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## **‘We All Went in With an Open Mind’: Possibilities of Professional Experience as a Catalyst for Engaging with Graduate Standards 1.4 & 2.4.**

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*Abstract: Evolving discourses in Australia have resulted in an increasing focus on teachers’ abilities to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Political concerns with achievement gaps and national education policy that require teachers to engage with curriculum priorities and professional standards that focus on strategies for teaching and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have contributed to this move. This paper reports on efforts to develop preservice teachers’ engagement with the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers during professional experience in an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school community. These findings highlight the complexity of challenging pre-existing social practices and the development of critical dispositions in preservice teachers, and the importance of purposeful professional experience as an opportunity for preservice teachers to construct and refine their professional knowledge through application and experience.*

### **Introduction**

Evolving discourses in Australia have resulted in an increasing focus on teachers’ abilities to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander<sup>1</sup> students. Political concerns with achievement gaps and national education policy that require teachers to engage with curriculum priorities and professional standards that focus on strategies for teaching and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have contributed to this move. In Initial Teacher Education (ITE), there is a need to assure preservice teachers (PSTs) achievement of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST) graduate standards; 1.4 Strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and 2.4 Understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. This sits in tension with the complex terrain of deficit positioning of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures in education policy and systems. As Moreton-Robinson, Singh, Kolopenuk and Robinson (2012) note, there is often a separation and imbalance between Indigenous content and the transfer of effective teaching skills in ITE, and a paucity of literature analysing the impact of racism on Indigenous educational outcomes. There are consistent calls for a ‘circuit breaker’ in ITE to realise the full potential of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education (Ma Rhea, Anderson & Atkinson, 2012; McLaughlin et al., 2013; Moreton-

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<sup>1</sup> Drawing from AIATSIS, I acknowledge that while there is a growing preference for the term First Nations Australians, in this context, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is the grouping of terms commonly associated with the graduate standards and two very distinct groups, though does not differentiate the different nations and diversity that broadly align which each group. The term Indigenous is included in the case study in verbatim from participants.

Robinson et al., 2012). In support of shifting discourses, Ma Rhea, Anderson and Atkinson (2012) found that affirming of PST agency through successful teaching practicum experiences supports development of Indigenous knowledges and perspectives in curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment.

This paper reports on a study that facilitated and supported PSTs to undertake professional experience in a partner school that identified high numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student enrolments and strong links to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. These placements were offered in response to findings from previous research at the institution and which resonate elsewhere (Hudson et al., 2016, O’Keefe, Paige & Osborne, 2019), that while PSTs are often confident with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Knowledges in theory, the application in real world contexts is a different matter. Furthermore, an emerging theme from previous research at the institution was a call from students for ‘more’, and ‘compulsory’, teaching placements in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community contexts. This theme is significant as empirical data exploring PSTs’ experiences with placements in schools with a high number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is limited, and such placements are considered vital in enabling teachers to meet the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (Burnett, Lampert & Crilly, 2013; Ma Rhea, Anderson & Atkinson, 2012). The study sought to take up this call to support and engage PSTs directly with such placements. It follows two cohorts of six PSTs through a pilot program which sought to identify domains of change in agency for the two focus graduate standards in response to placement. A critical reading of PSTs’ reflections interrogates how experiences and significant points of change in agency for Standards 1.4 and 2.4 are interpreted as empowering in broadening understanding. As teacher educators we sought to offer the placement as a ‘circuit breaker’ to disrupt dispositions, however our findings have caused us to revisit our understanding of ‘circuits’ and what perceived faults may flow through them. These findings highlight the complexity of challenging pre-existing social practices and the development of critical dispositions in PSTs. Furthermore, amidst the current scrutiny of ITE, which has witnessed a shift in language from ‘professional experience’ to ‘practical experience’, it highlights the decision-making capital and professional efficacy integral to purposefully designed professional experience.

