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Ensuring student success: Establishing a community of practice for culturally and linguistically diverse preservice teachers

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This paper discusses the primacy of communities of practice within learning contexts at university and during practicum for culturally and linguistically diverse preservice teachers. The study illustrates that learning occurs when there are adequate opportunities for participation and practice. Data from interviews with 28 culturally and linguistically diverse preservice teachers illustrate that tensions created by social, cultural differences impact upon modes of identification and dimensions of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). The study concludes by reiterating the importance of establishing proactive communities of practice to ensure success in learning and practice for this group of preservice teachers.

Introduction

Global changes have led to increased diversity among students undertaking preservice teacher programs and countries such as Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States have greater cultural and linguistic diversity among their student populations than ever before. Termed 'teachers of colour' in the United States, and 'minority' or 'ethnic' teachers in the United Kingdom and Australia, ethnic non-white teachers have historically been under-represented in these countries (Achinstein, Ogawa, Sexton & Freitas, 2010; Basit et al., 2006; Dilworth & Brown, 2001; Escayg, 2010; Gay, 2010; Han, 2005; Han & Singh, 2007; see also Cochran- Smith, 2004). As scholars observe, the extent of teacher diversity is also a comment on the democratic processes of teaching and teacher retention (Achinstein, Ogawa, Sexton & Freitas, 2010; Goodwin, 1997, 2004; Gordon, 2000; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Further, as Davies (2007) and Watts-Pailliotet (1997) note, although there is greater recognition of multiculturalism, there remain significant social, cultural and linguistic barriers to students' participation and practice.

Our study seeks to examine why pre-service teachers from culturally and linguistically diverse [CALD] backgrounds experience underachievement and, subsequently, loss of identity. Our contention is that without an effective community of practice, racially, culturally and linguistically diverse students are unsuccessful in becoming teachers. We undertake a fine-grained investigation of communities of learning and practice to describe how established members of a community influence the learning and practice of new members. In this paper, we discuss how communities of practice are significant sites that, through participation, enable effective learning and practice for students and thereby promote effective membership. Data collected from CALD pre-service teachers at a local university in Australia are examined from the perspectives of various concepts of community of practice. We argue that CALD preservice teachers can be successful in teacher training programs if we take into account aspects that form a successful community in which explicit attention is given to participation and practice. With this aim, we review briefly Lave and Wenger's (1991) and Wenger's (1998, 2000) concept of community of practice as it applies to CALD pre-service teachers.

Teaching Communities of Practice

Various researchers have stressed that teaching practice becomes strengthened when professional development occurs through collaborative, supportive means (Achinstein, 2002; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Snow- Gerono, 2005). Yet, as Little (2002) and Wilson & Berne (1999) observe, there have been few studies of interactions that occur within the teaching community or, in the present case, within teacher training programs. For all preservice teachers, particularly for CALD teachers, interactive communities of practice are highly relevant if they are to form bridges between their social, cultural and educational backgrounds and the ones they encounter. In this study, culturally and linguistically diverse pre-service teachers are defined as non-English speaking white students and those from Asian, African and indigenous backgrounds. We recognise that there are differences within these macro groups and that to refer to them in broad terms might be inappropriate. However, as the purpose of this study is to explore how a teaching/learning community forms and to determine best practices in achieving this goal, they are considered as one group.

It is not possible to review in a comprehensive manner Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger's (1998, 2000) situated theory model of communities of practice. Therefore we revisit this framework as it applies to this study and consider its centrality to the critique of learning environments. As Tillema (2006, p. 174; see also Keiny, 2007; Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002) notes, knowledge within professional, and here, learning environments takes account of the 'social and communicative nature of the way professionals learn'. In contexts of collective learning such as occur in universities and schools, learning as a communal venture draws on practices that are defined jointly by members of a community and a set of values that are commonly agreed upon.

Communities that operate through a shared set of values and principles and have shared goals and shared enterprise are defined by Wenger (1998) as 'communities of practice'. According to Wenger (2008, pp. 5-6), communities of practice are centres that assist in 'exchange and interpretation of information', help in 'retaining knowledge', 'steward competencies' and are 'homes for identities'. A community of practice is 'about something' Wenger (2008, p. 4), a learning/teaching community in which members as a group develop knowledges that allow for relationships, collaboration, networks and, subsequently, identities, to form. Three fundamental elements that determine a community of practice are (1), a domain which creates a common ground; (2), a community, which creates 'the social fabric of learning'; and (3), practice, constituted by specific knowledges that distinguish a community (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002, pp. 27-28).

