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## **Building Teacher Capital in Pre-Service Teachers: Reflections on a New Teacher-Education Initiative**

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**Abstract:** This discussion considers a new pre-service teacher education initiative at the University of Western Sydney, called *Classmates*. *Classmates* aims to prepare pre-service teachers to work in diverse and challenging schools. The paper argues that the neo-liberal industrial model of mass teacher education may be limited in its capacity to adequately prepare pre-service teachers for the difficulties they may encounter in a society where socio-cultural inequality is growing. It points out that pre-service teacher-education needs to build *teacher capital* to better prepare graduates and to buffer the transition from tertiary student to beginning teacher. *Classmates* offers one way that this may be achieved. Findings from the *Classmates* research clearly point to the pre-service teachers' acquisition of several forms of teacher capital, identified as (i) knowledge about students; (ii) knowledge about teaching and the institution; and (iii) knowledge about professional networks. The continuous *Classmates* practicum was perceived to make a major contribution to the development of this capital.

### **Introduction**

*Classmates* is a new secondary teacher-preparation initiative that began in 2006 as a collaboration between Australia's University of Western Sydney (UWS) and the New South Wales Department of Education and Training (DET), South Western Sydney Region. The philosophy of *Classmates* is to prepare pre-service teachers for employment in disadvantaged and challenging schools. Students in these schools often possess backgrounds impacted by poverty, unemployment, limited education, housing instability, homelessness and/or recent migration (Johnson, 2004; Lamb, Teese, Walstab, Vickers & Rumberger, 2004; Martinez, 2003; Morrell & Collatos, 2002; Vinson, 2002). Approximately two-thirds of the students in such contexts come from family backgrounds where at least one parent regularly speaks a language other than English (Vinson, 2002). Indeed, in 2006, South Western Sydney region had the highest enrolment in NSW of students from language backgrounds other than English (New South Wales Department of Education and Training, 2006).

Despite the need for 'professional support that goes beyond the routine requirements of the teacher's role' (Vickers, 2006, p. 6), these schools are frequently

staffed by beginning and early-career teachers (Berry, 2004; Chicago ACORN, 2003; Vickers, 2006). This is illustrated by schools in the South Western and Western regions of Sydney; these regions possess pockets of substantial economic and social disadvantage (Lamb, Teese, Walstab, Vickers & Rumberger, 2004), yet receive high numbers of newly appointed teachers (New South Wales Public Education Council Report, 2005).

Teacher resignation rates in challenging schools tend to be high, with many new teachers leaving the profession within their first five years (Berry, 2004; Ewing, 2001; Johnson, 2004; Ramsey, 2000; Legislative Council, Standing Committee on Social Issues, 2005; Vinson, 2002). Such staffing instability can create significant problems, potentially influencing the quality of teaching; the provision of suitable mentoring; the building of professional knowledge; morale; overall school stability; and student achievement (Berg, Charner-Laird, Fiarman, Jones, Qazilbash & Johnson, 2005; Glennie, Coble & Allen, 2004; Invargarson, 1998; Rockoff, 2003; Vinson, 2002).

These realities compound the complexities found in economically and socially disadvantaged school contexts. For instance, many schools demonstrate issues related to student behaviour, management, and/or learning difficulties (Ferfolja, Robinson, Clarke & Vickers, 2005; Lareau & McNamara Horvat, 1999; Thomson, 2002; Vickers 2006). Formal education may not be valued or seen as relevant by some students and families. Poverty, and a lack of, or poorly funded local social services means that some schools have become by default, substitutes for community care (Thomson, 2002). Furthermore, teachers now undertake a broad range of roles (Hinton, 1997) that are subsumed under the profession of 'teacher' in addition to subject and learning specialists. This combination of both societal expectation of the teacher and socio-cultural disadvantage makes teaching a complex, demanding profession.

