews with the supervising teachers.

Findings from interviews with supervising teachers of CALD students

The supervising teachers we interviewed had not necessarily supervised any of the pre-service teachers participating in the study; they were recruited separately

and the design of the study ensures possible links cannot be identified. As with the student interviews, the interviewer was not known to the supervising teachers, and any potential identifiers (including teacher names, pre-service teacher names, and centre names) were removed from the interview transcripts prior to analysis.

In their interviews, the pre-service teachers made it clear they wanted their supervising teachers to acknowledge the effects of cultural differences within the context of the practicum. The pre-service teachers were comfortable with what they perceived as their difference(s), attributing some of these differences to their culturally based experiences and understandings of teaching and learning. However, they were aware that they would have to learn to 'fit in', and expressed the desire to teach in ways the children were familiar with in Australia: to understand how Australian teachers teach. Myles, Cheng and Wang's (2006) study of foreign-trained teacher candidates showed that candidates were very aware that they would have to adapt their thinking and practice to their new environment in order to 'fit into the community of practice' (p. 239) and be assessed positively for their teaching practice.

In this section we focus on the most persistent discourse we identified through discourse analysis (Foucault, 1972) of the supervising teacher interviews, the 'discourse of denial', and the complex negotiations supervising teachers undertook to both maintain this discourse and attend to the inevitable challenges posed by the supervision of CALD pre-service teachers.

A juggling act: Acknowledging difference within a 'discourse of denial'

A discourse of denial is characterised by not wanting to talk about racial difference, arguing, 'they're all the same to me'. Phelan and Luu (2004, citing Frankenberg, 2003) describe this as 'a mode of thinking about race organized around an effort "not" to see, or at any rate, not to acknowledge, race differences' (p. 185). One teacher described her experience of supervising an Indian pre-service teacher in these terms:

... I don't see her as anything different; yes, she's darker-skinned, but I do not see her as Indian; she's a woman like me, she's wanting to be a teacher like me, she's a mum, like me. I don't look at the culture. I mean, yeah, she does have different traditions and different things, but I've never [been] sort of one [to say], 'Oh, you're that or you're that'—I think because we have got on so well, we're really good friends ... (Interview, supervising teacher 1, lines 61–67).

This statement concurs with Phelan and Luu's (2004) argument that supervising teachers desire to have a 'smooth, relaxed and pleasant interaction' (p. 186) with pre-service teachers, with no conflict, rather than

acknowledging difference and then having to deal with the implications of that difference. The repeated use of the phrase 'like me' signals the normative position taken up by this supervising teacher. This position, in turn, allowed her to identify specific benefits of pre-service teachers' differences without having to amend her own cultural world-view.

However, the supervising teachers in our sample did not ignore difference per se; rather, they found ways to manage notions of difference within a discourse of denial. We identified at least three strategies they employed to manage this juggling act:

1. Invoking the 'usefulness' of difference.
2. Attempting to 'normalise' the student.
3. Engaging in 'compensatory' pedagogy.

These strategies were all focused on the supervising teachers' desire to ensure success for the CALD pre-service teacher on the professional placement.

The 'usefulness' of difference

The supervising teacher quoted above saw another pre-service teacher's fluency in Tamil as 'fantastic':

... when she first started with her diploma here, on placement, it was fantastic having her at the beginning of the year, because we had a few children finding it very difficult to settle, and hadn't really left mum before, and because she had the same language, she was really able to hone in on those couple of children. And they settled brilliantly because she was able to talk to them in language that they could understand, and support them and help them and, oh, just thank goodness you're here ... (ibid, lines 305–313).

This scenario speaks not only to the diversity of pre-service teachers and the diversity of children in early childhood services, but also to the way maintenance of a normative position regarding Anglo–Australian pre-schooling renders cultural difference amongst pre-service teachers as merely 'useful', rather than central to their strengths, experience or identity as teachers. This was underscored when this supervising teacher said:

There's another kinder in the system where [the same pre-service teacher] has spent a lot of time, and she would have been very, very useful being Indian over there (ibid, lines 392–400).