A community of practice depends on communal meaning-making that assists in identification and belonging for newcomers, while it reaffirms participation and practice for experts. According to scholars, collaboration is essential in a community of practice, and it is achieved through meaningful knowledge sharing (Dalgarno & Colgan, 2007; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Shulha & Wilson, 2003; Roth, 1998; see also Barab & Duffy, 2000). Hence, in this study, the extent to which peers, academics and supervising teachers were collaborative and engaged in communal meaning making helped determine the success of CALD pre-service teachers. A central aspect of a community is practice that is explicit and implicit, reified and non-reified. Another significant concept is participation, as it assists a person to become a competent member of a community and thereby creates belonging and identity (Wenger, 2000; see also 1998).

The notions of participation and practice are central to CALD pre-service teachers if they are to reaffirm their identities as beginning teachers. The significance of communities of practice for CALD teachers is further enhanced when participation and practice are examined in depth. According to Wenger (2000), participation and practice consist of three dimensions

and three modes of belonging. The three dimensions of practice are: mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire. The dimensions of joint enterprise, mutuality and repertoire are highly significant to the success of this group. Joint enterprise illustrates how successful learning and practicum are dependent on various members accepting difference and learning jointly. Mutuality indicates cooperative engagement that is based on trust and shared understanding of members. Repertoire describes the level of awareness about the tools, techniques and concepts that are needed for a community to succeed and are made available to new members (Wenger, 2000). With all, but particularly with CALD pre-service teachers, these dimensions are crucial for success in learning. Along with these three dimensions, there are three modes of belonging, namely, engagement, imagination and alignment that ensure adequate membership to a community. Engagement involves 'doing things together' and thereby shared meaning making; imagination as a sense-making device helps comprehension of the world by 'constructing an image of ourselves, of our communities'; and alignment entails 'a mutual process of coordinating perspectives' (Wenger, 2000, pp. 227- 228). In the case of CALD preservice teachers, the three modes of belonging are central, as these permit differences to be accepted, create membership and allow for identification with the system.

The social learning systems of schools and universities draw on dimensions of practice and modes of belonging to construct potential communities. In the case of CALD pre-service teachers, communities of practice are both significant and fraught with tension, as they have to bridge different cultures, languages and varied educational experiences. CALD preservice teachers have to undertake multiple memberships as they negotiate between the university and the practicum school, and within the practicum context between being a novice teacher and becoming a professional, and in this their boundaries can shift and challenge them in unforeseen ways. In moving from peripheral to central participation there are expectations of learning to comprehend the 'social world' (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 36) and the myriad, subtle ways of belonging to the community of teachers or peers who might be from a different social, cultural and educational background. Such learning and adjustment is in addition to the expectation that pre-service teachers who move from one community to another learn to align with different forms of membership (Wenger, 1998). These challenges become intensified for CALD pre-service teachers in university learning contexts or in the environment of a practicum experience, particularly because of their linguistic, cultural and educational diversity and expectations.

The worth of participation and practice in pre-service teacher training cannot be over-rated, however, when students enter multi-membership they also experience 'the living experience of boundaries' (Wenger, 1998, p. 161) that result in new and complex re-organisation of identity and, subsequently, changes to subjectivity. There is a push and pull of experience and competence when peers, academics, supervising teachers and CALD pre-service teachers interact. As Wenger (2000) observes, such tension can produce learning, especially when there is an environment of collaboration, equity and mutuality. Nevertheless, as this study demonstrates, without an environment of collaboration, equity and mutuality and in the presence of an assimilation philosophy (Bennett, 2004; see also 1993), competence and experience may not be 'congruent' (Wenger, 2000, p. 226). If there are barriers to legitimate participation for CALD pre-service teachers, then participation and identity development are impossible.