Such facts point to an urgent question as to whether traditional modes of teacher education that focus on a one-size-fits-all approach actually prepare beginning teachers sufficiently well to deal with the high demands and increasingly complex situations they face in challenging schools? Moreover, in Australia, these traditional modes have been impacted by the neo-liberal industrial model of mass teacher education, characterized by a seemingly continuous re-structuring and 'streamlining' of teacher-education degrees, including large tutorial class sizes, reduced face-to-face teaching hours, reduced practicum, and an over-reliance on information technologies, imposed to meet the economic efficiencies fuelled by Federal government funding cut-backs to higher education. How can such changes prepare pre-service teachers to meaningfully address the difficulties they are likely to encounter in highly complex, challenging, and / or disadvantaged environments? It is not surprising that recent reviews of teacher education have concluded that many teacher education graduates are not teacher ready (Ramsey, 2000; Legislative Council, Standing Committee on Social Issues, 2005), and that in spite of university endeavours, the connection between teacher education and schools may be inadequate in some situations (Ramsey, 2000).

*Classmates* is a teacher-education initiative that endeavours to prepare pre-service teachers to work in diverse and challenging environments. It aims to produce beginning teachers who are willing to teach in such schools; who enter these contexts with some knowledge and experience in relation to not only the educational, but also the social and welfare issues they may encounter; and who, through this awareness, are mentally and emotionally charged to begin catering to the diverse needs of these school

communities. It does this through a variety of means, including ensuring that pre-service teachers undertake professional experience placements in sites that reflect the schools to which they are likely to be appointed (Vickers, 2006). *Classmates* also seeks to promote a professional ethos of 'giving back' to pre-teacher education once qualified. In effect, the initiative aims to develop pre-service teachers' *capital* (Bourdieu 1977) in order to streamline the transition from university student to capable and socially aware beginning teacher.

This paper highlights the perceptions of *Classmates* pre-service teachers in relation to their learning about teaching, students and schools, and their overall feelings of preparedness for their future roles. Although requiring longitudinal examination and cross-initiative comparison, the findings to date illustrate that *Classmates* may provide one method of meaningful professional preparation through its ability to build forms of capital that are of direct use to these future teachers. It is to the concept of capital that this discussion now turns.

### **Extending Bourdieu's Concept of 'Capital'**

Capital (Bourdieu, 1977) refers to both material and symbolic products and actions that within a cultural field (in this case school education) may be of use value. Harker, Mahar and Wilkes (1990 cited in Webb, Schirato & Danaher, 2002) explain that:

the definition of capital is very wide for Bourdieu and includes material things (which can have symbolic value), as well as 'untouchable' but culturally significant attributes such as prestige, status and authority (referred to as symbolic capital), along with cultural capital (defined as culturally-valued taste and consumption patterns)... For Bourdieu, capital acts as a social relation with a system of exchange, and the term is extended 'to all the goods, material and symbolic, without distinction, that present themselves as rare and worthy of being sought after in a particular social formation. (p. 22)

Grenfell and James (1998) indicate how capital within a field may be activated to have value. They highlight that 'this value is not a neutral, passive feature of the field. It is value which buys other products of the field. It therefore has power (p. 20). In teaching, there is a range of highly complex and interdependent knowledges, skills and behaviours that are both generic and context specific, which are required by teachers to effectively undertake their roles. These attributes reflect different types of capital, yet the combination of these forms of capital is particular to teachers and teaching. Hence, I have termed these combinations of capital, *teacher capital*.

The kind of teacher capital that pre-service teachers bring to the role varies and is at least partially dependent on an individual's background, circumstances and experiences and 'their position within the field' (Webb, et. al., 2002, p. 23). As novices, their location and access to power within this field is already limited. Additionally, most teachers are from middle class or aspiring middle class backgrounds, are 'overwhelmingly monocultural' (Gallego, 2001, p.312), and broadly speaking, exhibit a range of expectations, values, norms, behaviours, aspirations, predispositions and

educational achievements that reflect this social position. Their middle-class habitus (Bourdieu, 1977) may provide them with capital that is valued by the institution (middle class) and in cases where the school population is of a similar social standing. Habitus:

ensures the active presence of past experiences, which deposited in each organism in the form of schemes of perception, thought and action, tend to guarantee the ‘correctness’ of practices and their constancy over time, more reliably than all formal rules and explicit norms...habitus makes possible the free production of all the thoughts, perceptions and actions inherent in the particular conditions of its production – and only those. (Bourdieu quoted by Harker, 1992, p. 16 cited by Grenfell & James, 1998, p. 14).

