Article

Practicing Teachers' Reflections: Indigenous Australian Student Mobility and Implications for Teacher Education

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Abstract
Social constructions of education historically have impacted adversely on marginalised Indigenous Australian students whose mobile lifestyles and cultural positioning challenge teachers' social inclusion practices. This paper examines the preparation and capacity of pre-service teachers to engage with mobile Indigenous students and their communities. Evidence is drawn from practicing teachers who reflected on their experiences in working with Indigenous students and their communities since graduation and how their experiences, both pre- and post-graduation, impacted on their beliefs and practices. Individual interviews were conducted with four teachers who also participated in the first stage of the study as a group of 24 second year primary pre-service teachers at a regional Australian university. It was found that pre-service teachers representing a range of world views benefit from positive, scaffolded experiences that provide opportunities to develop practices that foster social justice and inclusion. The findings of this study have implications for providing pre-service teachers with opportunities to understand how historical factors impact on Indigenous student mobility in contemporary Australian educational settings and the development of socially inclusive pedagogical practices. Further longitudinal research to expand the evidence base around developing culturally-appropriate pedagogical practices in pre-service teachers is needed to support their transition into teaching.

Keywords
indigenous mobility; pre-service teachers; scaffolded experiences; social inclusion; social justice

1. Introduction

In looking at the question, "How can teacher educators approach diversity with a social justice orientation?" Nieto (2000, p. 180) argued that teachers with a strong sense of social justice have the capacity to learn about their students as well as with them and that such learning is not only transformational for both teachers and students but is also a lifelong endeavour. Further, using a social justice lens means asking difficult questions, critically evaluating every part of the educative process, from policy through to curriculum and pedagogy and the strategies used to engage parents in the education of their children, seeking to learn why some students find schools unjust and why other students find the same schools to be fair.

While Nieto (2000) was speaking from an American context, the same issues around social justice ring true when exploring how Indigenous Australian students experience the western system of education, including the many Indigenous Australian students who are mobile. A social justice orientation emphasises that Indigenous student mobility is also a social justice issue in Australia. The western education system operating in Australia, based on sedentary living practices is at odds with Indigenous mobility. The western practice of edu-

cation holds that academic progress is dependent on fixed residence and regular attendance at the same school (Dockery & Colquhoun, 2012), with little regard for the many groups of students, including Indigenous Australian students, who are mobile.

In the conclusion to their exploration of the parallels between the education of mobile Indigenous Australian and UK Roma Gypsy communities, Levinson and Hooley (2013) argued that a preoccupation with attendance and achievement at school for these groups could lead to two disparate outcomes. For both groups, such foci could be considered positive in relation to the rights that children have to access mainstream education. When access to education erodes children's strong connections with their own communities and cultural heritage, however, Levinson and Hooley regard this as a violation of basic human rights and what we would see as a social justice issue.

We argue that if education for Indigenous Australian students is to be underpinned by a social justice dimension, then developing an understanding of the history and culture of Indigenous Australians, their relationship to the land, reasons for mobility and how they learn is fundamental for designing pedagogical practices that are culturally-appropriate and inclusive. This can be achieved in consultation with Indigenous people, who hold in their memories, experiences and oral traditions, the knowledge that needs to be imparted to non-Indigenous people, creating space for the Indigenous voice, currently silent, to be heard, which Aikman and Dyer (2012) and Prout and Hill (2012) regard as a matter of social justice.

The purpose of this article is to examine the reflections of four teachers from the original cohort in our longitudinal study who are in their fifth year of teaching regarding their capacity to understand and engage with mobile Indigenous Australian students and their communities. The eventual aim of the study is to contribute to the evidence base around how universities can improve the preparation of pre-service teachers to work effectively with the broader Indigenous community.

2. Background

Mobility among Indigenous Australians, as noted by Hill, Lynch and Dalley-Trim (2012), is a particularly complex issue, rooted in the history of colonisation, with different forms of mobility still evident today. Unlike mobility among other groups, however, mobility among Indigenous Australians has received little attention in the research literature and, as also noted by Hill, et al., there has been a distinct absence of programs to cater specifically for Indigenous Australian students who are mobile. Dispositions around social justice based on developing an understanding of the history and culture of Indigenous Australians help to avoid the problem of placing the blame for the educational fail-

ure of students who do not permanently reside in one location on their mobility (Danaher, Danaher, & Moriarty, 2007) and pave the way for designing pedagogical approaches based on the strengths that Indigenous Australian students bring to the classroom. It is difficult to understand how these positive effects can be achieved without schools developing trusting relationships with Indigenous communities and broadening their views around curriculum and pedagogy, as recommended by Levinson and Hooley (2013).