## Literature Review

Regarding Indigenous contexts, ITE and implications for professional experience, research indicates that much more needs to be done to foster non-Indigenous preservice teachers’ learning in professional experience (Moreton-Robinson, et al., 2012, Ure et al., 2017). In their AITSL commissioned review of PST preparation for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, Moreton-Robinson, Singh, Kolopenuk and Robinson (2012) identified a shortage of Australian and international Indigenous education literature analysing the impact of racism on Indigenous education. In the Australian context, they found limited small-scale studies that engage PSTs with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. These studies were commonly underpinned by an “article of faith” that PSTs were then “better able to deploy culturally inclusive pedagogy in the classroom and so improve the educational outcomes” (p. 10). However, a lack of longitudinal studies and “trumpeting of white agency” (p. 11) potentially tainted their transformative potential. Furthermore, the desktop review of Australian university programs indicated a “mixed message” (p. 33) where the “ratio in favour of imparting knowledge instead of skills reflects a transmissionist, not a transformative, approach to training PSTs to teach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students” (p. 31).

An investigation of the literature since the 2012 review indicates that the trend of limited small-scale studies continues. However, as McKnight (2016) notes, the ‘intimate’ nature of these studies is intentional to foster unique approaches and avoid over-exposure and ‘commodification’ of work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their communities. As explored in the following paragraphs, most programs appear to be elective with non-Indigenous participants pre-disposed to engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education.

A common tenet in these programs is engaging predominantly White, middle-class PSTs in professional experience in target communities in some form of “dissonance”, which “can serve as a catalyst for both personal and professional growth” (Stahl et al., 2020, p. 528). As Stahl et al. found, “even those who cast themselves open to new experiences...to undo privilege”(p. 538) can experience the reaffirmation of certain beliefs. Despite an apparent predisposition for ‘openness’ indicated by those who elect to take such studies, a common tension is summarised as “brushes with whiteness” – discursive manoeuvres that limit white people’s ability to engage critically with a cultural politics of race” (Schulz & Fane, 2015, p. 140). Furthermore, these ‘brushes’, or “blind spots” (p. 148) remain concealed when thinking is not shared to avoid tensions and possible disapproval within white institutions. However, some programs have been found to disrupt and expose such manoeuvres in productive ways. For example, Country-centred approaches are advocated as expanding “intellectual insight to a more relational and emotive understanding of Aboriginal ways of knowing and learning” (McKnight, 2016, p. 121).

APSTs 1.4 and 2.4 are commonly used to define and support explanations for these studies (Auld, Dyer, & Charles, 2016; Labone, Cavanagh, & Long, 2014; Lavery, Cain, & Hampton, 2014) and often cited with the intention to build non-Indigenous PSTs’ competencies in Indigenous education supported by practicum experiences. Critical reflection and self-examination are common themes. Burnett, Lampert and Crilly (2013) note that in reflection it is the “moments of slippage [that] provide opportunities for non-Indigenous pre-service teachers to re-think, re-consider and re-learn” (p. 175) to counter possessive logic (McDowall, 2017) to address rather than perpetuate educational disadvantage. Auld, Dyer and Charles (2016) further extend this notion, looking to unpack the ‘dangerous practices’ of PSTs that “risk...being counterproductive to the empowering and transformative practices of student learning” (p. 166). Notably, these risks decline engagement with points of tension and include:

- Essentialising binaries of culture and heritage to construct the ‘real Aborigine’,
- Perpetuating colonising relationships through commodification of the experiences to make them a ‘better teacher’ rather than engaging with the points of contention the experience provokes,
- Assuming capabilities to comply with APST standards 1.4 and 2.4 without a deep understanding of a decolonisation agenda, and
- Reduction of the complexity of language teaching and linguistic human rights of children to techniques that appear to ‘work’ (Auld, Dyer & Charles, 2016).

Further informing PST preparation is the navigation of multiple and often contrary discourses that contribute to policy assemblage for Indigenous education, and that permeate ITE. Education policy mandates educational outcomes and influences the interpretive gaze PSTs take to their work. This discursive “trickery makes evident the contention between the goodwill intentions and the reality of policy implementation” (Hogarth, 2018, p. 666) and highlights the pre-existing complexity of policy messages all teachers must navigate regarding what their priorities ‘should’ be, before they enact them. This is evident in the various ways policy ‘talks down’ (Hogarth, 2018) and problematises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Policy problematisations perpetuate contemporary racialisation and

deficitising of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, histories, and knowledges (Hogarth, 2018; Maxwell, Lowe & Salter, 2018, Patrick & Moodie 2016) as part of an entrenched “‘problem-solving’ paradigm” (Bacchi, 2009, p. 272).

