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Inclusive Values: Exploring the Perspectives of Pre-Service Teachers

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Abstract: Since the turn of the century there has been an increasing focus on inclusive education in Australian schools, and growing interest in understanding how the values of pre-service teachers impact on their willingness to implement inclusive principles in their future classrooms. The current qualitative study explored the values and views toward diversity and inclusion of pre-service teachers at one university in Queensland, Australia. Results showed that first and fourth year pre-service teachers held similar ideas about the values that teachers should have, and showed congruence between their own personal values and teacher values. Fourth year students who had undertaken an inclusive education minor placed greater emphasis on the importance of inclusion, and felt more confident about supporting this diversity in their future classrooms, than those fourth years who had not undertaken this minor. The findings from this study will inform future planning in preparing teachers for inclusive work in schools.

Introduction

Since the turn of the century, there has been an increasing focus on inclusive education in Australian schools. As national policy has been shaped to underscore the importance of inclusive education throughout the schooling system, there has been an important consideration of the ways in which pre-service teacher education degrees incorporate inclusive understandings into their curriculum (Carrington et al., 2012). Further, there has been growing interest in the values and beliefs of pre-service teachers, as it is identified that the way pre-service teachers feel about inclusion will impact on how successful they are in upholding inclusive principles in their future classrooms (Kraska & Boyle, 2014).

The current study explored the values and views toward inclusion and diversity of pre-service teachers in first and fourth year at one university in Queensland, Australia. Asking first year students about their values and views offered insight into the perspective they had when they arrived at university, while asking the fourth year students about the same issues enabled reflection on what these students had learnt after three and a half years of a teaching degree. For some fourth year students, their degree had included a minor specialisation in inclusion and a Service-learning component. We were interested in comparing and reflecting on the students' responses to determine what impact, if any, the education degree had on pre-service teachers' values and views toward diversity, and how aware and confident pre-service teachers felt to respond to student diversity.

Inclusive Education

In Australia, the need for schools to be inclusive of all students has been a focus of educational policy for the last 15 years. International declarations and statements about inclusive education such as *Education for All (1990)*, *The Salamanca Statement (1994)*, and *The Dakar Framework for Action (2000)* have been translated into domestic education statements and policies (Berlach & Chambers, 2011; Elkins, 2009; Forlin & Forlin, 1998). Two examples of this at the federal level are the *National Statement of Principles and Standards for More Culturally Inclusive Schooling in the 21st Century* (Ministerial Council on Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs [MCEETYA], 2000) and the *Melbourne Declaration* (MCEETYA, 2008). These statements have been further explicated in state education policies such as Education Queensland's (2005) *Inclusive Education Statement*.

A focus on inclusion in education is based on a commitment to key values and principles that are constantly being questioned, discussed, and developed. Booth (2011) describes values as fundamental guides that give a sense of direction and underpin actions towards others. This is why teacher preparation programs often focus on challenging values in society to enable education reform for better outcomes for all children at school. When seeking to develop an inclusive environment in education, it is important that teachers are clear about the relationship between values and actions, that they make inclusive values explicit, and design educational activities that uphold inclusive values (Carrington et al., 2012). In doing so, inclusion becomes a philosophy and a way of life that is based on respect for all. The Australian curriculum (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2012), focuses on the critical role of education in 'shaping the lives of the nation's future citizens' (p. 5) and emphasises such values as democracy, equity, justice, moral and ethical integrity, an appreciation of diversity, and the importance of contributing to and benefiting from a deeper understanding of other cultures. For teachers to uphold the ideals that underpin inclusive education, their values must align with inclusive values and principles.

Values of Pre-Service Teachers

A range of studies indicate that pre-service teachers and teachers do have a commitment to enhancing those values that align with inclusive education, such as making a positive difference to the lives of students, helping students to become more aware of their needs, abilities and goals, shaping and supporting students, and caring for students (Balyer & Ozcan, 2014; Manuel & Hughes, 2006; Osguthorpe & Sanger, 2013; O'Sullivan, 2005). In Australia, Richardson and Watt (2006) surveyed 1653 pre-service teachers from three Australian universities to determine the factors that most influenced their choice of teaching as a profession. They suggest the strongest influences on the choice of teaching as a career are factors that are values laden. These factors include the intrinsic value of teaching, the opportunity to shape the future of children and adolescents, the opportunity to make a contribution to society, and a desire to work with young people. Osguthorpe and Sanger (2013) argued that teaching is a moral process, and their research found that American pre-service teachers believed that they would have a moral impact on students through being positive role models and directly teaching life lessons that go beyond academic learning.