2.1. Understanding Historical Factors that Impact on Mobility of Indigenous Students

Mobility has historically been part of Australian Indigenous culture and this practice continues today. In a study of mobility practices, Taylor (2012) pointed to Indigenous mobility figures up to three times higher than the rest of the population. Taylor's analysis of the 2008 Australian Census data and the National Report on Schooling in Australia (2007) indicate that there may be close on 22,000 students who are mobile at any one time. This has significant implications for the delivery of educational services to Indigenous students. Levels of mobility are higher in rural and remote locations, especially in Western Australia, the Northern Territory and South Australia. High rates of mobility, however, can also be found in large regional areas such as noted by Bennet and Lancaster (2012) who found a mobility turnover rate of approximately 60% that affected the consistency of the delivery of an after school reading program.

Even more important than identifying rates and patterns of mobility among Indigenous Australian students and their families are the historical factors pre- and post-colonisation that impact on mobility. It is important for teachers to understand this history and how it still impacts on Indigenous students, their families and communities today. We argue that, in order for Indigenous Australian students to connect with school and find meaning and relevance in their school experiences through teachers' use of culturally-appropriate pedagogies, teachers need first to understand the communities from which the Indigenous students come. First hand experiences in community are critical for scaffolding pre-service teacher understanding of factors impacting on families (Whipp, 2013) and the resulting circumstances that can lead to mobility, especially in situations in which mobility can be masked by non-attendance. Often, these practices are the outcome of deep-seated historical, economic, social or political drivers. Elders, with their lived community history experiences, can support pre-service teachers to understand the social justice issues around mobility that still impact on Indigenous Australians.

Comber (2014) in reflecting on her key findings from 30 years of educational research and then con-

sidering the current challenges facing teachers and education today, acknowledged that teachers are typically concerned about the learning of all of their students but they often have difficulty in knowing how to achieve optimum learning outcomes for all students. Advice for teachers provided by Comber that resonate with the findings from research into the education of the children of itinerant fruit pickers in Queensland, Australia (Henderson & Woods, 2012), includes learning about students, their families and communities and understanding and incorporating into their teaching the funds of knowledge that students bring with them to school. Both Comber and Kamler (2004) and Henderson and Woods (2012) noted that this more positive approach helped to undermine deficit discourses that are more common when teachers do not have close connections with students' families and communities. Comber promoted a more socially-just approach that broke down assumptions that teachers may have of some students that serve to maintain past predictable patterns of disadvantage. Much of the research conducted by Comber and her colleagues deliberately sought ways for teachers to move away from using discourses of deficit that Comber noted from her review of recent research to be still prevalent among non-Indigenous teachers teaching Indigenous Australian students. Instead, in some powerful case studies of teachers as co-researchers, Comber and Kamler showed how sustained commitment to social justice enacted in large part by visiting students in their homes changed the opinions that teachers had of their most at-risk students and their families. These teachers were then able to see a number of strengths that their students could bring to the classroom that would otherwise have continued to be overlooked. Teachers' changed views of their students were reflected both in their language when talking about their most at-risk students and the way that they re-designed their pedagogical practices to be more inclusive.

2.2. Socially Just and Inclusive Pedagogical Practices

While Comber and Kamler (2004) focused on just two case studies of first year teachers who became co-researchers in their "Getting out of deficit: Pedagogies of reconnection" project, they also explained the role of the more experienced teachers who partnered the new teachers on a one-to-one basis for the project. The changes that occurred in the first year teachers' pedagogical practices during the research were quite marked and probably would not have occurred had it not been for the research project and for the connections that the teachers made with the families of the students whom they considered to be at-risk. The project was possibly well-timed because the first year teachers had not been in the profession sufficiently long to become more set in their ways. This research

was fairly work-intensive for all concerned but the results were very impressive and it helped to fill quite a void in research that works with teachers in their first year of practice to encourage socially just and inclusive teaching pedagogical practices.