However, capital that is valued in one context may be less valued in another. Pre-service teachers entering the types of disadvantaged and challenging schools as defined earlier, may find that the capital they possess is resisted or devalued by some students or parts of the school community, or indeed, it may be inappropriate to activate. There may be problems reconciling their philosophies with those of the school community and vice versa, possibly resulting in poor relationships (Lareau & McNamara Horvat, 1999). Their product in this field buys little and so is relatively speaking, less powerful, particularly in terms of its exchange value. Moreover, their inexperience as pedagogues in schooling contexts means they may not have yet honed the set of professional, social and cultural skills necessary for effective teaching.

Possessing a similar habitus is useful, but arguably of greater importance is the gaining of the knowledge and skill that can be transformed into useful and valued forms of capital for specific contexts. Extending on Bourdieu’s concept of capital, and using the voices of the *Classmates* candidates, this paper illustrates how *Classmates* contributes to the building of *teacher capital* in pre-service teachers.

### **An Overview of the *Classmates* Initiative**

It is crucial to explain the structure of *Classmates* to contextualize the experiences, perceptions and voices of the pre-service teachers reported herein (Author, in press; Vickers & Author, 2006). In 2006, a group of fourteen secondary teacher education students undertaking the Bachelor of Teaching at the University of Western Sydney, in single-method English, maths and science, were hosted in one of five South Western Sydney region DET schools for their professional experience. These pre-service teachers attended their host schools for three days per week over a continuous cycle totaling approximately four months, enabling their development of meaningful professional relationships with their students, supervising teacher, faculty, and school. It should be noted that the *Classmates* students have in total the same number of practicum days as do the mainstream cohort, however, rather than undertaking two discontinuous ‘block’ practicum, their time in school is stretched over a continuous number of months. In the third school term, *Classmates* students undertook a third practicum within the cluster of host *Classmates* schools. This provided the pre-service teachers with the opportunity to participate in projects specifically organised by each school, such as

tutoring in homework centres and working with parent groups, which enhanced their understandings of site-based needs.

Formal university instruction was undertaken in a range of modes that varied substantially from the mainstream course delivery. For instance, *Classmates* students were required to attend evening lectures/tutorials (often held after a full day of professional experience), intensives, day classes and weekend workshops. Many of these were conducted at a *Classmates* host school site. A feature of this mode of delivery was that theory and practice were intimately tied, fostering the integration of the pre-service teacher into the life of the school and providing them with a realistic model of what teaching involves. Moreover, a key aim of *Classmates* is to promote pre-service teachers' understandings of regional needs, resources and supports while enabling them to develop professional, collegial networks; hence, some regional in-services aimed at the professional learning of early career teachers were also made available to *Classmates*.

To promote resilience within the pre-service teachers, a series of co-counseling workshops were offered. Howard and Johnson (2002) argue that a strong support group is one factor that can help alleviate teacher stress and burn-out. *Classmates*, as will be seen below, encourages a supportive peer network. However, the formalized workshops helped provide some basic strategies to cope with stress and to support each other during their studies and in their future teaching careers. Additionally, the newly formed *Classmates Club*, provides past and current *Classmates* participants with a space to meet to discuss issues and to provide an on-going support mechanism for young teachers.

*Classmates* pre-service teachers and their host schools received on-going support and guidance by Lynda Pinnington-Wilson, a DET senior education officer, who was also one of the initial conceptualisers of *Classmates*<sup>1</sup>, and by the UWS *Classmates* coordinator, also the author of this paper.

## Methodology

Fourteen *Classmates* pre-service teachers participated in face-to-face, qualitative interviews, as part of a broader study evaluating the inception year of the initiative<sup>2</sup>. The cohort comprised of five science, seven English, and two mathematics method candidates. Twelve were female and two were male. The *Classmates* were from a range of ethnic backgrounds including Lebanese, Russian, Australian, South African and Indian. The interviews used a semi-structured interview schedule which provided the latitude to re-order the questions according to the direction of the interview and the needs of the respondent (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This approach also enabled an emphasis on the lived experiences of participants, providing rich data in relation to issues pertaining to

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<sup>1</sup> Others involved in the initial conceptualization of *Classmates* included Mr Brian Miller who was at the time a lecturer at the University of Western Sydney; and Professor Margaret Vickers from the University of Western Sydney who was heavily involved in the early discussions and continues to oversee the initiative, working closely with the author and UWS *Classmates* coordinator.

