Supporting pre-service teachers through intercultural experiences: internationalisation of teacher education

In the classrooms of tomorrow, beginning teachers encounter a wide array of students from diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socio-economic backgrounds. The global community is reflected in the classroom and teachers are expected to prepare their students for global citizenship. Pre-service teachers studying at open access regional universities in Australia often have limited experience of travel and few opportunities to develop global mindedness.

This qualitative research explores how intercultural experiences contribute to the individual’s developing teacher identity and whether unfamiliar professional experience settings promote socially and culturally inclusive teaching in a global context. The study examines whether pre-service teachers develop intercultural empathy, improve intercultural communication and assemble values that reflect membership of a global community. Critical pedagogy principles have been applied to the research and participants are encouraged to critically reflect on their professional experience. Participant stories, collected through interviews and reflective writing, are examined through narrative inquiry.

This paper reports on the experiences of the first cohort in the study who travelled from Federation University Australia to complete professional experience placements in Timor-Leste and Papua New Guinea in 2015. Initial findings indicate that these experiences may increase the individual’s cross-cultural empathy, understandings and communication skills. However, the university could make changes to further internationalise its curriculum for teacher education and provide a more global perspective in education. In addition, mentoring and guidance through the reflection process can increase the learning that occurs including understanding cultural diversity in the classroom, becoming responsible and globally informed teachers and deeply reflective practitioners.