For example, in Australian education, ‘closing the gap’ has become synonymous with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students’ achievement in literacy, numeracy and year 12 attainment, and school attendance, however, progress and the narratives that surround it are problematic (Heffernan & Maxwell, 2020). The measurement of seemingly straightforward targets does not explain “what is actually occurring in the classroom” (Vass, 2015, p. 375). The ambiguity in progress to ‘closing the gap’ and tensions regarding the utility of the ontology of its application as an act of white supremacy (Vass, 2015) are evident in the wider policy assemblage. As national curriculum policy, the Australian Curriculum represents the education focus for Australian schools nation-wide and sits alongside the APSTs as a key focus of ITE. While the inclusion of the cross-curriculum priority (CCP) ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures’ appears to be progressive citing that “It [ACARA] recognises the need for the Australian Curriculum to provide every opportunity possible to ‘close the gap’” (ACARA, 2017, para. 1.), Maxwell, Lowe and Salter (2018) note that it is also a culmination of iterative policy problematisations.

As such, it is also useful to look to the APSTs themselves, and what frames of reference for engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students they foster. The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership’s [AITSL] rationale for embedding APSTs 1.4 and 2.4 in ITE notes that “criteria, rather than being prescriptive, [should] both encourage and provide opportunities for providers to be flexible and innovative in supporting pre-service teachers’ achievement” (AITSL, 2018, p. 3). Regarding these standards in professional experience, AITSL notes that “It is not possible to guarantee that every pre-service teacher will undertake professional experience in every school context and experience all possible students and communities.” (2018, p. 7). For example, the Queensland Professional Experience Reporting Framework does not include 1.4 or 2.4, however both are included in a ‘depending on placement context’ category. Furthermore, literature suggests that in professional experience placement discussions between supervising teachers and preservice teachers “Standards 1.4 and 2.4 are rarely, if ever, raised” (Ure et al., 2017, p. 249).

Following, AITSL guidelines require 1.4 to be a focus throughout coursework of a program, where 2.4 has opportunities in both coursework and professional experience. How this translates to requirements in ITE programs for registration is interesting. Publicly available data for the teacher performance assessments currently in place in Queensland suggest that 1.4 and 2.4 are not required at this milestone either. Despite this gap, it must be noted that national accreditation processes governed by AITSL require that each graduate teacher standard is taught, practised, and assessed, the latter as part of a critical task that assesses: “each component of the descriptor? Consider the verb/process in the descriptor: for example, demonstrate, know, and understand, implement, plan, describe” (AITSL, 2020, p. 24) and that the context of the critical task allows for this assessment. Interesting to note here, is of course the verb/process required by 1.4 and 2.4, both requiring demonstration of ‘broad knowledge and understanding’, with the addition of ‘respect for’ in 2.4. The qualifier of ‘broad’ indicates that what is required here could be interpreted as more general, than specialist knowledge.

Furthermore, Moodie and Patrick’s (2017) analysis of the APSTs identifies ‘settler grammar’ as a conceptual tool to describe:

*a double movement of recognition and dismissal; a process which adopts an absence/presence dialectic to explain: 1) noticeable lack of engagement with issues of sovereignty and the persistence of assimilationist policy frames,*

*alongside; 2) the acknowledgement of indigenous survival, but within a narrative that ensures settler superiority, for example the representation of culture and reconciliation as recommended foci for beginning teachers (p. 443).*

By singling out ‘students from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background’ APST 1.4 encourages a focus on difference that reifies Indigenous students as potentially “different and difficult” (p. 445) and reinforces essentialised notions of culture. While the inclusion of an Indigenous focus appears to be progressive, it includes only so far as this inclusion does not appear to threaten ‘settler futurity’ (Moodie & Patrick, 2017): which interest convergence would consider as the perceived interests of white students, who by suggestion remain the ‘usual and less-challenging’ students. Regarding APST 2.4, the focus on ‘understanding and respect’ is represented as “personal, ethical mission based” in which “any sense of Indigenous agency or sovereignty is rendered absent” (p. 448). This similarly aligns with interest convergence where simultaneous promotion of ‘understanding’ appears to make social advances while absence of agency denies critical change in notions of ‘respect’. Moodie and Patrick’s (2017) overall findings suggest the call for “more culture and more respect as the solution to educational disparity serves simply to reinvent the settler grammars that present a version of the indigene which can only justify her subordinate position” (p. 451). Settler grammar is also found in the CCP, which is presented as a solution to the achievement gap where “paradoxical representations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (deficit) and cultures (desirable, but only to the extent that it does not interfere with schooling) (p. 11)”.