Other researchers interested in social justice issues and developing socially-just teachers come from the perspective that culturally-responsive or culturally-appropriate teaching practices are developed over time. The pre-service teacher education years are regarded as being important in raising the consciousness of future teachers. Whipp (2013), for example, interviewed 12 teachers in their first year since graduation from American pre-service teacher education programs that were deliberately justice-oriented to explore how those teachers conceptualised socially-just teaching. The interviews focused on the teachers' experiences prior to and during their pre-service teacher education as well as the support provided to them during their first year of teaching. The findings highlighted the importance of each of these phases in collectively influencing the adoption of socially-just teaching post-graduation but, in particular, pointed to the importance of pre-service teacher education drawing on candidates' experiences prior to commencing their studies.

Drawing on the aforementioned studies and on earlier and current stages of our own research, it can be argued that, while research that explores how practicing teachers can be supported to learn about their students, their families and communities is important, this process and the development of social justice and the capacity to enact inclusive pedagogical practices must begin during teachers' undergraduate years. In her exploratory study, Whipp (2013) noted that exposure to scaffolded, cross-cultural experiences during the undergraduate years can support pre-service teachers to develop transformative structural orientations around social justice principles that embed caring relationships, culturally-inclusive pedagogies and an advocacy agenda. Cross-cultural experiences that bring undergraduates into direct interaction with individuals from cultural groups different from their own help to prepare teachers to be open to diversity and to care authentically for the students with whom they work. Butcher et al. (2003) strongly advocate that community service learning and community engagement become central aspects of teacher preparation as both their case studies and review of the international literature identify the benefits of collaborative learning that develops teachers' sense of efficacy.

The pre-service teacher education years are particularly vital for connecting with Indigenous Australian students and their communities. Making direct contact with the Elders and community members and providing opportunities for deep learning about the history of Indigenous Australians and the intergenerational impact of that history on patterns of mobility and sustain-

ing that contact during the pre-service years and into their professional lives, appear to be key factors that influence the adoption of socially just pedagogical practices.

3. Methods

The four teachers whose interviews formed the data for this report were part of a group of 24 participants in an earlier stage of the cohort study who, as second year pre-service teachers, reflected on their first experiences in teaching Indigenous Australian students from kindergarten to Year 6 after school in a community setting twice weekly for eight weeks. The pre-service teachers worked with the Indigenous students with their reading and were facilitated by the local Elder to gain entry to the community and to follow the protocols for that community while engaging with the students and their parents. The pre-service teachers were challenged by the fact that attendance by the students was often sporadic, as over 60% of the families in the community were mobile or moved in and out of the community on a regular basis. The purpose of the second stage of the longitudinal study, currently in progress, is to explore these same participants' reflections on their experiences in working with Indigenous students and their communities in the five years since graduation and how they believed that these experiences, together with their pre-service experiences, impacted on their beliefs and pedagogical practices. Of particular interest in this paper are those aspects of the teachers' reflections that have implications for the preparation of pre-service teachers to engage with mobile Indigenous students and their communities.

As with the first stage of the study, for which all 24 pre-service teachers in the cohort agreed to participate, the intention in this stage is to invite participation from the original cohort of 24. Priority was not given to the order in which the participants from the original cohort in the first stage of the study were approached, recruited and interviewed for the second, current stage. The teaching experiences and career trajectories of these four participants are quite varied, however, accommodating meaningful comparisons between participants. While recognising that these first four participants were not selected through purposive sampling to represent the probable diversity of the larger group, their diversity could be said to approximate so far in this qualitative study the underlying logic of the principle of maximum variance described by Punch (2003). As applied to the present stage of the study, this principle holds that having such a diverse sample within the cohort group in terms of teaching careers and roles since graduation provides an ideal opportunity to begin to explore from the perspectives of these practicing teachers their reflections on the impact that their pre-service experiences had on their preparation and fu-

ture capacity to engage with mobile Indigenous students and their communities.

The pseudonyms used for the participants in the first stage of the study were also used for the second stage. This consistency across cases, while not impacting in this report, is logical for other comparative analysis both within and across cases.

3.1. Participants

All four participants have been working as teachers in various capacities and in different towns in the same region since graduation. Their careers have been quite diverse.

Leslie, now assistant principal in a Kindergarten to Year 6 regional Australian public school, has taught consistently since graduation. Her classroom experiences were in a high-Indigenous school, mainly in lower primary, with 12 months also spent with upper primary students transitioning into secondary school.