Recent international research has continued to find values based influences for pre-service teachers' reasoning in choosing teaching as their career. A study of 600 final year pre-service teachers from nine public universities in Malaysia found that altruistic reasons (teaching allows me to influence the next generation, teaching allows me to raise the

ambitions of under-privileged youth, by being a teacher I can help the young to lead a meaningful life) were the most dominant influence (over intrinsic and extrinsic factors) in choice to become a teacher (Bakar, Mohamed, Suhid, & Hamzah, 2014). Similarly, Al-Yaseen (2011) examined the factors that influenced 400 Kuwaiti pre-service teachers to choose teaching as their career. The results revealed that pre-service teachers were mostly influenced by altruistic and intrinsic factors. In a Turkish study exploring reasons for choosing teaching as a career, 176 pre-service teachers from two public universities self-reported a desire to enhance social equity, to shape the future of children, and to make a social contribution as their key motivations (Dundar, 2014).

Thus it appears that locally and globally, many pre-service teachers come to the profession with values that reflect those needed for inclusive education. Booth (2011, p.34) outlines that a key component of effective inclusion involves “developing mutually sustaining relationships” between teachers, students, school and their communities. There is growing awareness of the central role that relationship plays in quality teaching and learning (Brady, 2011; Juvonen, 2006; Lovat, 2010), and Tirri (2010) identified caring and respect as essential values that teachers must demonstrate in order to develop meaningful relationships with students. Teachers who work in Australian schools will teach diverse students who come from different cultures, have different abilities and live with families from a range of socioeconomic situations. This requires an inclusive approach to education underpinned by a philosophy of acceptance, in which all people are valued and treated with respect. While pre-service teachers might indicate values that align with these ideas, the practice of inclusive education in the classroom is where ‘the rubber meets the road’. Pre-service teachers find that inclusive education is challenging, and they have indicated in previous research that they do not feel adequately trained during their undergraduate degree to successfully support the diverse needs of all students (Hemmings & Weaven, 2005; Winter, 2006).

Service-Learning and Units on Inclusive Education in Education Degrees

Pre-service teacher education programs in many countries are required to prepare teachers to work in inclusive ways. In an effort to provide pre-service teachers with a greater awareness of diversity, and skills to support students with a range of differing needs, some universities have embraced the notion of Service-learning. In education degrees, Service-learning programs are used within a range of subjects including inclusive education (Carrington & Saggars 2008; Carrington, Mercer, & Kimber, 2010; Chambers & Lavery, 2012; Kimber, Carrington, Mercer, & Bland, 2011), developmental learning (Marchel, Shields, & Winter, 2011), and citizenship (James & Iverson, 2009), as well as stand-alone subjects about cultural awareness (Stachowski, Bodle, & Morrin, 2008), social justice (Chambers & Lavery, 2012), or diversity (Baldwin, Buchanan, & Rudisill, 2007). Service-learning entails a partnership between a university and its community, and the activities of service and learning are embedded within the curriculum with a focus on linking theory to experience and practice (Beere, 2009; Hatcher & Erasmus, 2008; Kenworthy-U'ren, 2008; Lavery, 2009; Schmidt, Marks, & Derrico, 2004). Service-learning requires students to engage in ongoing critical reflection that occurs in a scheduled and organised manner (Kimber et al., 2011; Le Grange, 2007).

In Australia, the use of Service-learning programs in teacher education has been propelled by the need to provide pre-service teachers with opportunities to engage in authentic learning beyond that offered through practica. This need is evidenced in part by commissioned reports indicating the inconsistent quality and extent of teaching practica (Butcher, Howard, McMeniman, & Thom, 2003; Colby, Bercaw, Clark, & Gailiardi, 2009;

House of Representatives, 2007). Service-learning presents pre-service teachers with the opportunity to develop a deep understanding of students from diverse backgrounds and a belief that all students can learn (Chang, Anagnostopoulos, & Omae, 2011; Conner, 2010; Marchel et al., 2011). These imperatives speak to a noted homogeneity in the pre-service teacher population, as well as these students' desire to gain knowledge and skills to teach the diverse groups of students in their future classrooms. As Mills (2009, p. 277) summarises, "the need for pre-service teacher education to prepare what is a predominantly Anglo-Australian and middle-class profession to be effective teachers of diverse students is critical".

In some Education degrees, Service-learning experiences are embedded within a unit that focuses on inclusive education. From their research of 603 pre-service teachers studying inclusive education at five universities across Australia, Hong Kong, and Canada, Sharma, Forlin, and Loreman (2008) conclude that a university subject about inclusive education can have a positive influence on pre-service teachers' attitudes towards inclusion. The students in Australia, Hong Kong, and Singapore all studied their respective university's 10-week subject, while the students in Canada studied a content infused program across two years. Kraska and Boyle (2014) analysed the impact factors such as age, gender, previous teaching experience, regular contact with people with disabilities, and having completed a module (unit) on inclusive education have on attitudes towards inclusion among a sample of 465 pre-service teachers from Monash University in Australia. These pre-service teachers were drawn from all year levels of the primary and early childhood programs. Some were or had completed only one unit on inclusive education or special education, while others had completed or were completing multiple units. Pre-service teachers completed a self-report questionnaire that examined their attitudes toward inclusion, and provided information on their sense of positive affect toward inclusion, the level to which they felt well trained and prepared for inclusion, and their sense of negative affect toward inclusion. The results showed no significant differences on attitudes toward inclusion by age, gender, previous teaching experience or regular contact with people with disabilities. Differences in attitude were found however, based on having completed a module on inclusive education, with those pre-service teachers who had done so demonstrating significantly more positive attitudes toward inclusion. In addition, pre-service teachers who had completed a module on inclusive education were also more likely to feel that they had received adequate training and were competently able to support children with diverse needs.