Wenger's (1998, p. 164) conceptualisation of identity involves both 'what we are' and 'what we are not' and includes non-participation. Non-participation, with its two identifiable states of peripherality and marginality, is to be understood as occurring in the context of participation. Non-participation can occur either when the newcomer wishes to be on the periphery and observe as an opportunity for learning (Wenger, 1998, p.166), as was often the

case with CALD pre-service teachers in this study, or when the student is marginalised from full participation in the community, as occurred with some participants. Marginalisation implies a situation in which a participant is denied the right to integrate more deeply into the community of practice and become a fully participating member.

Thus, the two states of non-participation became sites for empathy or apathy depending on how these states were represented by the CALD students and interpreted by the peers, academics and supervising teachers. While for CALD pre-service teachers, non-participation was a site for learning from the boundaries of practice, whereby they observed the social and cultural practices of teaching, their non-participation was often interpreted as a lack of initiative. Critics note that social, cultural and educational diversity has to be viewed as productive for it to be worthwhile (Deters, 2006; Flores & Day, 2006; Han, 2005; Kalantzis & Cope, 2000; Myles, Cheng & Wang, 2006). As Kalantzis and Cope (2000, p.130) observe, where 'productive diversity' is accepted, it becomes a learning resource that is productive due to its heterogeneity and through sharing of cultural knowledges rather than as a problem to be overcome. To achieve productive diversity, receptivity to different cultures of learning and teaching is required with diverse paths to learning being accepted: indeed, where 'a pedagogy of pluralism' occurs (Kalantzis & Cope, 2000, p. 130).

The above review indicates that a community of practice emphasises participation, practice and social interaction as significant to identity formation; it is dependent on interactive relationships, mentor scaffolding, sharing, and joint meaning-making for its success. The construct of a community of practice helps us to comprehend how legitimate peripheral and full participation occurs and how CALD pre-service teachers attempt to acquire full membership of learning and teaching communities in a socially, culturally and educationally new context. All conceptualisations of situated learning through communities of practice are exhibited in institutional learning contexts and success in interaction depends on the extent and level of participation and practice promoted for newcomers. A community of practice may support the rhetoric of membership yet participation and practice may be not be valued, as the data discussed in the next section illustrate.

Examining Data

As researchers, educators and support personnel, we had an ongoing link with the preservice teacher training program at a local Queensland university in Australia, and we engaged in this study to comprehend the struggles encountered by students in becoming members of various communities of practice due to their cultural and linguistic diversity. The research conducted with pre-service teachers from a CALD background was aimed at exploring their personal and social experiences in their engagement with multiple communities of practice. The researchers invited teacher trainees, domestic and international, who were from a non- white Australian background and/or had English as a second language and identified themselves as culturally and/or linguistically diverse, to participate. To explore the multiple, contentious boundaries of communities and to gain a deeper understanding of the personal and social experiences of CALD pre-service teachers, we invited all students identifying themselves as culturally and linguistically diverse to share their experiences at university and practicum. The selection was based on students who had completed at least one practicum in the four-year undergraduate degree program. Three men and 25 women participated. Twenty-four identified as East Asians, Pacific Islanders or Indians; two were from white European backgrounds and two identified as Indigenous Australians. One student who was completing his degree in Europe identified as an exchange student.

The interviews were semi-structured and informal and lasted about an hour, as the goal was to enable students to share their lived experiences of participation, practice and communal meaning-making. Some of the questions that were asked were:

- What were your experiences at practicum?
- In your attempts to undertake teacher training programs, what problems did you encounter and how did you overcome these problems?

Initial transcription of the interviews yielded about 150 pages of text. The analysis was conducted on the entire transcript initially to study the relationship between the different parts of the narrative and to isolate lived experiences. The entire transcript, when considered in a holistic manner, assisted us in studying the links between the part and the whole. Examination and re-examination of the data helped to highlight lived experiences as being significant for discussion. We sought to find threads that interwove the various strands of the main themes together. We applied the theory of communities of practice to the data to isolate the various communities being identified by the participants.

For analytic purposes, the data were transcribed with pseudonyms and coded to focus on central themes drawn in relation to the theory of community of practice, namely participation in the university learning community of practice, the collaborative learning community of peers and the practicum school as a community of practice. We draw on themes that relate to these areas and acknowledge that the selective process of preferring these over others might seem limiting. In identifying the significance of community of practice as the primary area of examination, we acknowledge the elimination of comments that are not relevant to the study. However, data presented retain the original text as provided by participants.