Linda taught in casual positions for the first two years following graduation, including one semester in a junior high school, followed by lower primary. Now in her third year and permanent in a Catholic school, she is teaching a Year 5 class as well as Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). She also has some co-ordination and leadership responsibilities within the school.

Ken, employed as a casual teacher since graduation, has had some block teaching periods. Currently in a temporary job-share position one day per week he continues casual work on the other days. He has taught across Kindergarten to Year 6 and in both public and private schools.

Jake works in the same region, in a small rural primary (Kindergarten to Year 6) school with a low Indigenous population. Since graduation he has also had regular casual work, including working in Kindergarten to Year 10 settings, where he has engaged with Indigenous students.

3.2. Interviews

All four interviews were conducted via telephone because of distances and at mutually agreed times. The teachers consented to the research and to having their interviews audio recorded. The researchers also took brief notes during the interviews but, as noted by Wilkinson and Birmingham (2003), audio recordings afford more reliable and comprehensive records than notes alone. Interviews were preferred over surveys for the second stage of the longitudinal study because they provide interviewees with opportunities to give more extensive responses and for the researchers to encourage interviewees to expand on their responses.

The purpose of the interviews in this phase of the second stage of the study is to establish background in-

formation on the teachers' individual experiences and career trajectories and to seek their reflections on specific areas as a precedent for the less structured focus group interviews that will occur as the second phase of this stage of the study. The interviews lasted for up to 45 minutes each, allowing time for deep probing of leads in three main areas covered in the interview guide.

The second group of questions focused on ways that the teachers perceived that their experiences since graduation helped to shape their capacity to work with mobile Indigenous students and their communities, the strategies that they employed to support mobile Indigenous students and what the main issues were for them as teachers. The teachers were then asked to reflect on their current beliefs and practices.

The third group of questions probed teachers' thoughts about how their university studies had impacted on the way they taught Indigenous students. The teachers were also asked how university experiences could be strengthened to support pre-service teachers to develop capacity to work with Indigenous students and their communities.

3.3. Data Analysis Techniques

The data analysis began while the interviews were being transcribed. The researchers took notes from their individual readings of the transcripts as they became available and met to discuss their interpretations of the interviews, identifying themes emerging within and across interviews. Based on analyses of the same data sets, the process was thus progressive as the discussions moved from one interview to the next and iterative as the discussions moved back and forth between the interviews. The iterative part of the process enabled the researchers to take the analysis to the next level by making comparisons and looking for patterns and differences across cases.

4. Findings

The individual interviews with the four teachers who were the first to participate in the current stage of the longitudinal study revealed through their reflections how their capacity to work with mobile Indigenous students and their communities in the first five years of teaching was influenced by the contexts in which they taught and the opportunities afforded by those contexts. In particular, the teachers' opportunities to work with mobile Indigenous students and their communities were quite varied and the teachers responded in different ways.

The two recurring and interrelated themes that emerged from an examination of the interview data were teachers' understanding of historical factors impacting on mobility and the development of socially-inclusive pedagogical practices that supported mobile

Indigenous students. These themes were underpinned by the teachers' developing understanding of social justice and its application to marginalised mobile Indigenous students. Given the close connections between these two themes in the responses in the interviews, they are presented together below. This is followed by an examination of the data from the interviews that reveal, from the teachers' perspectives, how universities could improve their preparation of pre-service teachers to work with mobile Indigenous students and their communities.

4.1. Understanding Historical Factors Impacting on Mobility/Socially-Inclusive Pedagogical Practices

When asked to identify a significant experience that impacted on her capacity to work with Indigenous students and their communities as well as her experiences in working with mobile Indigenous students, Leslie identified "going to…a small, rural, Aboriginal community" for a professional experience placement as an undergraduate. She said that, while she was frightened about going, "it opened my eyes" to "rural and remote Aboriginal communities and what they offer. I gained so much from that to be able to bring back to my own school and my own teaching experiences of what some families go through just to get their children to school...in working with the school and breaking down those barriers from many years ago to what we have today". There are parallels here between Leslie's experiences as a practicing teacher and Whipp's (2013) finding that exposure to scaffolded experiences at the undergraduate level provides opportunities to develop social justice practices. Leslie's earlier relationships with Indigenous students during her professional experience placement, helps her to develop caring relationships with the students she now teaches. Her active role in this process is the beginning of her orientation to being an agent of change.