While these policies are positioned in response to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, a teacher’s own nuanced worldview is not recognised. As Halbert and Chigeza (2015) note this leads to a precarious “narrowing of teachers’ professional selves to assuring cultural responsiveness to ‘other’ and little acknowledgement of the complexity of teachers’ own global, culturally literate identities as influencing their practice” (p. 160). Ultimately, Australian ITE is governed by policy allied to a “settler state [which] requires colonisation for its existence” therefore it stands to reason that “there are limits to the kinds of decolonial transformation it will sanction” (Stein & Andreotti, 2017, 164), and the potential for transforming approaches taken to challenge subordinate positioning. Exploring how cognisant PSTs are of the discursive complexity and what impact it has on the potentially transformational impact of PST engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in ITE, presents, as Nakata, Nakata, Keech and Bolt (2012) acknowledge, “complex and contested knowledge terrain” (p. 120).

## **Theoretical Approach**

While findings from studies are generally positive in the opportunities provided to PSTs to initiate self-examination “in relation to decolonising the colonial ‘othering’ of separation that complicates Western teaching practice for Aboriginal students.” (McKnight, 2016, p. 123), the long-term transformative impact of experiences remains unknown and unrealised. Despite assumptions regarding PST ‘readiness’ for transformation, and rhetoric and policy intention to decolonise the curriculum, “much work is needed to ensure [embedding Indigenous knowledges] naturally occurs in the curriculum...and resources are required” (McLaughlin, Whatman, & Nielsen, 2013, p. 6). This key finding echoes Moreton-Robinson et al.’s (2012) caution regarding transmissionist versus transformative realities, and caveats regarding prematurely positioning PSTs as ‘knowers’ following such experiences (see Auld, Dyer & Charles, 2016).

This study engages theory to explore how professional experience placements in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contexts could act as ‘circuit breakers’ to disrupt PSTs dispositions. The theory of transformational learning is employed to conceptualise notions of ‘disruption’ through educational experiences. The explicit valuing of disposition for social justice points to the transformative potential of ITE experiences to disrupt problematic frames of reference and foster critical awareness.

A common theory adopted in teacher education to disrupt learners’ discourses is Mezirow’s transformative learning theory (Calleja, 2014; Dyce & Owusu-Ansah, 2016; Grayman-Simpson, Dopucet & Burgos-Lopez, 2019; Kerr & Andreotti, 2019). His theory offers “*learning that transforms problematic frames of reference to make them more inclusive, discriminating, reflective, open and emotionally able to change*” (italics in original, Mezirow, 2011, p. 22). This constructivist learning develops in response to a ‘disorientating dilemma’, through often iterative phases (Calleja, 2014) where learning occurs in one of four ways:

1. Elaborating existing frames of reference.
2. Learning new frames of reference.
3. Merging related frames of reference to transform points of view; and/or
4. Transforming approaches taken to meaning making to critique premises regarding the world and self.

Disruptions are implemented to ‘lead learners to the learning edge’, and often require a delicate balance between challenge and comfort (Taylor & Jarecke, 2011). A key tenet to the use of this theory in ITE is the influence it takes from Freire’s (1970) concept of conscientisation to intersect the development of critical awareness with learning that transforms problematic frames of reference in response to such disruptions. While some studies indicate that a transformative view of cognitive shifts ‘appears specially promising’ in regard to challenging frames of reference such as white privilege (Dyce & Owusu-Ansah, 2016; Grayman-Simpson, Dopucet & Burgos-Lopez, 2019), others advise caution. Kerr and Andreotti (2019), for example, cite that exposure to intentionally disrupting experiences “may in fact promote greater adherence to inequitable structures within which prospective educators are already privileged” (p. 660).