Participation in the University Community

Participants indicated that as learning at the university was socially situated, the social/ cultural context of participants determined how they adapted to different levels of participation. When learning experiences were similar, as in the case of 'S4', who thought: *'the system is different, quite different, but I haven't really felt I have met any great cultural clashes',* learning became a positive challenge that enabled him to become a member of the community. For some others, when the system did not work well due to epistemic differences, there was disengagement from the community; for example, 'S1' stated:

> *If peers do not keep appointments, they are not collaborative then it conflicts with my philosophy. This is very different to the Asian commitment - you have to be punctual, cooperative, work on Saturday and Sunday and you have to be reliable…as long as you do business.*

Here, the absence of collaborative work environment, mutuality, trust and negotiated commitment led to a lack of participation and community experience. Participation and practice were considered to be essential to being a member of the community and, as 'S5' noted, when there was a lack of interaction and connection, there were feelings of awkwardness:

> *My experiences were diverse enough, maybe in one of the subjects there might be… there was some exclusion because the others were ahead of us and nobody was talking to us. But we got through. They don't care about you - it is quite awkward.*

For others, for example 'S2' who said: 'm*y English is very limited, the words that they use in academic system is very overwhelming. But if I do manage to pass I am hoping to return to my home country and encourage other indigenous people in their communities to follow my footsteps',* being confronted by institutional apathy was overwhelming, yet the

larger goals of ensuring success of her own people took precedence and motivated her to continue learning. The determination exhibited by this student was not evidenced in the international cohort who often felt that there was resistance among members of the community to engaging with them. For 'S6', there was limited participation and belonging:

> *The hardest thing was, sometimes teachers are not very good with international students. I go to them to talk to them during consultation times, and then I get feeling that they don't want me to be there.*

As Quiocho and Rios (2000, p. 523) stress, 'the entire system must be consciously guided by pedagogical principles that are humanizing and supported by collaborative relations of power', if diverse teaching workforce is to be successful. When this happened, for example in 'S3's' experience, it resulted in engagement, shared vision and shared purpose: *'it is like the teacher just opens the door, helps the student open the door, and they will– tell them how to think and then the students find the solutions themselves. Yeh! Sure, I like it'*. However, these students were in the minority. For others, it was '*hard*' as, although the lecturers tried to include them, they preferred non-participation and learning through observation, as evidenced in the following comment by 'S8':

> *Actually, to be honest, I do not want the tutor to ask me anything. Because my feeling is, I am not sure I can answer; I am not confident, sometime it takes so long.*

However, 'S1' felt that there was little by way of shared meaning making, and as a result she was on the margins through lack of achievement: 'lecturers do not help; tutors only give feedback after the assignment has been marked, here, they do not sit with you to explain how the assignment is done'. These comments illustrate how differences in educational experiences and diversity in learning cultures strongly impacted on these students, resulting in reduced participation in and membership of the university community of learners.

Community of Practice among Peers

The learning community of practice at the university was influenced by the social and learning networks that students attempted to establish. CALD students faced immense challenges in trying to become members of the learning community as they navigated through its complex social and cultural practices and network. As Lieberman (2000, p. 223; see also Lieberman and Grolnick, 1996) argues, networks are sites that enable collaboration and 'commitment to continuous learning.' Through interaction and collaboration, peers can promote cultural understanding and thereby knowledge of each other within the situated learning context, leading to successful learning communities. If the CALD pre-service teachers are to capitalise on new learning and become members of the social and learning community of peers, then all members of the community need to comprehend and be involved in learning as a shared repertoire and as a joint enterprise. Yet the data indicated that there was little collaboration and sharing, which led to CALD students being isolated. As 'S6' said:

> *First three years I do not think I had any friends; I had a few people I could speak to but not like sit together, share any work; in fourth year I only had two other people from other countries, so it is not many international students either, so you do not get much as well.*

In terms of 'engagement' and 'mutuality' (Wenger, 2000, p. 231), there was little identification by the largely white, monocultural peers of the social and cultural gaps that existed for CALD students, and events and interactions did not bring the community of students close enough to develop trust. In cases where there was mutuality, as the following

comment by 'S14' demonstrates, there was an attempt to work together to address each other's concerns through shared repertoire, such as learning experiences and language:

> *A friend graduated with literacy as her Major and for one or two of us she would do a quick reading and pick up some of the things that were incorrect; she would give me hers and I could see, oh is that how you write it? Also, classroom was a big challenge. They don't have to be Asian as long as they are happy to have a conversation with me.*

The success of engagement for 'S9' was based on 'acculturation'. Clearly, for this student the enterprise of learning was not constituted as a joint inquiry between peers; the dimension of imagination had to be developed by him with little reciprocal mutuality from the broader community of peers. Hence, there was minimal alignment through shared understanding, or shared meaning making, resulting in him acculturating to succeed:

> *There is a clash of cultural expectations of my community and the larger dominant cultural expectations. I had to give up some of my cultural expectations, and I have acculturated successfully so that I can move forward.*

This student drew his learning energy or enterprise from his initiative to be positive about his difference and set about establishing a communal purpose for his learning. There was little mutuality and alignment was weak, with attempts being made by him to establish trust and productive interaction and contribute to the overall purpose of learning:

> *I did feel a degree of distancing in the fact that I am always the only Aboriginal male in my classes. When there are group activities, or discussion I am often left out of the groups and always have to find a group to join as I have noticed that many students know each other from previous classes or high school. I do feel a degree of isolation but on the other hand this does make me break out of my comfort zone, to deliberately engage with students from a non-indigenous background.*

Where the three dimensions of enterprise, mutuality and repertoire were limited or absent, engagement, imagination and alignment were minimal, resulting in students struggling to become members of the learning community. In the following excerpts, 'S15' and 'S3' respectively emphasise the importance of the learning community as central to their identity as a student:

> *Some were trying to discuss with us, but in another unit where they teach their kind of subjects - totally different subjects - and we are expected to behave like Australians, it's quite hard.*
>
> *It is hard - but I am getting better; there are some interactions, but it is like just when we meet each other, not much, in class. I mean I got some Australian friends, we talk about study - our topic not relate to culture, we don't know each other, they don't know Chinese ways, I don't [know]Australians' way. There is complete isolation from local students. I have international friends, you know, mainly Asian, but friends from local backgrounds I have none.*

The absence of cultural understanding by domestic students led to a failed sense of community for the international students. As Wenger (2000) notes, a sense of community is formed when gaps are acknowledged and members are open to opportunities, but when there is no mutuality or reciprocal knowledge sharing, as in the above excerpt, there is a lack of membership. 'S14' said: *In tutorial I was sitting by myself at a table because I was late; then some other students came. But no one sat next to me; they join others. The tutor did not say - you join others, so I sat by myself.* This became a comment on the absence of membership due to her difference being unacknowledged and unaccepted; it also indicated a loss of belonging, identity and a loss of learning. As Otten (2003, p.14) observes, 'domestic students often stay in their established circle of friends', therefore, 'the social…classroom interaction

and academic work assignments tend to stay monocultural, monodisciplinary and monolingual'.

For 'S16', the realisation that membership was based on native whiteness, and her non-native whiteness, her ethnicity and culture were considered different resulted in a serious loss of membership and alignment:

> *I do belong to the whiteness but I do not belong to the English speaking whiteness and I thought I am standing on the outside, how can this be - and it was really a shock to me; I had to take a step back and look at myself and say that no you don't belong because there are issues; you are not one of them - shades of whiteness. The person I sit next to I can understand as she has a British accent but the Australian woman I found it very hard to understand. It comes back to me that I am not native.*

Community of Practice at Practicum Schools

At practicum schools, legitimate peripheral participation allows novices to observe experts, reify their knowledge base and experiment with university knowledge through calculated risk taking. In this study, a number of participants could not engage with peripheral participation as they were expected to be experts and they could not move from peripheral participation to full participation due to their cultural and linguistic differences. 'S10' noted:

> *If the supervising teacher is very experienced person that is okay I think, but I didn't get - the first one she wasn't so experienced and she is not good at team working so that was the problem. Before we start practicum we need to get to know the differences of teaching and educational procedures from supervising teacher. I think that it is totally different here.*

The social processes involved in learning are realised only if they are reciprocated. When shared repertoire and involvement are minimal, meaningful learning is reduced. When collaborative learning was present and participation was promoted, students could engage in visualising a community of practice, for example, in the case of 'S6':