Through her own, first hand experiences teaching Indigenous students in rural and remote communities Leslie developed an awareness of how marginalisation impacts on families. She also remarked that the experience in the small, rural community "set me up to be able to go into a community of not knowing anyone". When she later taught mobile students from that same community in her present school, she commented that it gave her "a head start as well because they know who I am and I know who they are". Whipp (2013) identified knowledge of communities as one component required to begin to enact socially just teaching. In this way, Leslie is affirming students' cultural backgrounds, enabling her to connect to their funds of knowledge, one of the prerequisite capacities required for socially just teaching. Leslie's first hand experiences enabled her to understand some of the historical factors that impacted on the community. Leslie was the only one of the

four teachers who had the experience of teaching mobile students who had moved from a community where she had known them previously. Such affirming experiences help mobile students to feel a sense of community connection as advocated by Hill et al. (2012) as they seek to foster relationships in new settings.

Linda identified a religion lesson as being a significant experience in her teaching within the past five years. She talked about how she made connections with Dreamtime stories and how it was "very, very rewarding to have some knowledge that I was able to impart and share with the students". She recalled that one of her lecturers at university explained a simple way of helping students to understand the historical connections that Indigenous people have with their land and she recounted the steps in the lesson. She remembers drawing an analogy between the feelings that the students expressed about their mothers and how Indigenous people felt about their land and having it taken away from them. In Linda's words, "It was just one of the most, I'll never forget it, one of the most inspiring lessons that I have ever, ever taught". There are similarities between Linda's lesson, and the three characteristics of culturally-appropriate pedagogy (contextualisation, cultural relevance and authenticity) that Hickling-Hudson and Ahlquist (2003) found to be successful in leading students to become more engaged in their learning. As noted by Levinson and Hooley (2013) it can be difficult to bridge the gap between learning when it involves two cultures. For both Leslie and Linda, therefore, there were connections between historical factors and their development of culturally-appropriate pedagogies.

Jake had several experiences that were significant to him. The one that he felt was most significant involved six Indigenous male students in a Year 9 science class that he taught for three successive weeks on a casual basis. During the recount of this experience Jake explained how he connected with 6 Indigenous students and earned their respect:

"The second week I tried to spend some time once everything was set up to go and speak to the boys. When I went up they were very cautious about why I was going to speak to them. I just went up and had a bit of a yarn with them, asked them whereabouts they were from. They said [town]. I said, no, where your real country where they're from. They started to talk about where their families come from. We sat there and had a yarn. Two of them really took a positive shine to that and they were influential in how the rest of the group would act. From there on in I actually had a situation where I had 2 boys who were influential to the rest of the group. The situation came up on playground duty when someone wasn't being respectful. These boys would actually go up and say, hey get back in line;

pick up the papers; don't litter and stuff like that. It turned it around to a real positive because I'd taken that little bit of time and knowledge to share a bit of their lives and talk about where I was from. Even though I wasn't identifying as Aboriginal, sharing like about friends and family and stuff, showing them that I was willing to get to know them and that even though I wasn't going to be there all the time they mattered to me."

This recount illustrated Jake's cultural knowledge during his initial engagement with students. His warm, responsive practice developed a comfortable and respectful environment for learning.

Both Jake and Ken said that their experiences in working with Indigenous students who were mobile were minimal. Jake, however, talked about students who had "come in for a bit and then they're gone for a bit". He attributed the mobility to families moving between districts or towns. He continued, "I've been directly involved with these families that come in and out 'cause I've been teaching face to face I've been involved with all the families and students in the school." Both Jake and Linda mentioned using the 8 Ways of Learning (Yunkaporta, 2009). Jake found it helpful to use a sharing circle and "allowing that time for students to listen to one another and get to know each other before we get started in the mornings has been quite helpful." He also talked about more informal strategies to help these students and their families to "feel a part of the community and the school." Jake identified his school as being a small one where everyone knows each other and so he identified only positive experiences for mobile Indigenous students who came to the school. Knowing the families, knowing their histories and using culturally-appropriate pedagogies that took account of that knowledge and history were, therefore, a feature of Jake's teaching that he emphasised.

Ken, who has worked on a casual or relief basis in the five years since graduation noted that he "hadn't been in the classroom as a teacher long enough to have experienced students who have started and then left for whatever reason and possibly back again. I'm not in the same class long enough with a block [extended period of teaching]. He did, however, refer to Indigenous students who appeared on the roll but were mobile. "I'll mark the roll and they say 'Oh, he's gone back to xxx' or he's gone back to yyy'". The opportunity to develop an understanding of historical factors impacting on mobile Indigenous students and then being able to develop socially-inclusive pedagogical practices to support mobile students is difficult when teaching in a casual capacity.