## Method

This study was conducted at a regional university characterised by a diverse student cohort including students that identify as first in family, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, and hold various work and caring commitments alongside their study. This study (ethics approval: H6492) sought to take up the call to develop and implement a professional experience program to support and engage PSTs directly with professional experience in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community contexts. Two researchers conducted this study: one Aboriginal and one non-Indigenous academic, both of whom taught into the Bachelor of Education at the time of the study.

The methodology for the project focused on facilitating and supporting PSTs to undertake specialised teaching placements in a partner school that identified high numbers of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander student enrolments and strong links to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities. ‘Community College’ (CC pseudonym) was identified as a “particular more than the ordinary” (Stake, 2005, p. 447) school suitable for the pilot case study, for the following reasons:

- Strong links to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities – CC caters for families from local and remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, comprising approximately 35 different language groups.
- Shared interest in the aim of the placement – the CC principal and Head of Teaching and Learning identified with the aim of the project and its mutual significance for both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and PSTs more generally.
- Potential for a range of placements across Bachelor of Education degrees (ECE, Primary & Secondary) – the college is Prep to Year 12 and coeducational; and
- Accessibility – the college is in an outer suburb of the regional city where the university campus was located.

Two cohorts of PSTs successfully completed this placement and accompanying qualitative research study at CC. The first cohort ( $n=$  four) included two PSTs placed in the primary school and two in the secondary, and the second ( $n=$ two) were placed in the primary school.

A consistent theme in literature (Le Cornu, 2016, Ure et al., 2017) is that partnerships in a learning community model of professional experience is preferred practice in ITE. Common features across models include closely aligned on-campus and in-school learning, with ongoing learning for all involved and underpinned by concepts of collaboration, reflection and reciprocity (Le Cornu, 2016, Ure et al., 2017). The study design adopted a learning community model and included five stages:

1. *Promotion of the project as a complementary experience completed as part of a mandatory second year professional experience placement.* Initial expressions of interest were received and reviewed in conjunction with the Head of Teaching and Learning from CC who made the final decision on which applications were suitable for placement at the school. Integral to this decision was the purposeful consideration of suitable school-based teacher mentors for each potential PST.
2. *Pre-placement workshop designed to engage PSTs with key aspects of teaching in Indigenous communities and orientate preservice teachers to the school, led by project leaders, in conjunction with the Head of Teaching and Learning from CC.* This workshop used the 3Rs approach (3Rs Project Consortium, 2016): Know yourself, know your students, know what you teach. It included opportunities to engage school-based teacher mentors with PSTs and at the conclusion of the workshop PSTs were required to write a reflection in response to questions derived from the relevant APSTs (1.4 & 2.4). An adaption of Davies and Dart's (2005) the Most Significant Change (MSC) Technique was selected to gather data. Domains of change in this instance were students' agency for the two professional standards noted above (1.4 & 2.4) as developed during the professional experience placement. These domains seek to deliberately frame 'changes' as points of development rather than challenges, however opportunities for counter narrative were provided. Reflections were analysed by open coding. Salient extracts that captured key themes in the data were identified for reflexive discussion in focus groups in Stage 4. Extracts were also chosen to be representative of PST reflections – that is, an extract from each PST was included to ensure PSTs could 'see themselves' reflected in the extracts.
3. *PST participation in and completion of professional experience placement at CC.*
4. *Focus group of 60 minutes conducted with PSTs to explore how their agency regarding the two professional standards 1.4 and 2.4 developed through their professional experience.* Domains of change in this instance focussed on PSTs' agency for the two professional standards noted above (1.4 and 2.4) as developed during the placement. The focus group presented PSTs with salient extracts of reflections collected from the workshop to prompt reflection on their further

engagement with this efficacy because of placement, including enablers and/or barriers that PSTs may identify in the development of this efficacy. PSTs were asked to review extracts identified in Stage 2 and come to a consensus on the single most significant point of development that they believed came to fruition during their placement and explain the criteria used to make this selection. PSTs were also asked if there were any unanticipated points of development, and how and if they had planned to follow up on these points of development in any way. Data were analysed by open coding to examine and classify agentic capacities for the APSTs captured in focus group discussion.

5. *Analysis of the data by both researchers* (two sets of data collected from the workshop and focus group for each cohort) independently using conceptual tools drawn from the four iterative phases (Calleja, 2014) of responses to a ‘disorientating dilemma’; elaboration of new frames of reference, learning new frames, merging frames to transform points of view and/or transforming approaches. Guided by reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021), themes from this analysis led to reflexive dialogue on the insights and tensions the findings indicated.