> *In my first practicum, my supervising teacher told me that if I don't know then to ask her and that it was important that we were working together. So if I didn't know something I would say let us ask the teacher. But for my second practicum at this school the feeling is that she didn't want me to be there. And it was really hard.*

When community membership was denied to her, her learning remained incomplete and the self could not experience 'the whole person acting in the world' (Lave & Wenger 1991, p. 49). Many of the students interviewed experienced a lack of scaffolding, mutuality and joint enterprise that then resulted in failure and loss of identity, for example, for 'S17':

> *She did not scaffold; that was one thing; she didn't share resources; the relationship was bad. She wanted me to teach according to the way she does it. One teacher did not do anything to assist. She said, I am not supposed to be giving you feedback or anything. I taught my class, but she's like, I don't care. She shared resources, only if I asked; but most times she was complaining about my resources. She said she buys resources and she can't share them with me. I felt bad. Another one said, do this, and do this, and this; she wanted me to teach the way she taught.*

For the participants, it was highly important that their supervising teachers built community relations so that they could move from peripheral to central participation. Drawing on Wenger (1998) mutual engagement leads to action, in this case a successful practicum. For 'S12', the expert/novice relationship was very important to belonging and she relied on the expert or supervising teacher for her community membership:

> *In the school I got to meet other teachers and they became my second and third mentors through my supervising teacher. It so depends on your supervising teacher: How kind they are to introduce you to the group and make you welcome. And have those teachers make you welcome. In my second practicum school they have year one, year two, year three clusters and my supervising teacher made sure that I link and connect with other teachers and formed relationships; she forced me to photocopy, sent me to office so that I would establish relationship myself — there are two ways — the supervising teacher pushes you to integrate; or drags you along and support you.*

As this example demonstrates, where the mentor accepted responsibility to guide the novice from peripheral to central participation, the novice was able to engage in learning 'knowledgeable skills' (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 29) through social processes. The social processes assisted her to comprehend relevant relationships, align herself with the work atmosphere and to imagine a community.

For some students, adequate opportunities for participation, engagement and alignment with the teaching community of practice led to their success at practicum. When through negotiation there was joint enterprise, students had positive experiences, as 'S13' observed:

> *My host teacher encouraged all the time and supported all the time. She told me that if you are not comfortable then just don't teach and think about what you can do. At this prac, I had very, very positive experience. I want to finish the course. My liaison academic helped me and my host teacher was very helpful.*

However, when participation led to differentiation in terms of identity for 'S9', it became a challenge:

> *Though I did not have major problems in my practicum as I got along with my supervising teacher, there was a tendency to view me as different. They wanted to find out more about the Indigenous Australians and their cultures. It was almost as though you are exotic, a souvenir.*

In this student's case, although mutual engagement ensured that his diversity was accepted in a proactive manner, the concept of joint enterprise that defines a successful practice was reduced as he was perceived as an 'exotic' 'souvenir'. Alignment, joint enterprise and shared repertoire were reduced as he was perceived to be different and it was left to him to negotiate legitimate peripheral participation. The lack of shared history and shared culture minimised reciprocity between the mentor and novice and therefore effective social participation and membership. Cultural differences reduced expansiveness, and the individual was unable to claim access to participation to the same extent as student teachers who were from mainstream Anglo-Australian backgrounds.

Discussion

While we accept that there are numerous factors that enable the success or failure of CALD pre-service teachers, from our data set it was apparent that to move beyond the narrow and restrictive race and ethnic boundaries, it is necessary to take into account the nature of effective communities of practice. It cannot be assumed that effective communities of practice exist due to structures being in place or that communities of practice will be effective because educational institutions assume and expect institutional commitment, collaboration, inclusive education and community membership. Despite the emphasis on a community of practice, there are members who do not easily accept - or silently exclude - those who are diverse. One central notion of this paper is that many CALD pre-service teachers often become de-motivated to teach due to their failure to become members of the learning and

teaching community of practice. We argue that for newcomers learning is constituted of more than academic knowledge or knowledge of skills and also includes re-constructing and re-negotiating social/cultural identities through active participation in communities of practice.