In response to being asked to reflect on her current beliefs and practices and whether her beliefs and practices had shifted since her university days, Leslie re-

sponded with "Um, no, I can't say I have". She said, "I didn't find all of it valuable" and then explained that she found practical experiences to be of greater value than her in-class experiences.

Similarly, Jake said:

"I don't think I've shifted too much. I still think I've...still got the same belief system about the way I treat people, work with people and try to help people out. They've stayed pretty much the same. I have a better understanding, I think of some of the different dynamics within the family the students might have and how that will relate in the classroom but my belief system has stayed the same."

Ken said that he had not changed his beliefs or his teaching philosophy. He did note, however, that his practices with Indigenous students had "probably changed" but did not elaborate.

Linda, on the other hand, talked about how her beliefs had been challenged by her experiences in working with Indigenous students during her time as a pre-service teacher and how those experiences impacted on her teaching practices since leaving university:

"Basically, having exposure to working with Indigenous students through university...gave me a different view...and...a broader understanding [that] allowed me to challenge my beliefs and my views and go down that road of discovery within myself. It also enabled me to approach teaching Indigenous students in a real context."

Linda's comment reflects what Whipp (2013) described as a structurally-oriented teacher who has become aware of issues faced by marginalised students and who acts to support students to access learning through culturally-appropriate ways:

"There are students out there that learn differently, whether they're Indigenous, whether they're a different race, they learn differently but, in particular, it made it relevant when we had the Elders talk to us and explain it very simply. That made it relevant and because of that relevance I feel that I'm able to contribute to my students a bit of background knowledge, a bit more understanding and, more importantly, hopefully an equality, um, view on how they view Indigenous students as well."

Later in the interview, Linda continued to place emphasis on the importance of practical experiences and talking with the Elders for influencing her beliefs and her practices. In referring to her first experience of working with Indigenous students in a community setting she said, "When we got to know the Elders and we talked to them and had an understanding of where

they had come from and an understanding of their culture that was just like the biggest learning curve ever for me and the most rewarding." She could recall saying to one of the women from the community while she was there, "I never ever thought of it like that; I didn't understand that and now I understand that it actually makes sense. So, within that learning and that context I now try...to give a very informed view of Indigenous communities, especially when we have to teach the content in HSIE [Human Society and Its Environment] about British colonisation and Indigenous communities, etc., etc." Linda's experience of engaging with the Elders reflects the kind of relationship advocated by the Elders in Bond's (2004) PhD study of the Mornington Island community.

4.2. Recommendations for Pre-Service Teacher Education

From her own experiences in working with Indigenous students and their communities and from her observations of pre-service teachers on practice teaching placements, Leslie identified four core areas that she could see were important for preparing pre-service teachers to work in schools with high Indigenous populations. She cited understanding how Indigenous students "learn, what families are going through, the dynamics of the family and…kinship" as the four most valuable prerequisites for teaching. She believed that university experiences could be strengthened in this regard by providing pre-service teachers with rural and remote experiences. Citing an experience that she volunteered to undertake as a pre-service teacher, she said that the experience was "probably the best thing that I've ever put myself through." She continued, "While it was 2 weeks I found that I could not have learned what I did in 2 weeks what I could have in 10 weeks in a [university] classroom." Leslie, therefore, articulated both the four core areas that she believed that pre-service teachers needed to learn and the type of experiences that would promote that learning. Clarke's (2000) conclusions concur with points raised by Leslie about the need to understand the students, school and community, especially with regard to the personal and professional connections that can assist teachers to work effectively with Indigenous students.

When making recommendations for preparing pre-service teachers to work with Indigenous students and their communities, all four teachers referred to their first experiences teaching Indigenous students from Kindergarten to Year 6 in the community setting that was the context for the first stage of this study. For Leslie, this experience highlighted issues for the education of Indigenous students who are mobile. While she did not specifically refer to mobility and later asked what the term meant, she was very clear in explaining the impact that it had on the students' learning. She

noted that the pre-service teachers saw that "some children dropped off. You wondered where they were and then you liaised with their co-ordinator there and she would let you know what had happened…and you start to grow an understanding as well as that why people might, say, commit to a 20 week program, they might only be there for 10". Mobility, or absenteeism, disrupts academic progress and increases teacher workloads (Dockery & Colquhoun, 2012), in the context of the structural constraints of fixed classrooms and regular school attendance.