<sup>2</sup> The broader evaluative study including the interviews reported upon in this paper were conducted by Professor Florence McCarthy and Ms Vikki Fraser. This culminated in the writing of the report: McCarthy, F. (2007). '*Classmates*': A partnership between UWS School of Education and the South Western Sydney Region Department of Education and Training. University of Western Sydney: Australia.

their experiences in the program, particularly in terms of their perceived professional development for a career in teaching.

Interviews were audio-taped and transcribed. The data were thematically coded for descriptive themes. The organisation of this information was enhanced through the employment of the qualitative software program NVivo, which also enabled the maintenance of its contextual integrity.

As this is a relatively small, but publicly known participant cohort, confidentiality of responses has been paramount. Thus, pseudonyms for all participants are used as is the application of discontinuous narratives – a strategy frequently applied to research of a potentially ‘sensitive’ nature (Khayatt, 1992). Additionally, names and identifying features of schools have been omitted.

### **Developing Teacher Capital**

Findings from the *Classmates* research clearly pointed to the pre-service teachers’ acquisition of several forms of teacher capital. It is beyond the scope of this paper to address them all; however, this discussion will broadly address three key areas: (i) knowledge about students; (ii) knowledge about teaching and the institution; and (iii) knowledge about professional networks. From participants’ admissions, it should be noted from the outset that the structure of the continuous *Classmates* practicum was perceived to make a major contribution to the development of this capital.

#### **(i) Developing Knowledge About Students**

Pre-service teacher education for challenging schools needs to develop individuals who have a repertoire of teacher capital in various contexts that can be exchanged or activated for specific purposes or uses. One form of capital was the acquisition of *knowledge about students*. The continuous *Classmates* presence in one school enabled the pre-service teachers to build their knowledge about students’ academic abilities and to gain a deeper understanding of students’ lives and experiences. Gallego (2001) discusses the importance of providing ‘pre-service teachers with opportunities to interact with the communities and children representative of those they are likely to teach’ (p. 312). This *knowledge about students* helped inform and shape their interactions and professional relationship with their charges, which was exemplified by the following comment from one pre-service teacher relating her experience of the *Classmates* practicum:

Jenny: I had one challenging student that would get up and swear and carry on and storm out of the room ... He was the most difficult one that I had. And by the end I was able to establish a good relationship with him by getting information from the deputy principal... [and] also the time that I had in welfare meetings, finding out what the background to these kids’ problems are, to be able then to tackle it in a different way rather than thinking that they are just difficult kids, they are just being rotten. To find out what is going on behind the scenes that is influencing their poor behaviour was really good. And I think if I

had been there for four weeks [the length of the traditional practicum] I wouldn't have found these sorts of things out. ... By the end he actually handed in an assignment, it was the first assignment that he had ever handed in ever, so that was good ... Yeah, we ended up forming quite a good relationship after a very heated situation.

Being on site for a considerable length of time allowed Jenny to become familiar with the student, his background, and his learning needs. She had the opportunity to learn about the school's structural avenues that could provide useful information about students such as welfare meetings, as well as the time to utilise this information productively. This enabled her to work through various strategies to support the student's learning and at the same time, develop a positive interpersonal relationship.

*Classmates* pre-service teachers were able to develop relationships with students, which contributed to greater understandings about their charges. This not only gave them capital through their knowledge of students' academic abilities and how these could be best improved, but also in terms of what was valued by the prevailing youth culture in the school. The chance to learn about the latter enhanced the pre-service teachers' status and rapport with students. As Stephania pointed out:

Learning about the backgrounds of these students, how they learn, you know implementing different reading, writing and listening strategies and engaging the students' visuals was like my golden ticket. ... And just classroom behaviour, like just focusing on the positive, you know, because sometimes it just became like a negative environment, like someone was always doing the wrong thing, so changing that and trying to look at the positive... And just motivating ... through interacting with them outside as well as inside the classroom, like playing footy with the boys. I would play cards with the boys often and that really won them over, that gave me a lot of credit with them.