Achinstein, Ogawa, Sexton & Freitas (2010, p. 81) note that 'teachers of color are underrepresented in the profession and experience high turnover' (see also Guyton, Saxton & Wesche, 1996). As this study found, the lack of community and shared purpose within the academic learning community and the practicum implied that there was a risk of attrition of this group. As Escayg (2010), Darling-Hammond (2006), and Villegas & Lucas (2002) observe, factors that assist all teachers to be successful practitioners include participation and practice that are valued. Further, as this study demonstrated, there needs to be institutional commitment and collaboration in terms of resource access and shared perspectives (see Myles, Cheng & Wang, 2006). As Darling-Hammond (2006, p. 305), observes, teachers have to develop 'the skills to learn from practice as well as learn for practice'. Consequently, we argue that, in academic and practicum settings, effective communities of practice are necessary to the success of all (and especially CALD) pre-service teachers (Burant, 1999).

Where attempts were made to include novice members, there was an interactive process of learning along with all the accompanying complexity and uncertainty that occur in real-life contexts (see Herrington & Oliver, 1995; see also Burant, 1999). While it was no surprise that when collaboration was established there was engagement, alignment, joint enterprise and the imagination to believe they could be members, this was extremely crucial to the initial attempts of CALD pre-service teachers to participate and practice. This study found that CALD pre-service teachers who experienced diversity and difference as obstructive to shared understanding and interaction failed to become members of a community of practice or achieved minimal membership. Participants of learning and teaching communities often did not operate on the central tenets of a community of practice: that is, through joint enterprise, mutuality and inclusion of novices (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002; see also Cumming-Potvin, 2009).

The implications of this study in terms of current practices are relevant to higher education institutions as they deal with efficient inclusion of CALD pre-service teachers and students. Our findings illustrate the significance of operative communities of practice that are open to new members, where challenges and conflicts promote a healthy reflection on beliefs with a view to change that is positive (Achinstein, 2002). If learning communities consider inclusion as a significant objective, then efforts need to be made to go beyond acknowledgement of the common purpose of teaching and employ a systematic process of shared understanding. Instead of mere collegiality, there has to be a purposeful attempt to acknowledge difference. As Polin (2010, p. 175) observes, 'in a healthy community, the practice, the knowledge base and the tool sets are all open to influence and change' when members interact.

Another implication is the immediate need to comprehend differences in social, educational and cultural backgrounds. In this study, while there were limited attempts to comprehend the needs of CALD students and to engage with them in productive community partnerships, there was a lack of community membership due to social/cultural differences being predominant in interactions. Thus, there was identity loss and disengagement with the processes of learning. Supervising teachers, academics and peers who accepted the differences as positive helped promote participation and practice. The study found that placing difference at the centre and at the forefront instead of at the boundaries can help affirm pluralism rather than the accommodation of diversity.

The need to connect with CALD students becomes critical, with supervising teachers positioning themselves as learners who comprehend social and cultural differences. Valuable suggestions made by students included staggered practicum, shadowing teachers in schools

and observing teaching; at university having student seminars to share narratives of experiences, peer mentors, and explicit instructions on social, cultural and academic norms. Moreover, participants also commented on the need to acknowledge difference; they emphasised a focus on communities of difference that are based on, as Shields (2004, p. 38) notes, 'respect for difference and on the absolute regard for the intrinsic worth of every individual'. This study provides local knowledge that links to research on ethnic teachers conducted in the United Kingdom (Basit & McNamara, 2004) and United States (Hern ndez Sheets & Chew, 2002) to indicate an urgent need for greater acknowledgement of difference. As Goodwin (2004, p. 21, original emphasis) argues, ethnic teachers make a special contribution through '*thinking and acting* in culturally responsive ways'. We suggest close attention be paid to how communities operate within learning and practice contexts. The study has prompted the authors to gather further evidence by extending the study to include the current cohort of CALD pre-service teachers and to conduct workshops for CALD students undertaking practicum.

Conclusion

This study indicates that interactive, proactive communities of practice are possible when there is recognition of difference, respect for difference, and acceptance of diversity. If the mission is to be inclusive, communities of practice must be scrutinised closely for reflective practices that encourage discussion and sharing, and newcomers must be assisted to engage, align and imagine themselves as members of a community. The study illustrates that, in the present context of increasing teacher diversity, the need to establish proactive communities of practice in pre-service teacher education programs is immediate and urgent.

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