By contrast, in an Australian study, Woodcock, Hemmings, and Kay (2012) surveyed third year pre-service primary education teachers undertaking an inclusive education subject which included a four-week embedded practicum at a large Australian regional university. Pre-service teachers (N=97) were surveyed before the unit began and after the unit was completed, and the researchers found that attitudes towards inclusion altered little over the five months duration of the subject. They speculated that the short duration of the practicum was an important factor in why there was minimal change in pre-service teachers' self-efficacy around inclusive education. Hence, they suggest that further investigation might be a longitudinal study, entailing both surveys and interviews, following students at several Australian universities over the four years of their degree program.

Mills (2013) argued that more and longer practica were essential in aiding pre-service teachers' understanding of teaching diverse students in a socially just manner. Mills interviewed twelve Graduate Diploma of Education students and twelve final year Bachelor of Education students at a metropolitan university in Australia, and outlined that pre-service teachers require extended practical experience in community work and school placements with people who are marginalised in some way in order to fully internalise socially just practices. While more experience in diverse schools and with diverse communities may enhance pre-service teachers' knowledge about diversity, Varcoe and Boyle (2014) found that

Australian pre-service primary teachers viewed inclusion less positively in their fourth year of study than they had in their first year. It would seem that this decline might be related to more classroom experience and a greater awareness of the lack of resources available to assist teachers to engage in more inclusive practices. Thus it is imperative that consideration is given to the changing nature of pre-service teachers' values as they move through their degree, alongside their understanding of inclusion and sense of ability to support student diversity.

The Current Study

In this study we considered the values of first and fourth year pre-service teachers, and their views about, and awareness of, the diversity they will encounter in their future classrooms. The first year students are those within the first three weeks of their education degree, allowing us to gain an insight into what values they feel are personally important to them, and to the profession of teaching, before they are exposed to the values expressed throughout their education degree. In contrast, the fourth year pre-service teachers have almost completed their education degree, with some having studied an inclusion minor (comprised of four units including supporting students with learning difficulties, supporting students with disabilities, supporting students with English as a second language, and educational counselling), most having undertaken 20 hours of Service-learning within the community, and all having completed a unit on Inclusive education (focusing on teaching for the diversity of learners pre-service teachers may experience in their school community). The Service-learning requirement in the first semester of the final year of their degree provides pre-service teachers with opportunities to experience diversity, with such opportunities potentially leading them to question their assumptions and deepen their understandings of marginalisation and injustice (Carrington & Saggars, 2008). Thus we were interested to see whether differences in values, awareness of students' diverse needs, and confidence to support diverse students were evident between first and fourth year pre-service teachers, and between those fourth year pre-service teachers who had studied the inclusion minor and those who had not.

Method

Participants

Four hundred and ninety-one Bachelor of Education students at one Queensland university participated in the current study (350 first years; 141 fourth years). There were 329 (65%) female students, and the mean age of all students was 21.3 years (SD 5.4 years). The majority of students were Caucasian, $n=394$ (80%). Table 1 provides a detailed breakdown of demographics collected for First and Fourth year students.

Variables	First Year Students		Fourth Year Students	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
<i>Gender</i>				
Male	122	35	39	28
Female	228	65	101	72
Missing	0	0	1	1
<i>Ethnicity</i>				
Caucasian	276	78	118	84
Australian Aboriginal/ Torres Strait Islander	8	2	1	1
Maori	2	1	0	0
South African	2	1	0	0
Kurdish	0	0	1	1
Samoan	0	0	1	1
Asian Australian	11	3	2	1
Missing	51	15	18	12
<i>Secondary School Attended</i>				
Public	166	47	76	54
Private	169	48	59	42
Both	12	3	4	3
Missing	3	1	2	1
<i>Previous contact with people with disabilities</i>				
Yes	305	87	126	89
No	41	12	12	9
Missing	4	1	3	2
<i>Previous contact with people from other cultures</i>				
Yes	336	96	133	94
No	11	3	5	4
Missing	3	1	3	2
<i>Studied inclusion minor</i>				
Yes	N/A	N/A	56	40
No	N/A	N/A	85	60

Note: N = 491

Table 1: Detailed demographic information of participants by Year of Study

Measures

This study reports on the qualitative findings drawn from a larger longitudinal mixed methods study exploring pre-service teachers' attitudes toward inclusion and Service-learning.