Normalising the pre-service teacher

A more explicit form of the discourse of denial is pressure on CALD pre-service teachers to develop 'an Australian perspective':

... this woman [the pre-service teacher] concentrated on the children that came from her

culture, from India, or from Sri Lanka, and not anybody else, and when we were choosing children to look at, she wanted to take only little ones from her culture, which wasn't good enough; she has to look at all of the children. So I said to her, 'No, you cannot have any from your own culture, I know that that sounds really hard, but next year you'll be doing this on a full-time basis. Why don't you have a look at children outside of your culture?' And I said, 'That's one suggestion' ... she accepted that, and I said, 'It's forcing you to look at things from an Australian perspective', and I said, 'You will be working with Australian parents, who will insist on Australian perspective' (Interview, supervising teacher 2, lines 114–121).

Again, this supervising teacher was alert to the pre-service teacher's difference but only from the normative position of her own perspective:

I said, 'The beauty of you is that you have a second perspective that you're able to give these Australian children and that will be appreciated [by Australian parents] only when you're able to communicate with their children'. And I said, 'If you can communicate with the Australian children, then you're able to win the parents over, whereas if you can only communicate with children from your culture, then you're going to run into problems from other parents'. And I said, 'That's really not appropriate to do, it's not a practical thing to do'. So I asked her to go home and think about it, and she was quite happy to do that, or at least I think so, I wasn't sure (ibid, lines 122–130).

Our point here is not to position ourselves as superior in some way to perceived inadequacies we might identify among the teachers participating in this study. This would be not only unethical and unhelpful, but inaccurate.

A 'compensatory' pedagogy of supervision

For example, there was considerable evidence across the interviews with supervising teachers of the extra effort they put into supervising CALD pre-service teachers, effort which in our experience is not always reflected in on-campus programs:

I find that you do have to spend that extra time and it's not necessarily also giving feedback in one lump. With all students you like to give ongoing feedback but this is more intense ongoing feedback. Or they require a little bit more time for that interaction and to demonstrate and to get them to observe and reflect on what they're seeing (Interview, supervising teacher 3, lines 80–85).

Another of the supervising teachers described how she amended her supervisory pedagogy to provide additional support for CALD students:

What I found with [one pre-service teacher], I would actually have to sit down and spend a little bit more time explaining the processes of how I did a curriculum, or she would come back from a tutorial and say, 'We did this', but she was still floundering (Interview, supervising teacher 1, lines 114–118).

This teacher went on to describe how this pre-service teacher frequently sought her advice in making sense of on-campus experiences that were challenging or too linguistically complex:

... you could see that she was struggling to understand what it was that was required of her so, with her, yes, I think I did spend, not a huge amount of time, but I did spend more than I would have [with another CALD pre-service teacher] just explaining and clarifying to make sure she really understood what they were expecting of her for uni and, you know, something that had been discussed in the tutorial. She'd ask, 'Well, what does that word mean?' [and] although it may have been explained in the class, she would come back and say, 'But I still didn't get it' ... (ibid, lines 127–137).

This tendency to erase difference, while also to capitalise upon and to compensate for it, is highly paradoxical. In our final discussion, we attempt to find a way through this contradiction.

Unpacking a contradiction

In analysing each of the teacher interviews, we have struggled to explain the contradiction evident in the teachers' description of their thinking. We have come to see this contradiction as akin to, and symptomatic of, a wider discourse in early childhood education: a reluctance to let go of notions of 'equality' in favour of notions of 'equity' and the inevitable pedagogical challenges this would bring. We see this as a residual form of the discourse of individual development, still commonplace in Australian early childhood services and, as evidenced by our analysis of professional placement documents, in teacher education programs as well (cf. Nuttall & Doecke, 2008). One of the supervising teachers signalled this desire to treat everyone as equal by seeing them as individuals:

I don't think there's anything particular to [CALD pre-service teachers] because I was thinking about it and, in terms of [pre-service teachers], I don't think I can categorise them into [whether] this was a particularly common thing, because I think with all [pre-service teachers], they're all different and they all have particular needs. And it's more, for me, not a particular area that they've had difficulty with, but the communication between, say, the supervisor and themselves (Interview, supervising teacher 3, lines 51–56).