Stephania's engagement with aspects of youth culture in the school, that is, playing footy and cards, provided her with significant capital. As Grenfell and James (1998) emphasise, 'Capital exists in ever changing configurations in relation to the field which generates it' and its values 'are constantly being renegotiated in implicit and explicit ways' (p. 21). Hence, despite the fact that engagement in these activities may not have generated a great deal of currency in the broader social context or even in another school, within this particular institutional context or field, it was highly valued. Having gained knowledge of students, Stephania recognised the value of such participation. Her on-going activation of this capital reinforced her popularity, giving her 'a lot of credit' with the students, easing her role as teacher in a challenging context, and highlighting the benefits of relating to students on a professional but also interpersonal level.

Another pre-service teacher, Jackie, articulated how the opportunity to participate in sporting activities with the students over a long period allowed the building of positive and informed relationships with the students.

Jackie: I used to have sport with him and he was 14 years old and the conversations I had with this kid, like [he was] really, really



clued on. And we would talk about literature, and some of the books I'd read, he had read, and he would be able to have a conversation with me about these books as a 14 year old. And I was like, you are really smart, why are you in time-out [a discipline management strategy]? So it just came down to the fact that he had nothing to do in class because it was just so easy. Because it was so easy he just wasn't interested.

Interviewer: Do you think for some teachers there is a tendency to underestimate the children?

Jackie: Definitely. If he is naughty then he must be stupid, or [he] must come from a really bad background, like his parents must bash him or something. Like they don't think that oh maybe it is because he is smart. ... He will do nothing all term and do his exams and top the class.

The knowledge about students reflected in Jackie's comment above highlights the gaining of invaluable knowledge on several planes. Firstly, it illustrates Jackie's development of reflexivity regarding teacher practices and attitudes. She, like Jenny earlier, had begun to consider how the socio-cultural backgrounds of students, in addition to their relatively subaltern position within the field of education, impacted not only their learning, but simultaneously shaped how they could be positioned by teachers. Secondly, it provided Jackie, as a future teacher, with greater insight into issues of misbehaviour, moving away from the too frequent labelling and stereotyping of 'who acts out' and why, to a deeper comprehension of the importance of keeping students engaged and academically challenged. Thirdly, it allowed Jackie to persevere in further building a professional relationship with the student – one that by all accounts was vital considering her perceptions of the student's reputation with teachers. Importantly, the formal evaluation of the inception year of the *Classmates* initiative reported how supervisors felt that their personal attitudes towards some challenging students had changed as a result of how the *Classmates* pre-service teachers responded to them. As was reported in the evaluation:

Of particular interest is the attention *Classmates* students paid to particular students and how this affected their supervising teachers. For example, in one instance a *Classmates* student worked very diligently to 'turn a kid around' that is, bring a shy, semi-bullied student forward by giving him special tasks to do in the classroom; making him responsible for a significant part in group work; and generally paying attention to him. The result was quite dramatic in the classroom as other students changed their behaviour towards him. Moreover, the supervising teacher said that even the boy's parents were aware of the changes in him, and reported how much 'he liked his two science teachers' [his regular teacher and the *Classmates* pre-service teacher]. This caused the supervising teacher to muse, 'after seeing how X actually turned this kid around, that also sort of motivated me a

bit more on a personal level with the kids . . . that you can really make a difference'. (McCarthy, 2007, p. 18)

Thus, the teacher capital acquired by *Classmates* pre-service teachers that is, developing knowledge about students, inspired established teachers by providing them with a fresh lens through which to view and approach their own teaching, contributing to perceptions that the pre-service teachers were an asset to the supervisors' professional learning. This enabled the unbalanced binary power usually apparent in supervising teacher and teacher-in-training relationships to shift (Author, in press). The pre-service teachers were not powerless, but had acquired capital that enhanced how they were professionally perceived in the school.

#### (ii) Developing Knowledge About Teaching and the Institution

The *Classmates* pre-service teachers had the opportunity to undertake a range of professional duties, ranging from programming, planning and curriculum delivery through to the development of classroom management skills (Author, in press). However the duration and continuity of the practicum experience enabled a comprehensive gaining of *knowledge about teaching* in other vital areas. These included, but were not limited to, the construction of formal examinations, student assessment, and report writing, liaison with parents and community, and the organization of, and participation in, extra-curricular activities like excursions, camps and competitions. Many *Classmates* also actively participated in school-based committees. The acquisition of knowledge beyond the classroom ensures that these students, as future beginning teachers, have first-hand experience in the full role of the teacher. As I have partially recorded elsewhere (Author, in press):

Jenny: I think it [*Classmates*] kind of helps you slowly merge into the school environment. Like you are there long enough to see everything that happens, you were there long enough to see the workings of the school. . . . You are there to see the students and because we are there for two terms, the students get used to you as a teacher. They don't just see you as a prac teacher anymore . . . The fact that we were at one school the whole time, we really got the opportunity to try things. . . . I mean I got the opportunity of going on a camp . . . because I was there for so long, and [I] organised a science competition and did lots of little things that I don't think in a four week block [traditional practicum] I would have had the opportunity to do. Yeah, it was just brilliant.