Demographic questionnaire: Participants were asked a range of questions that collected basic demographic information such as age, gender, and ethnicity. Participants were asked whether they had attended a public or private high school and whether they had previously been in contact with people with disabilities and people from different cultural backgrounds to their own. In addition, fourth year participants were asked to indicate whether they had studied the inclusion minor during their Education degree.

Open-ended questions: Participants were given five (5) open-ended questions in which they were encouraged to write extended answers. These questions asked them to list their most important values, what values they thought teachers should have, and what they felt were key responsibilities for teachers. They were also asked to list the ways in which their future classrooms may be diverse and to indicate how they feel about this diversity.

Procedure

Ethical approval to undertake the current research was obtained from the university human research ethics committee. First year students were given the questionnaire during a tutorial in the first three weeks of classes in Semester 1, 2014 (February/March). They were advised that completion of the questionnaire was voluntary, anonymous and confidential. The questionnaire was completed in silence in class time and placed in a box out the front of the classroom as they left the room. All fourth year students completed the questionnaire during the final tutorial of an on campus conference they were required to attend. Completing the questionnaire at this time (July 2014), meant that most students had finished all the university based units for their teaching degree, and had only their final practicum and internship remaining. These times were chosen for data collection as it allowed us to capture the perspectives and attitudes of first year students at the beginning of their degree and fourth year students very close to the completion of their degree.

Data Analysis

All qualitative responses for each question were entered into SPSS and were then printed. Each question was open-ended, with no pre-generated answer options to select, and participants were able to write as simple or as detailed an answer as they desired. Data were analysed using content analysis (Tesch, 2013), where the frequency of each response was counted. For questions 1, 2, and 3, participants were asked to list the values they thought were most important for themselves personally, and for teachers, and they were asked to list teachers' key responsibilities. The first coder went through all data and generated a frequency count on responses given. In doing so, those values/responsibilities which generated the highest frequency counts were deemed the most important values and responsibilities. Similarly, question 4, which asked participants to list the types of diversity they felt would be present in their future classrooms, generated a large list of responses which was thoroughly explored. While analysing this data, it became apparent that some participants had interpreted this question as being about the diversity students would bring, while others interpreted this question as being about ways in which the teacher would respond to student diversity. Realising this, the responses were grouped into one of these two areas, and they were then frequency counted to show the amount of times each response was offered (Merriam, 2009). For question 5, participants were asked to state how they feel about the diversity they will encounter in their future classroom. After examining the participants' responses, the data were grouped into responses that reflected 'positive' feelings (feeling good, awesome, confident, ready), 'positive yet conflicted' feelings (good but concerned, initially nervous but strive to adapt), 'anxious, overwhelmed, and apprehensive' feelings (scared, frightened), and 'negative' feelings (overtly against inclusion). Remaining responses were those where the response did not seem to answer the question, and these were grouped as 'meaning unclear'.

To enhance the validity of the data (Merriam, 2009), a research assistant (RA) was employed to repeat the data analysis process. The RA was a Masters of Psychology student who had experience in qualitative data analysis. The RA printed all qualitative data and, for questions 1, 2 and 3, undertook a frequency count of the responses. For question 4, the RA was told to group the responses under the two areas of student diversity and teacher response to diversity, and conducted her own frequency count of the responses divided into these two areas. For question 5, the RA was told to sort the responses into the five areas of 'positive', 'positive yet conflicted', 'anxious, overwhelmed, and apprehensive', 'negative' and 'meaning unclear'. Responses were grouped into these areas and a frequency count was undertaken.

Once completed, the initial coder and RA met to compare their frequency counts and discuss their analyses. Minor inconsistencies were found between total numbers for responses given in questions 4 and 5. The initial coder and RA worked through the data together to recount and regroup the responses to ensure agreement was reached on the placement of responses and the final numbers generated.

Results and Discussion

While we were most interested in examining difference and similarity between the responses for first and fourth year pre-service teachers, the data were also explored for differences between those fourth years who had undertaken the inclusion minor, and those who had not. Where these examinations led to interesting differences in findings these results are discussed.

What Values do Pre-Service Teachers List as the Personal Values that they hold?

Both first and fourth year students listed 'Respect for self and others' and 'Honesty' as the two most important personal values that they held. For the third most important value, first year students rated 'Being fair and equitable', while fourth year students rated 'Being inclusive and accepting'. First year students noted the value of 'Being inclusive and accepting' as their fifth most important personal value, coming after 'Caring/kindness/compassion'.

When the fourth year data was explored by comparing those students who undertook an inclusion minor with those students who did not complete this minor, it was revealed that those who did the inclusion minor rated 'Being inclusive and accepting' as their second most important value (13% of respondents), while those who did not take this minor rated 'Being inclusive and accepting' as their fifth most important value (7% of respondents; coming in after honesty, respect, developing relationships, and trust). It appears that for those fourth year students who have undertaken the inclusive education minor, the values of inclusion and acceptance have been internalised. While this internalisation may be a result of studying this minor, it is also possible that those students who choose the inclusion minor already held strong positive views about the importance of inclusion and acceptance of others.