The supervising teachers participating in this study are not colour blind—they know their pre-service teachers are Asian or Indian—but they are at pains to produce, reproduce and perpetuate a liberal humanist discourse within which all human beings are ‘the same’ or should be equal. However, ‘liberal humanism makes it difficult for [the supervising teacher] to even acknowledge difference, for fear that they are being discriminatory’ (Phelan & Luu, 2004, p. 187). As early childhood educators and teacher educators, we recognise the desire to focus on individual needs regardless of culture as highly characteristic of early childhood education in Australia. Even the notion of ‘cultural appropriateness’ is conflated with or seen as part of individual appropriateness (Bredenkamp & Copple, 1997), which views culture as an individual phenomenon, a part of them and their identity, and not as something beyond the individual, determined by society and circulating through discourse.

It is clear that the supervising teachers participating in this study so far are employing pedagogical practices that flow from their understandings of CALD pre-service teachers as learners and their attempts to make sense of pre-service teachers’ behaviours. Strategies such as showing and demonstrating (because of perceived or actual difficulty in employing concepts), spending more time with students to speak with them and discuss their written work, slowing down their speech, and suggesting to CALD pre-service teachers that they sit aside (in the preschool or at home) to process their thinking (including the time needed for any necessary language-switching to occur) were all employed by the participating supervising teachers. The same teacher who exhorted her supervisees to develop ‘an Australian perspective’ also explained how she took time to build trust, find out about pre-service teachers’ cultural and family backgrounds, and identify their needs.

The sensitivity to the CALD pre-service teachers’ learning styles and needs, and the gathering of information about backgrounds and experiences, suggests that the supervising teachers were drawing on what Pacini-Ketchabaw and Schecter (2002, p. 408) refer to as a discourse of ‘intercultural sensitivity as a pedagogical tool’, within which teachers demonstrated sensitivity to children’s differing learning styles and needs and sought input from families about issues that would impact on students’ learning. Pacini-Ketchabaw and Scheter (ibid) argue that this discourse is characterised by a lack of reciprocity: teachers are sensitive to difference and seek information about differences in order to meet children’s needs and help them succeed within the curriculum, but they don’t use the information they garner about their diverse students in order to integrate their experiences into the curriculum. Similarly with the supervising teachers, their intent was to meet the CALD pre-service teachers’ learning needs and ensure success in an unfamiliar context, rather than to find

ways to integrate the pre-service teachers’ experience, knowledge, and approaches to teaching and learning into the early childhood curriculum. Other than the ‘usefulness’ of the CALD pre-service teachers linguistic contribution with CALD children, there was little evidence that supervising teachers value the culturally distinctive ‘funds of knowledge’ (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992) that CALD pre-service teachers bring to professional experience placements.

As stated earlier, our concern is not to ‘point the finger’ at supervising teachers. As with Pacini-Ketchabaw and Schecter (2002, p. 412), ‘[W]e assume as an analytic premise that teachers are generally without ill intent or deliberate bias; rather we emphasise the insidious and pervasive role of dominant discourses within educational institutions’. It is to the insidious nature of institutional discourse that we find ourselves returning as teacher educators.

Conclusion

Inasmuch as placement handbooks and assessment pro-formas represent institutional discourses, the discourse of denial is far more prevalent in the official documents we reviewed than in the accounts of the supervising teachers we interviewed. None of the teachers in this study had received specific advice through in-service programs offered by universities or through contact with individual university lecturers. In the absence of this support or advice, supervising teachers inevitably draw on the discourses of difference they have available to them in order to engage in supervisory practice. Achieving a truly differentiated curriculum for professional practica will require access to different discourses of difference. At the institutional level, this means producing and circulating alternative discourses through official documents that overtly acknowledge pre-service teacher difference. It also means providing for the possibility of diverse experiences, knowledges and approaches to teaching and learning being integrated into the early childhood curriculum by attending to the wording of requirements and assessment criteria. At the site of the enactment of practicum supervision and assessment, it means enabling supervising teachers to access a ‘discourse of diversity as curriculum’ (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Schecter, 2002, p. 409) within which CALD pre-service teachers’ diverse experiences, knowledges and approaches are valued and integrated into the curriculum in meaningful and authentic ways.

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