Ken referred to the same community setting and said that "if all pre-service teachers were involved in [the] after-school homework centre then that would…start to open their eyes to the social issues that they are finding themselves in". His recommendation was to make the experience compulsory. While he also did not mention mobile Indigenous students specifically he was among the pre-service teachers whom Leslie mentioned who witnessed the fluctuation in student attendance and the fact that it was not possible to know whether students would be around for the full length of the program. Ken also recommended that:

"Wherever possible, every pre-service teacher should experience at least one practicum in a school with a high Aboriginal population...even for a week just so they know there is another side to teaching". He continued, "So if they can understand, well this is what you'll be coming across if you find yourself in a western town or even in a town with a high Aboriginal population, this is what you will be experiencing and you'll need to come up with strategies because you're going to need them. Just observe that teacher and how that teacher is relating to his or her students. If that was possible, that would be wonderful. I don't really know what else Uni could do".

In making his recommendations for pre-service teacher education, Jake drew on several profound experiences that he had just prior to commencing university. Until then he did not realise that some people in the community would not have received a formal education and would be unable to write. He specifically mentioned the impact that mobility could have on educational attainment because of disjointed school attendance. He recommended that pre-service teachers be informed of such situations that were outside of their experience because of the way that it could make them think about their practice.

Linda responded without hesitation when asked how university experiences could be strengthened to support pre-service teachers to develop the capacity to work with Indigenous students and their communities. She said:

"Get them [the pre-service teachers] out of the classroom and into the community and talk to the Elders. That was one of the most engaging times that I spent at uni." She continued, "we were very naive and even a bit scared because it was an unknown, not because it was an Indigenous community, just because it was an unknown. I can remember sitting on the grass...talking to students and seeing how engaged they were and listening to the Elders talk and walking past the rest of the community when we parked our cars and them calling out hello to us, you know, in the first couple of days you know like in the first couple of weeks we were there it was like 'Don't even look at us' but then felt welcomed into the community and so, get them out of the classroom."

Findings such as these emphasise the important mentoring role that Elders play in helping pre-service teachers to work with Indigenous students in community.

5. Conclusions and Implications for Pre-Service Teacher Education in Australia

This paper focused on the reflections of four teachers who were interviewed about their experiences in working with mobile Indigenous students and their communities, both as pre-service teachers and then in their first five years of teaching. These teachers as a cohort had, in common, experiences that they shared as pre-service teachers, beginning with their first experience of teaching mobile Indigenous students in the first stage of the present study. The mobility and irregular attendance patterns of these students challenged the pre-service teachers' western-based pedagogies and efforts to engage those students in learning. Common in these teachers' reflections on that experience and on other experiences in their pre-service years were how the Elders and other community members helped them to understand Indigenous histories and culture and the role that this knowledge plays in teachers' capacities to connect with Indigenous students.

Recurring topics from the teachers' reflections on their pre-service experiences in working with Indigenous students and on their more varied teaching experiences in the five years since graduation include connecting with the Elders and the Indigenous community and gaining practical experiences. The four themes identified by Leslie, that is, developing an understanding about how Indigenous students learn, the realities of their day-to-day lives, family dynamics and kinship, Jake's discovery that not everyone who is an adult can write and how Indigenous student mobility can be hidden or not well understood, point to the need for universities to provide pre-service teachers with scaffolded opportunities to learn about how historical factors still impact on Indigenous Australians today (Butcher et

al., 2003; Whipp, 2013). Non-Indigenous Australian educators cannot do this alone. It is clear that it is the Elders who hold the keys to the future through their wisdom and their knowledge of the past who need to be equal partners in preparing pre-service teachers to meet the needs of mobile Indigenous students.

The next steps in this longitudinal study will involve interviewing more of the participants from the first stage of the study and comparing and contrasting their responses to those put forward by the four teachers whose reflections were reported in this paper. It is important to continue with longitudinal studies that follow pre-service teachers through to their early years of teaching to assess the impact of strategies employed in the undergraduate years to foster the development of socially-inclusive pedagogical practices for teaching mobile Indigenous students.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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