What Values do Pre-Service Teachers Think Teachers should have?

First and fourth year students demonstrated similarities in the values that they felt teachers should have. First years listed the three most important values for teachers as 'Being fair and equitable', 'Respect for self and others', and 'Being inclusive and accepting'. For fourth years, the three most important values they felt teachers should demonstrate were 'Respect for self and others', 'Caring/Kindness/Compassion', and 'Being inclusive and accepting'. While these values were listed in slightly different order, they are largely similar. As Tirri (2010) argued that teacher values of respect and caring are essential for the development of meaningful relationships between teachers and students, it is reassuring to see pre-service teachers prioritise such values.

When the fourth year data was explored by comparing students who undertook the inclusion minor with students who did not complete this minor, it was revealed that inclusion minors rated 'Being inclusive and accepting' as the second most important teacher value (13%), while non-inclusion majors rated it as the seventh most important teacher value (7%),

coming in after respect, honesty, kindness/caring/compassion, understanding, developing relationships, and being fair and equitable. Thus those who undertook the inclusion minor felt more strongly than those students who had not that being inclusive and accepting was an important value that teachers should demonstrate in their work, and personally prioritise.

It is heartening to note that the values first and fourth year pre-service teachers feel they personally demonstrate, are also those they feel teachers should demonstrate. As teaching is a moral endeavour (Sanger & Osguthorpe, 2013), it is reassuring to see that pre-service teachers identify within themselves values such as respect, equity, honesty, compassion and acceptance, and that they feel these values are integral to good teachers.

When Considering Themselves as Teachers, What Key Responsibilities do Pre-Service Teachers see for Themselves in this Role?

When asked to consider the three key responsibilities that they felt they would have as teachers, differences arose between first and fourth year perceptions. First year students rated the three most important responsibilities as 'To educate/mentor/guide students', 'To be inclusive and accepting', and 'To encourage and support students academically and personally'. For fourth year students, their top three responsibilities were 'To encourage and support students academically and personally', 'To develop relationships', and 'To be a good role model'. Fourth year students did rate 'To be inclusive and accepting' as their fourth most important responsibility.

Thus while both years consider supporting students and being inclusive and accepting as important responsibilities for teachers, first years seem to place a greater emphasis on explicitly educating and guiding students, while fourth years placed more emphasis on developing relationships and being a good role model. As pre-service teachers progress through their education degree, they are continually exposed to the notion that effective teachers focus on collaborative teaching and learning methods, where students are seen as participative and proactive (Brady, 2011). It is perhaps not surprising that fourth year pre-service teachers indicate responsibilities for teachers more in line with this theoretical orientation, while first year pre-service teachers' responses may indicate a more traditional approach to teaching. By rating the need to develop relationships and be a good role model so prominently, fourth year pre-service teachers are promoting behaviours that support inclusive classroom environments (Booth, 2011).

In What Ways do Pre-Service Teachers Think Their Future Classroom will Include Students with a Range of Diverse Needs?

This question was interpreted in one of two ways by participants. Some pre-service teachers inferred this question to be asking them to list the range of ways in which their future students would be diverse, while others saw this question as asking how they as teachers could respond to this diversity. Table 2 shows the myriad ways in which first and fourth year pre-service teachers anticipate diversity will be a factor in these two areas in their future classrooms. The number beside each answer indicates the number of students who gave this response. Students could list as many answers as they felt necessary.

<i>Types of student diversity</i>	<i>1st Year</i>	<i>4th Year</i>
Cultural diversity	133	26
Students with disabilities (cognitive and/or physical)	76	30
Students with different family backgrounds/SES status	39	13
Students with differing ability levels	34	5
Students with English as an additional language	21	7
Students with learning difficulties	20	11
Differing religious needs	19	4
Students with different social skills	7	2
Students with different values and beliefs	6	2
Students with different learning styles	5	8
Students with mental health/illness issues	5	0
Students with different behaviour management needs	2	3
Students who are gifted	2	0
Sexuality issues	1	0
Students emotional needs	0	3
<i>Teacher responses to diversity</i>	<i>1st Year</i>	<i>4th Year</i>
Differentiation (in teaching styles, activities, assessment, resources)	19	28
Explicitly teach about inclusion, difference and acceptance	16	0
Enhance own knowledge and skills in area of inclusion	13	0
Have an awareness and understanding of individual students and their needs	9	10
Use various technologies in the classroom	9	3
Provide extra support and time for students who need it	2	1
Create positive relationships with students	0	8
Use a teacher aide	0	1

Table 2: Diversity students believe they will encounter in their future classrooms and ways teachers can respond to this diversity.