## Results

PST responses to the experience were overwhelmingly positive. This was evident in comments such as:

*“It was amazing” (M, cohort 1),*

*“Keep doing it” (S & M, cohort 1),*

*“I really appreciate the opportunity” (N, cohort 2).*

It must be noted that PSTs self-selected to participate, so in terms of transformation they positioned themselves as ‘open-minded’ and ready for transformation:

*I feel like everyone went, like we all went into it with a good attitude, an open mind. We weren’t going in there with expectations or thinking we were going to do certain things; we were just learning off the students and the teachers and everyone (M, cohort 1).*

As an endeavour intended to encourage PSTs to engage with APSTs 1.4 and 2.4 and school settings similar to CC, the project was successful, and met the intent to transition from theory to real-world application, as PSTs noted, as *“It doesn’t become real until you get here” (K, cohort 2),* because while *“you get it as a theory...I think you don’t really understand it until you see the fact that you’ve got 20 students in front of you” (N, cohort 2).* This is explored further in the following sections on APSTs 1.4 and 2.4.

### Elaborations and/or Disruptions?

#### *1.4 Strategies for Teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students.*

At the conclusion of the pre-placement workshop, all PSTs identified in their reflections a focus on the attainment of strategies for ‘different’ students and how staff can support this attainment (see Table 1), aligning with more technical approaches to the APST and reflecting Moodie and Patrick’s (2017) observations that the APST encourages a focus that positions Indigenous students as needing specific strategies to be ‘dealt with’.

Cohort 1 themes	Cohort 2 themes
<i>Engaging with staff</i> : “utilise the extensive knowledge of the staff at the school to answer any questions I may have and to guide me in my teaching”	<i>Engaging with staff</i> : “observations of supervising teacher and other teaching professionals at the school”
<i>Language background</i> : “develop my understanding of the different linguistic background of my students and learn strategies in order to use this”	<i>Engaging with individual learners</i> : “knowing learners from an individual perspective”
<i>Visual aids</i> : “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture is not predominantly written but represent through symbols and movement...I hope to develop my use of visual aids further”	<i>Responsive and relevant strategies</i> : “This prac will force me to explore and add several teaching strategies to my ‘toolkit’”

**Table 1: 1.4 Pre-placement themes**

In contrast, the consensus after placement was that while strategies were part of what they learnt, their most significant learning was not a particular strategy, but rather the importance of relationships such as ‘engaging with staff’ and ‘getting to know the students’ to ultimately know more about their learners. Cohort 1 reached consensus that their key learning was engaging with staff and that changing it to ‘engaging with staff and students’ was “*definitely important*” (M, cohort 1), “*because a lot of the students really, they wanted to know about you too, so you had to be open with them*” (S, cohort 1). Cohort 2 also agreed that their “*top one [is] engaging with individual learners*” (C, cohort 2), and “*it was really about knowing those 20 different individual students...I don’t just mean from an academic perspective, I mean, you know. How they were on that day, what was going on for them on that day*” (N, cohort 2).

This shift indicates that PSTs have elaborated on previous frames, which aligned with narrow technical views of teachers’ professional roles to simply have strategies, to learn new frames for relational engagement central to teachers’ work: *It’s hard to properly put it into words, but in a simplistic way, I think that’s part of the key in all of this, isn’t it? The individual relationships we have with people* (N, cohort 2). Potentially, this signals a significant shift from possessive logic that wants to know about and prioritise strategies and ‘toolkits’ for ‘different’ students, to learning a new frame of reference that grasps the importance in being in relation to (McDowall, 2017) students as individuals.

#### ***2.4 Understand and Respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People to Promote Reconciliation between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Australians.***

The placement served as a similar disruption to initial responses to 2.4. After the workshop, PSTs identified target areas that they anticipated the placement would help them to ‘understand’ and ‘demonstrate broad knowledge’ as identified in Table 2.