Such immersion is crucial for pre-service teachers (Townsend, 2002) and provides novices who have yet to be qualified with a grounded understanding of school operations at a variety of levels. The *Classmates* initiative enabled pre-service teachers to understand how the broader system operates.

Nelson: For me personally, constantly being in that environment, in that context, not only gives you confidence, but also gives you

the opportunity to see the actual physical workings, the grass roots workings of any particular school or institution. And if you are able to understand that then I believe you are then able to jump in a lot quicker ... on how the school actually functions as a whole.

This suggests that the transition of the *Classmates* into their first year of teaching may provide fewer surprises (Author, forthcoming); as new teachers they possess teacher capital through their varied and realistic experiences on practicum (Castle, Fox & Souder, 2006). The broad impact of *Classmates* on graduates in their first year of teaching is currently being researched; however, suffice it to say, at the completion of their teaching degree, *Classmates* pre-service teachers perceived themselves ready for their role. As one pre-service teacher articulated:

Teaching is all about preparation, and *Classmates* has been the best preparation of all. It's preparing us for the realities we'll face at school ... I've seen all the aspects that teaching involves – not just the inside of a classroom, but sport activities, exams and administration. I've also learned about classroom management, how to deal with difficult situations and how to help students with individual needs. (Female *Classmates* student cited in Vlaming, 2006, p. 37)

One feature of the *Classmates* practicum structure is that it enables theory and practice to be explored simultaneously. As a result, pre-service teachers' capital was not only in the development of a practical pedagogy, but in the recognition of the important relationship between theory and practice. As practicum and academic classes were simultaneously implemented, the pre-service teachers were able to see how the academic was in actuality, closely aligned with, and of immense value to, the practical and vice versa. Wilkinson (2005) argues that theory is essential as a frame and lens. As a frame it structures pedagogical knowledge so that it is intelligible. As a lens it enables an analysis of professional practice (Author, in press). Understanding the theory, but not how it corresponds to practice can have its drawbacks. The Legislative Council, Standing Committee on Social Issues (2005) states:

There are a lot of reasons why teachers leave in their first year. One of them relates to the lack of connection that occurs in some universities between theory and practice. They can handle the theory and complete their assignments but when they go out into the classrooms and into the schools they find it difficult to transfer that theory into practice. (p. 44)

Pre-service teachers need to be able to see how theory and practice inform each other. For *Classmates*, these are equally important facets of teacher education that work hand-in-hand; the curriculum being of immediate relevance to their concurrently experienced practicum and vice versa. This was demonstrated in comments like the following:

Latisha: Doing the subjects alongside prac...doing the theory with the practical, really builds up your pedagogy because you are

learning as you go. And as you learn it you get to apply it in the classroom.

Lena: You really have to practically apply it, test it, critically reflect on it and that's one of the things the [Classmates] program gave us.

Lena later expounded how this link between theory and practice worked to her educational benefit.

Lena: We've been able to do a full cycle... when you look at the teaching / learning cycle you know... We've seen it work. We've seen it where it has gone wrong. We have been able to reflect on it.

*Classmates* seems to move pre-service teachers away from seeking a bag of teaching tricks, to a process of reflexivity. This reflexivity may also work advantageously to address the issues of risk involved in pre-service teacher professional placements. Gallego (2001) points out that:

Under the tutelage of a mentor (or master) teacher, student teachers reside in classrooms as subordinates. Although student teachers may disagree with the methods, philosophy, or style used by the mentor teachers, their novice standing may require them to avoid conflict and simply accept practices they do not support. (p.314)

In *Classmates*, the simultaneous nature of theory and practice enabled on-going discussion and deconstruction of pedagogical and school-based practices. The ability to be able to analyse their own practice and that of others while learning about the theory, and having the opportunity to share their immediate experiences with peers and academic staff, served as a pedagogical tool about teacher practice broadly. Pre-service teachers did not automatically adopt the strategies that they witnessed but explored and discussed different methods which they could implement.

