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## **Identity and participation: culturally and linguistically diverse student teachers and their practicum experiences in Queensland schools.**

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### **Background**

Increasing numbers of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) student teachers, both international and local, are undertaking their fieldwork practicum experiences in Australian schools. While many have positive practicum experiences, there are a significant number who experience difficulties. Explanations for these difficulties have been explored in terms of competencies and skills (Campbell, Tangen and Spooner-Lane, 2006) and positive work has been undertaken by education faculties to build linguistic, practical and cultural skills for these student teachers. While it is recognised that culturally and linguistically diverse teachers have much to offer the community (Cruikshank, 2004; Myles, Cheng and Wang, 2006) little work has been done on viewing this situation from a socio-cultural perspective where learning is seen as a form of socialisation into the different beliefs, values and practices (Edwards, 2005, p.57) of the new community, the placement school. This study argues that a consideration of these pre-service teachers' experiences using perspectives derived from Situated Learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991) and Community of Practice (Wenger, 1998) will illustrate learning and identity development and the factors that facilitate or constrain their practicum experience. This in turn will allow new perspectives on strengthening the preparation that these student teachers undergo before their practicum.

### **Research Questions**

Drawing on the work of Deters (2006) in Canada and Han (2005) in Sydney a number of key questions were developed to address the central research question: 'What are the factors facilitating or constraining the fieldwork practicum experience for culturally and linguistically diverse student teachers in Queensland schools? They included questions about the school community, relationships with students and teachers, and the successes and challenges of the practicum experience from the student teachers' perspectives.

### **Methods**

Sixteen in-depth interviews were carried out to identify culturally and linguistically diverse teachers' experiences of their fieldwork practicum in Queensland schools. Interviewees were invited to talk about their position as part of the practice school community, the important influences on their own journey of becoming teachers, the important relationships that they developed with their supervising teachers and the relevant university staff during the course of the practicum. Some of the highs and lows of their practicum experience were also discussed.

### **Frame**

The data was analysed using narrative analysis techniques based on the work of Clandinnen, Pushor and Or (2007) and Kearney (2003) informed by Situated Learning and Community of Practice theory. Narrative here is used as a 'strategy to disclose educational experiences' (Cortazzi, 1993, p. 12) and simultaneously explores the notions of temporal transition, the social environment in which the narrative takes place and the concrete place, in this case, the practicum schools. The themes that emerged from the student teachers' narrative accounts were considered from the perspective of viewing the practicum as an opportunity to participate in the community of practice of the school.

### **Research findings**

The results of the study show that considering the practicum as an experience of situated learning allows researchers to explore the important elements of professional identity development and the processes of participation and marginalisation that can be the keys to a successful practicum experience for culturally and linguistically diverse student teachers. The results also highlight the complexity of the practicum experience, confirming that the social and emotional components play a central role along with the professional skills and competencies that student teachers are required to demonstrate.

The results of the study will contribute to practical ongoing support for student teachers in their practicum experiences in Queensland. By highlighting some of the social and cultural aspects of the practicum experience, it is anticipated that the broader preparation for the practicum will be enhanced. Some of the issues that have been raised though this study will provide the basis for positive and practical work on better anticipating the challenges that may be faced in the practicum schools.

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