Cohort 1 themes	Cohort 2 themes
<p><b>Deepen understanding:</b> “to practice my philosophy of respect with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from all across Australia and learn about their unique and various cultures”</p> <p><b>Cultural education:</b> “I will then be able to take my knowledge to other school environments and be better equipped to teach student of different cultural backgrounds”</p> <p><b>Educate others:</b> “I would love to learn more about the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture to better educate others and hopefully remove some stigma and help promote reconciliation between the younger Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians”</p>	<p><b>Deepen intercultural understanding:</b> “I aim to build strong relationship with the staff and students which, in turn, will foster intercultural understanding”</p> <p><b>Educate others:</b> “It is my belief that the perception that there is or should be one voice to represent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is unhelpful in promoting and progressing reconciliation, as it doesn’t create space for differing opinions or perspectives and perpetuates generalisations and stereotypes. It is my hope that this placement will provide me with both a greater understanding of those nuances as well as a greater ability to communicate that in other forums as with peers in educational and professional settings”</p>

**Table 2 2.4 Pre-placement themes**

A key point of change after placement was identified as a more nuanced understanding of the complexity and responsibility that comes with ‘knowing’ “*because there’s no use going and doing the prac and learning all that, and not doing anything with it*” (M, cohort 1). For cohort 1, the consensus was that there was no hierarchical order to their learning, but rather a consensus on the interrelatedness on their initial knowledge targets that it is a ‘flow more than a priority’ where “*they [themes] basically fit into each other...as a circle: it goes back around too, because you can be educating others, but unless you keep on deepening your understanding then there’s no point doing the other two*” (S, cohort 1).

While this appears promising regarding acknowledgement of the complexity of teachers’ work, there are tensions in this gain, however, as it is represented as a “personal, ethical mission based” (Moodie & Patrick, 2017, p. 448) understanding which lacks acknowledgement of Indigenous agency. The focus is instead on white agency; what the PST can do and know. “*You can’t educate others or be a culturally aware teacher if you don’t understand different cultures*” (S, cohort 1), and adhering to the focus on the teacher and self, noting each of the pre-placement statements privilege PST agency: “*I think the deepening of understanding, one is the foundation of the other two*” (S, cohort 1).

In cohort 2, one PST was unable to rank the two themes, reflecting in part cohort 1’s consensus on interrelationships: “*I think they’re both very similar*” (C, cohort 2). For the other PST ranking ‘educating others’ to promote reconciliation as the top theme came easily, and interestingly this PST was the only one to explicitly state a confirmation, rather than elaboration or challenge to their initial frames of reference:

*I think it just confirms what I thought going in. That I have a real – it doesn’t sit comfortably with me that we just lump groups of people together and expect that they all speak with one voice...I feel probably even more passionate about speaking about it in different forums...And I have always been. But I feel even more so now* (N, cohort 2).

For PSTs across both cohorts, the experience provoked an understanding that served as an entry point for frames that potentially disrupt racist practices, and was promising in terms of learning new frames of reference to do so: “*biggest takeaway was the need to ‘educate others’ and sometimes challenge them – I’m becoming more – well more likely to challenge it [stereotyping comments]*” (N, cohort 2), and “*I’ve already been in a debate with somebody about Indigenous students...and I was like well you obviously are very ignorant.*”

*And that's because I was able to go there and have a better, deepened understanding."* (N, cohort 1).

## Discussion of Entry Points

To what extent the experience served as a stimulus for disrupting existing frames of reference and transformation requires further investigation. The focus on 'understanding' was potentially a discursive position (Hogarth, 2018) that limited PSTs view to a focus on their own agency. There are two examples to explore further here: the discursive manoeuvres of 'difference' across both cohorts, and the emerging reflexivity and transformation of one PST.

A theme across both cohorts was a tension in the discursive positioning of Indigeneity with 'difference'. The school was simultaneously positioned as inherently different: "*it was different from anything else I'd done, and it did take a couple of days to adjust to the different attitudes towards school and education, the different tolerance for different behaviours*" (S, cohort 1), yet somehow fundamentally the same as all other schools: "*I keep on coming back to the point about how I was expecting something completely different and totally out of the box, but they're [students] not*" (K, cohort 2). This ambivalent positioning does not threaten the status quo, and allows PSTs to elaborate, rather than revise their frames of reference. A key point of distinction of CC is its point of difference as a school that is focused on Indigenous students and culture, however, this was largely invisible in PST responses who instead "*just looked at them as 20 little different individuals*" (N, cohort 2).