Several *Classmates* pre-service teachers also commented how this concurrent experiencing of theory and practice assisted their understandings and completion of their own assignments and informed their responses in academic classes.

Lena: In the mainstream [when Classmates were combined with the students undertaking the traditional stream] ... we would have the answers which also boosted our confidence ... I remember in our English method, our lecturer asked, we were doing group work, and he said, well ... what sort of things would you encounter doing this [in practice]? And we [stated] you've got your classroom management, you've got independent learning, this is what will happen in the group. We've got that experience.

Mary: I can do an assignment, I can reflect on what I've done, I can reflect on the kids I've taught, I can think how I will adapt it.

Jenny: For our method classes we are in with other mainstream students, and we are always a bit condescending to the other

students when they are talking about things because we feel like we are so much more advanced than they are – it is terrible – but we just do and we don't mean to, but we feel like we are almost teachers, like we are not students anymore, I guess because we've had that longer experience.

Jenny, in the above extract, illustrated how she felt 'like we are almost teachers'. This was a common theme across all of the *Classmates* pre-service teachers' interviews. *Classmates* were given the time and experiences to take up the subject position of 'teacher', while they were in fact still students. It enabled them to adopt the role, gaining a sense of belonging and ownership of this identity through the combination of their academic and professional experiences that built their teacher capital. Additionally, the everyday material conditions of teaching, experienced in this case through exposure through the continuous practicum, 'produces both a particular kind of body and set of dispositions and values' (Webb, et. al., 2002, p. 18), which enables the subject to feel a sense of place in that context... 'like a fish in water' (Webb, et. al. 2002, p. 18). Not surprisingly, the *Classmates* pre-service teachers aligned themselves early on with *teachers*, rather than their tertiary student peers. This teacher subjectivity was reinforced by their students as well as by other teachers in the school as demonstrated below:

Stephania: The kids got used to my face and they started to interact with me like I wasn't a pre service teacher ...I became a part of the regular staff there.

Connie: We actually felt as professionals even though we were prac teachers, so being able to work alongside people who valued you... rather than being looked upon as a prac student by students and teachers, we were actually valued

This recognition of self-as-teacher signified a shift in their self-perception and in the ways that these pre-service teachers operated in the school. They were not only treated professionally by students and staff, but their access to power increased when they were perceived by others and themselves as valid representatives of the institution (Author, in press). Their gaining of power enhanced their authority and legitimation, enabling them to enact a new positionality. Assuming this teacher subjectivity while they are in reality *students* is a forceful illustration of their acquisition of teacher capital; it simultaneously places them in an advantageous position for the start of their teaching career. The status this provided enhanced their confidence, as pointed out below:

Nelson: I think basically that's the biggest key for the program is the confidence that it creates within – not to say that there are odd days that you are going to walk out of there feeling incredibly drained and unconfident, but I think overall confidence that you [can] create an environment where you know that for at least some part of that lesson students are learning ... And you start taking ownership of problems that you face each day instead of just palming them off to somebody constantly.

Mona: I think I've really grown as a teacher. I remember my first lesson, I was really nervous. I was really shy. .... But as it went

on, I think I developed more skills, I became more confident. Just the amount of prac and the amount of knowledge that you end up with at the end of the day is so much more and you are much more prepared than the mainstream students I think.

Perhaps one of the key benefits of *Classmates* is its ability to build teacher capital through the development of confidence. This was achieved as a result of their learning at university; their various experiences and successes on practicum, particularly highlighted by 'golden teaching moments'; and their ability to respond to diverse student needs in a 'challenging' school. Their initial fears of potentially being placed in a 'difficult' school had been overcome. As one pre-service teacher stated:

Rosa: When I found out I had [names school], I remember my husband's face went white. Then he tried to perk up straight away and say, oh you know, you will be fine. And I said, oh yeah, I know I will be fine, but you know it is not going to be easy. So yeah, [names school] was my greatest fear... But in hindsight I would not have wanted to do my professional experience anywhere else. So I am really glad that I did do it there because it gave me a lot as an aspiring teacher... It gave me the confidence to know that through time you can work through particular issues.