As can be seen from Table 2, first and fourth year students listed very similar answers as to how diversity would manifest in the students in their classroom. Most overwhelmingly, first and fourth year students mentioned cultural diversity and students with disabilities. The pre-service teachers were also aware of diversity in family background and socio-economic status. While two first year students specifically mentioned ‘students who are gifted’, no fourth year students noted this as a factor. However, first and fourth year students did list ‘students with differing ability levels’, and it is feasible that this category of students includes those who are gifted and in need of support. Despite this, it is a concern that few first years, and no fourth years, specifically drew attention to diversity in the form of gifted students. This could be because of a general idea among students that inclusive education is about students with disabilities and those who experience poverty, rather than about responding to the needs of all students.

For those pre-service teachers who interpreted this question as being about how they as teachers could respond to this diversity, ‘differentiation’ and ‘having an awareness and understanding of individual students and their needs’, featured strongly in their responses. First year pre-service teachers also felt that ‘explicitly teaching about inclusion, difference and acceptance’ and ‘enhancing their own knowledge and skills in the area of inclusion’ would be important ways to respond to diversity. Interestingly, fourth year pre-service teachers did not list either of these options. It is possible that fourth year pre-service teachers feel that they know a lot about inclusion, due to having undertaken almost four years of a teaching degree, although this idea runs counter to the research that highlights that most final year pre-service teachers indicate that they have not been well prepared for ‘doing’ inclusion (Hemmings & Weaven, 2005; Winter, 2006). It is concerning that fourth year students do not seem to acknowledge that there is a need to continue learning about diversity and inclusion. Perhaps the message of life-long learning in this area is not getting across?

Of further concern is that fourth year students did not identify the explicit teaching of inclusion, difference and acceptance as a key way to support diversity in the classroom. While it is heartening to see that first year students already consider this explicit teaching valuable, it is concerning that fourth year students did not acknowledge this avenue as a way to support diversity. This concern could, however, be somewhat ameliorated by the importance a number of fourth year students placed on being role models. This may imply an intention among fourth year students to embed their values, which by and large appear to be those that will support an inclusive teaching practice, into all teaching activities, leading them to feel that the explicit teaching of inclusion, difference, and acceptance is less necessary. While fourth years must embed inclusion into all aspects of their teaching, they could also be encouraged to engage their students in explicit discussions around inclusion, diversity and difference in order to help develop their students thinking in these areas (Mergler, 2008).

In line with the earlier response from fourth year students that the second most important responsibility a teacher has is to develop relationships with students, they list developing positive relationships as a key way in which teachers can support diversity in the classroom. While first years do acknowledge the need to know students on an individual level, they do not specifically identify the need to build meaningful and positive relationships with students as a priority. This is, though, unsurprising as the teacher-student relationship is increasingly emphasised throughout the course, and particularly in the fourth year. Through readings, activities and in-class discussions, pre-service teachers are exposed to the idea that effective teaching and learning is based on authentic relationships between teachers and students (Juvonen, 2006; Lovat, 2010), with the requirement for critical self-reflection, allied to Service-learning, strengthening that awareness (Carrington & Selva, 2010).

How do Pre-Service Teachers Feel about the Diversity they will Encounter in their Future Classroom?

Pre-service teachers were asked to indicate how they feel about the fact that their future classrooms will be diverse. Table 3 shows a comparison of the responses for first and fourth year students, and a comparison of the fourth year students who had and had not studied the inclusion minor.

	n	Positive	Positive yet concerned	Anxious, overwhelmed, apprehensive	Negative	Meaning unclear	No answer
1 st Year	350	198 (57%)	32 (9%)	2 (>1%)	2 (>1%)	10 (3%)	107 (31%)
4 th Year	141	65 (46%)	20 (14%)	11 (8%)	0	0	45 (32%)
4 th Year inclusion minor	56	33 (59%)	3 (1%)	1 (>1%)	0	0	19 (34%)
4 th Year non-inclusion minor	85	32 (37%)	17 (20%)	10 (12%)	0	0	26 (31%)

Table 3: Comparison of first year students' and fourth year students' (both those who had and who had not studied the inclusion minor) feelings about the diversity of their future classroom.

What can be seen from Table 3 is that almost one third of respondents in each year did not answer this question. If we remove these students, it becomes apparent that, of the 243 first years who did answer this question, 198 (81%) stated that they feel positive about having this diversity in their classes. Of the 96 fourth year students who answered this question, 65 (68%) stated that they feel positive about this diversity. Further, fewer first years felt positive

yet concerned (13%) and anxious, overwhelmed and apprehensive (less than 1%) than fourth years (21% and 11% respectively). Thus first year pre-service teachers appear more positive than fourth years about the diversity they will encounter in their future classroom. This finding is in line with previous research (Varcoe & Boyle, 2014) showing a drop in pre-service teacher confidence in inclusion as they progress through their degree. There are a number of possible reasons for this finding in the current study. First years, for example, may be overestimating their ability to support diversity in the classroom. It may be that first year pre-service teachers are not yet aware of how complex and involved the practicalities of supporting diverse students can be. Fourth years, in comparison, have attended a number of practicums at schools where they have seen the wide range of students in classrooms, and have had to grapple with being the teacher in control of these diverse environments. Previous research supports this idea that greater exposure to classroom environments with diverse students (particularly students with disabilities) can result in increased concerns among pre-service teachers about the practice of inclusive education, particularly for those pre-service teachers who feel less confident in their ability to support diverse students (Forlin & Chambers, 2011).