Overlooking race and positioning all students as 'individuals' denies the significance of the creation of an Indigenous school in going some way to tipping the racialised imbalance in schooling practices and often negative histories of relationship with schooling. This 'brushes off' tensions of how one respects Indigenous culture and provisions of formal schooling while also having traditional Western academic expectations of students (Stahl et al., 2020). Making this significance visible would require PSTs to problematise their existing frame of reference, and in raising critical consciousness ask how white society is implicated in the construction of disadvantage or perpetuation of difference and problem positioning in dominant educational discourses such as 'closing the gap'. There was some acknowledgement, for example, of how student behaviour was managed with cultural sensitivity, yet the critical significance not yet examined. For example, C from cohort 2 reflected in depth on "*how two different cultures work*" regarding how misbehaviour escalated when non-Indigenous staff intervened yet was resolved when Indigenous teachers "*step back a little bit because they knew that brothers and sisters would come into deal with it...without there ever being a word spoken*".

One PST did acknowledge the need for transformation and for teachers to make their frames more visible. As already noted, they explicitly positioned their frames as being confirmed, rather than disrupted. However, it is clear from their reflections post-placement that they are grappling with contested terrain and thinking about where significant shifts are needed:

*I think one of the problems I'm having, if I reflect on this experience, and now even at this stage of my degree; I'm becoming less tolerant, I'll be honest, of some of the stereotyping that's happening in this degree. Comments that I'm sure come from a good place, but they're not particularly helpful and they're fairly ignorant...So if anything, I'm becoming more – well more likely to challenge it. I get frustrated at some of the depth of conversation. And certainly, we're not expected – we're not pushed to have greater depth. But I*

*think that's – through those conversations, I think people's biases or ignorances' can come through. For me as a teacher, we have to keep examining ourself in this because we can do so much good and so much harm...I would like to think if we can have more, I guess – more opportunities to reflect, that some of the stuff that we can challenge and then correct it* (N, cohort 2).

This suggests unexamined entry points for further critical interrogation and points to the importance of a community learning model of professional experience to which reflection and reflexivity are integral. At the learning edge we can see reference to a more reflective and seemingly more inclusive frames. This gaze is focused on teacher agency and performance, rather than the agency of students, and in this instance the agency of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to resolve their 'own problem'. Is this why the first PST did not recognise the potential of the behaviour example she reflected on as a possible entry point to questioning the implications of 'alternate' approaches to Western practices? Might this also contribute to the second PST's development, which while it seeks to celebrate advances in her agency to challenge racial inequity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, does not refer to empowering the agency of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to mount their own challenges? What appears to be missing is the link from teacher agency to how it can contribute to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agency, which ultimately reflects the discursive positioning of the policy in which a teacher's performance is predominantly framed.

### **Conclusion – Elaborate, Learn or Transform?**

While it was clear that PSTs viewed their experiences as being very valuable to their professional development, the extent to which this was a transformational experience is unclear. How this learning experience developed new frames for relationality and mobilised agency for systemic change for racially marginalised groups is more elusive. In turn, this led us to question our original intent in terms of a 'circuit breaker'. Did we want PSTs to feel more confident in their professional agency, and to perceive that they have a 'toolbox' of strategies with which to engage with the APSTs? If so, then we might consider the project successful, were we not to consider the dangerous risks (Auld, Dyer & Charles, 2016) of reducing the complexity of capabilities to engage with the APSTs.

Over time, Professional experience has seen a shift from 'practise teaching' underpinned by technicist views of teaching in the 1980s (Le Cornu, 2016), to 'professional experience' in the 1990s, a term which emphasises the theory praxis nexus and where decision-making capital is developed and refined (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2013). Now, ITE faces a drift back to the 'practical' in current discourse led by policy iterations emanating from the *Quality Initial Teacher Education Review*. This study points to the rich potential of professional experience as so much more than a 'practise run'. Themes occurring in the data suggest the points of development were more than tallying up strategies, pointing to a readiness to engage with relational complexity and challenge inequitable stereotypes. However, if the question turns to our intent to enable PSTs to challenge and question social justice and support Indigenous agency, findings suggest we have not reached the transformation we were hoping for.

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