### (iii) Knowledge About Networks

The third key area of teacher capital acquired by the *Classmates* pre-service teachers related to their knowledge and development of professional networks. The *Classmates* pre-service teachers came to know each other, partly because their academic learning was undertaken together and also because they were clustered in small groups in the various host schools. In the interviews many claimed that the *Classmates* cohort was 'like family'. Several social events were organized both officially and unofficially, enabling strong bonds to form.

Jackie: We are only a small group but we all get along so well and in terms of if we need help, like we see each other all the time and everyone is always willing to help you.

Professional networking occurred in a number of other ways as well. For example, the *Classmates* pre-service teachers attended several DET early career teacher in-service courses which were valuable in several ways. Firstly, it provided them with useful professional information that they could include in their teaching. Secondly, it enabled them to connect with already practicing teachers. Thirdly, it helped them to gain further insight into the functions and resources of the broader institution.

Lena: Even the in-services...the things that we talk about, like we've got a general idea about the accreditation and things like that, whereas the mainstream don't really know much about it.

Barry: It was interesting because everyone else there was an early career teacher so it was interesting to talk to people [about] how we are going to be next year.

Sandi: It opened up our eyes ... we are aware of the English Teachers Association, we are aware of their [web]site.

Nelson: One good thing that I got out of that day was ... the programs that exist ... to help the schools and teachers access information and resources and texts, not only to ... inform themselves, but also to inform their students and their local community.

Because pre-service teachers were in the one host school for a continuous period, there was also ample opportunity to network locally and to learn from a range of teachers on site, not necessarily only their supervising teacher.

Rosa: You couldn't wish for a better situation to walk into as a prac teacher. The staff were brilliant there, they were very supportive, very helpful, very warm, you know, very welcoming. They tried to include you on everything. They really did do that there, so they were very, very good.

Reema: All of our teachers were very supportive, they were always there... When you develop that relationship with your supervising teacher you feel more comfortable going up to them and saying look ... what do you think I should do here?

This capital, knowledge about networks, provided the pre-service teachers with a strong base from which to begin their teaching career; not only have they more awareness about the institution as a resource, but they also possess genuine relationships with their peers and other established teachers to whom they can turn for help, support and guidance. As Connell (1991) highlights, teachers highly value other teachers as resources. The close relationships between the pre-service teachers and their host schools also meant that many of the *Classmates* candidates were offered casual and temporary positions immediately upon their course completion, enabling them to quickly gain meaningful employment. This is particularly advantageous in maintaining and further strengthening the teacher capital acquired by the *Classmates* and assists in the transition from pre-service to beginning teacher (see Author, forthcoming).

## Conclusion

Although further research about *Classmates* is essential (and currently underway), the voices of the *Classmates* pre-service teachers illustrate that they developed valuable and valued teacher capital through their experiences in this initiative. Considering the current fiscal restraints and limitations on Australian university Departments of Education, the research about this initiative indicates another way in which pre-service teacher education can produce graduates who *do seem to be* 'teacher-ready'. This is not to say that *Classmates* is perfect or the 'ideal'. What I hope to have

made clear in this paper is that providing pre-service teachers with opportunities to develop contextually relevant teacher capital may contribute to the production of confident and culturally knowledgeable future teachers. Such a model may also be of great benefit to the education of pre-service teachers in their preparation for other diverse contexts, such as working in schools with Indigenous students or in Indigenous communities. The alignment of the continuous practicum with academic studies enhances reflexivity, while the contextual congruity between the practicum placement and the type of school to which the new teacher is typically appointed potentially minimizes 'culture shock' and allows the beginning teacher the opportunity to build on the teacher capital that they have acquired (Author forthcoming). As Latisha reflected in a follow-up interview after having been employed as a teacher for six months:

Yes, a lot of it is in the classroom but there's so much more you have to learn. If you think it's just teaching you're fooling yourself. It's so much more. And with Classmates it allows you to go beyond the classroom, it allows you to look into things like the backgrounds of kids, where they're coming from, (their) socio-economic background – you don't learn this sort of stuff in the class, you learn about it in other ways. ... I was even there for parent-teacher night last year. I got to meet a lot of parents and you learn that way. If it wasn't for Classmates ... I don't think I would have learned half of what I did.

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