Fourth years students may well have a more realistic view of the challenges involved in teaching in modern diverse classrooms. This idea is supported by the fact that adding together the 'positive' and 'positive yet challenged' response for first and fourth year shows that both years feel equally positive about this future diversity, with fourth years expressing more concern along with their positivity. In addition, fourth year pre-service teachers do feel more anxious, overwhelmed and apprehensive than first year students; as noted above, these students had completed the coursework for their degrees and their anxiety may be due to the imminence of the direct responsibility they will have for students in their care on entering the profession. This may also be indicative of their increased awareness of what supporting diverse students in diverse classrooms actually entails (Varcoe & Boyle, 2014).

It is also possible, however, that the messages pre-service teachers received throughout the course increased their anxiety and concern. While pre-service teachers were given strategies for supporting students with diverse needs specifically to increase their awareness and confidence, it is possible it had the opposite effect. In order to explore this further, the fourth year student responses were grouped by those who had studied the inclusion minor throughout their education degree, and those who had not. It is important to acknowledge that not all students can choose to study the inclusion minor, as this option is only available to those students who are studying Primary Teaching. Table 3 shows the responses of those fourth year pre-service teachers who undertook the inclusion minor and those who did not.

Again around one third of these participants did not respond to this question. If these participants are removed, we find that of the 37 inclusion minor students, 33 (89%) feel positive about this future diversity. In comparison, of the 59 non-inclusion minor students who answered this question, only 32 (54%) feel positive about this future diversity. In addition, more non-inclusion minor students feel positive yet concerned (29%) and anxious, overwhelmed and apprehensive (17%), than those students who did study the inclusion minor (8% and 3% respectively). Thus it appears that fourth year students who have focused on notions of inclusion throughout their degree do feel more confident and less concerned about working with diversity in their teaching futures. Therefore it is those fourth year students who have not had a particular focus on inclusion, but have been exposed to the ideas of inclusion in other ways throughout their degree (and particularly in their final year through Service-learning) who consider themselves as being less positive and more concerned about working with this diversity.

The following quotes provide examples of first and fourth year pre-service teacher responses in relation to how they feel about the future diversity they will encounter in their classrooms.

Those who feel positive:

“Excited. I can’t wait to learn about others and assess how best to support and encourage them whilst guiding them through their educational journey” (first year, female, 23 years old).

“Great. I feel it will help develop compassionate and understanding students” (fourth year, female, 29 years old, inclusion minor).

“Wonderful” (fourth year, male, 22 years old, non-inclusion minor).

Those who feel positive yet concerned:

“I feel excited but also concerned about limited knowledge on diversity” (first year, male, 20 years old).

“Semi confident, unsure about how I can independently implement these things” (fourth year, female, 22 years old, inclusion minor).

Those who feel anxious, overwhelmed, and/or apprehensive:

“Nervous that I may not use these methods correctly” (first year, female, 19 years old).

“It’s a bit overwhelming” (fourth year, female, 21 years old, non-inclusion minor).

Those who feel negative:

“Angry” (first year, female, age not provided).

“I strongly believe it makes learning for students difficult and that there are too many pressures on teachers to meet each individual’s needs” (first year, female, 44 years old).

Implications for Teacher Education Programs

This study has identified that the personal values held by first and fourth year pre-service teachers, and the values they feel teachers should possess, are highly similar across the two cohorts. Similarly, there is congruence within each cohort’s personal and professional values. Many of the values expressed by the pre-service teachers, along with the key responsibilities they felt teachers should uphold, reflect those found in past research; highlighting a belief in supporting, respecting, accepting, encouraging and positively influencing the range of students that will be in their classrooms (Bakar et al., 2014; Balyer & Ozcan, 2014; Dundar, 2014; Osguthorpe & Sanger, 2013). Reassuringly, the values pre-service teachers listed as important to them personally and professionally are among those that are needed for inclusion (Booth, 2011) and quality teaching (Lovat, 2010) to prosper. It would be valuable for an explicit connection to be made between the pre-service teachers’ personal and professional values, and the fact that these largely reflect those that underpin inclusion. As some students resist an inclusive education framework, demonstrating the key ways in which this framework allows their values to be demonstrated in their teaching may help resistant students rethink their position.

The findings of the current study revealed that the majority of pre-service teachers feel positive and confident to support the range of diversity that will be apparent in their future classrooms. The vast majority of pre-service teachers in the current study would have been

educated in Australian schools since 2000, where inclusive education has been a key policy driver at federal and state levels. As context is central to understanding how people form their beliefs (Dadvand, 2015), it could be expected that school students educated during this time would hold more informed and potentially positive views and values toward diversity and difference. Indeed, the pre-service teachers in the current study did largely offer positive views of inclusion and supporting diversity. It is important to acknowledge however, that while the participants in the current study may have been schooled at a time when inclusion and acceptance of diversity were key policy drivers in education, this does not mean that the individual schools that the participants attended were inclusive. It often takes schools many years to fully implement policy directives, and it can take even longer for teacher, student and community attitudes to change. It is heartening that the current pool of pre-service teachers will go into the teaching profession with a largely positive view of diversity and sense of competence to support diverse students.

While the pre-service teachers were largely positive about diversity, not all types of diversity were noted. This finding has implications for the fourth year Inclusive Education curriculum. The diminished consideration of giftedness, together with fourth years' lack of mention of sexuality or mental illness issues, draws attention to the content of the subject areas (units) related to inclusive education; for example, the Service-learning partnerships available for fourth year students to undertake required work in the community include many services for people with disabilities, refugees, and socio-economically disadvantaged (low SES) backgrounds, but none related to giftedness or sexuality. Further, a scan of associated lectures reveals mention of these groups but an emphasis on low SES and disability as primary considerations. This emphasis on low SES and disability may well lead students, over the course of their degree, to focus on these groups of students to the detriment of their ability to cater for alternate groups of students. It must be stressed to students that inclusive education means that the needs of ALL students are to be considered and supported, so that each student is able to succeed to the best of their ability.

Another important consideration from the findings is that fourth year pre-service teachers believe in the importance of role modelling their values, yet do not feel they need to have explicit discussions with their future students about inclusion. While creating warm and supportive classroom environments may demonstrate an inclusive agenda, teachers must seek to help students understand the reasoning behind the teaching choices they make. As teacher educators, the authors of this paper do occasionally hear pre-service teachers argue that providing support to students with additional needs will lead to a neglect of 'normal' students. Encouraging pre-service teachers to have discussions early and often with their future students about the importance of inclusion, including the difference between equality (giving everyone the same) and equity (giving everyone what they need), may go some way to reducing the perception that students with high needs are receiving more than other students, or are taking the teacher away from other students. The fourth year unit on inclusive education does include teaching final year students explicitly about this difference, and working to ensure that they understand the requirement they have as teachers to address the needs of ALL students in their future classrooms. It would be beneficial to discuss equity and inclusion early and consistently with pre-service teachers, and have them practice ways in which they could explain these notions to their future students and the parents of their future students. Doing so may help everyone understand the importance and necessity of equitable teaching practice.

Limitations

We cannot argue from this study that doing the inclusion minor caused the greater awareness of, and value attributed to, inclusive ideals. It must be remembered that those students who studied the inclusion minor may have chosen to do so as they entered the university with more acceptance and willingness to embrace diversity. In addition, the first and fourth year students in the current study are two distinct groups of students. It is therefore difficult to know where the fourth year students started in relation to their values and views toward inclusion and diversity, and the differences between the groups may be due to variables other than the length of time they have been studying the Education degree. A longitudinal study that follows the first year pre-service teachers used in this study, and investigates their values toward inclusion and diversity at the end of their degree would allow for more meaningful conclusions to be drawn about the potential impact of the degree itself.

A further limitation with this study is that all data was collected via self-report. It is possible that the pre-service teachers' responses were affected by social desirability bias, in that they reported what they thought we wanted to hear. This cannot be discounted as pre-service teachers are very aware of the inclusive views of teacher educators. In addition, it is possible that students have reported what they would hope they would do or feel in certain situations. It may be that we would see a discrepancy between what pre-service teachers say they would do, and what they would actually do in the classroom. Future research that includes observational data of pre-service teachers out on practicum working with students in the classroom may present more nuanced understandings of their values and views toward diversity and inclusion.

Conclusion

The results showed that the values first and fourth year pre-service teachers listed as important to them personally and professionally are the values that support an inclusive education environment. Importantly, it was shown that those pre-service teachers who had completed the inclusion minor did feel more positive about the future diversity they will encounter in their classrooms than those fourth year students who had not completed this minor. In addition, those pre-service teachers who had completed the inclusion minor were more likely to rate 'being inclusive and accepting' as an important value that they personally held, and as a value and responsibility that teachers should have. While we cannot stipulate that all students must do an inclusion minor, we can ensure that the principles of inclusive teaching practice are woven throughout all areas of the Education degree. It is imperative that an examination of all units that comprise the degree is undertaken to outline the key places where links to the values of inclusion and diversity can be highlighted and explicitly related to inclusive teaching practice. Similarly, it is essential that teacher educators across the degree work systematically to help students develop their awareness of the values they hold as individuals and as future teaching professionals, and help students draw connections between their stated values, inclusive values and the teaching choices they make.

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