

*Good intentions are not enough:  
promoting quality teaching and  
productive pedagogies in  
teacher education programs*

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## Introduction

Current debates about educational reform are concerned with the role of teachers in supporting the active and meaningful participation of learners. The characterisation of a good teacher and how one becomes a good teacher continue to dominate these debates (Chinnapan, 2006, p.355). While there has been considerable discussion over what constitutes quality teaching, Gore, Griffiths and Ladwig (2002, p.2) have suggested that “a consensus does seem to be emerging about characteristics of the type of classroom teaching that is needed”. Within this emerging consensus, the onus for delivering ‘quality teaching’ is clearly on teachers themselves, and by implication, on teacher educators. Following Lingard, we would argue that while teachers cannot — nor should they be expected to — address all the ills that bedevil schooling, they nevertheless have a major part to play, and that:

of all school variables ... it is teachers who have the greatest effect on student learning outcomes ... teachers can make *a* difference, but not all *the* difference. (Lingard, 2005, p.174, original emphasis)

Thus, when we read headlines like “Unis get the blame for ‘dumb’ teachers” (*The West Australian*, February 10, 2007), we were enraged but at the same time challenged to critically reflect on our praxis as teacher educators. We have long learned to avoid thinking in terms of ‘deficits’ but rather to think in terms of ‘what can we do so students can learn better?’ This can be uncomfortable terrain for teacher educators and while we do not hold with the assumptions embedded within the headline (and others of a similar ilk) that “teachers and students are solely responsible for student outcomes” (Lingard, Hayes, & Mills, 2003, p.418), we feel that it is also important to reflect rigorously on our own practices. We believe that we need to model best practice for our students if they are to become the sorts of teachers who are committed to education for social justice, who are, in short, teachers who are engaged in quality teaching. Certainly, as teacher educators we are concerned to be the best teachers we can possibly be in order to prepare our students – future teachers – to be ‘quality teachers’ who have the capacities to achieve optimal learning outcomes for all their students. To achieve those aims we are well aware that having good intentions is simply not enough; that simply wishing for quality teaching will not make it so. We are particularly concerned to equip

our students with the necessary knowledges, skills and attitudes that will enable them to make a difference in the lives of students who traditionally do least well at school. In other words, for us ‘quality teaching’ is a matter of social justice.

Thus we base our work within the initial teacher education program on the premise that:

If improved educational equality or increased educational opportunity are among our chief educational goals ... this will require a curriculum which helps to *redefine* what is to count as cultural capital, which recognises and rewards practical, aesthetic, and personal and social achievements, as well as intellectual and academic ones, and which combines rigour and relevance in the curriculum for *all* pupils, instead of offering rigour to some and relevance to others. (Hargreaves, 1989, cited in Hayes, Mills, Christie, & Lingard, 2006, p.117)

Preparing students to address social justice concerns is particularly salient in our case as the data on which we draw in this paper is grounded in our experiences with a cohort of 257 pre-service teacher education students (2006) within the context of a mandatory unit called *Education for Social Justice*. As the title of the unit suggests the scope is broad, encompassing political, historical, theoretical and curricular perspectives that are of particular importance as students learn that quality teaching needs to move beyond anglo-centricism. In order for our students to acquire the intellectual rigour that this demands, our aims for the Unit are that, on successful completion of the unit, students should be able to:

- Demonstrate a knowledge base about Aboriginal cultures and histories;
- Demonstrate a theoretical understanding of key sociological concepts;
- Examine selected educational issues within Indigenous as well as multicultural education and present an informed position;
- Debate and critique current strategies for teaching children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

These outcomes are a crucial component of quality teaching, especially in the Australian context. In this paper, therefore, we reflect on the extent to which these outcomes have been achieved through an analysis of the results of student teachers’ final examinations. We realise that examinations can never adequately demonstrate the range of student learning, but suggest that what examinations can do is to point the way to re-conceptualising our teaching to create more effective and meaningful learning experiences for our students so that they, in turn, can realise their potential of becoming ‘quality teachers’.

While we are reasonably pleased with the results for the Unit as a whole (89% Pass rate), the examination results are more worrying (58% Pass rate). If we use our students' examination results as the criteria, we fall somewhat short of the mark in our unit aims and aspirations for the teaching profession of the future. Thus, the questions we want to specifically address in this paper are: 'What do examination results tell us about student learning?' and conversely: 'What do they tell us about our own teaching?' This, in turn, leads us to a third, more ephemeral, question: 'How can we enhance student performance through better aligning our assessment practices with the material that we believe is central to achieving the aims of the unit?' The discussions of these questions are grounded within a Productive Pedagogy model.

### **Productive Pedagogies and the notion of 'quality teaching'**

We ground our analysis within the model of Productive Pedagogies because this framework is quite specific about what 'quality teaching' might look like. While the framework of productive pedagogies is primarily concerned with improving the educational outcomes of students in schools, the model has demonstrated its versatility as it can readily be adapted to other learning contexts, such as school leadership (Hayes, Christie, Mills, & Lingard, 2003) or the specifics of boys' education (Keddie, 2006). In fact, Gore et al. (2002) argue that productive pedagogies provides a framework with potential for enhancing the quality of teacher education and the quality of teaching subsequently produced by graduates. We certainly felt that it might serve as a useful lens for our analysis and future practice, both in terms of improving our students' learning outcomes and in modelling sound practice for those very same students once they graduate and become fully-fledged teachers.

Theoretically, we are attracted to the model of productive pedagogies and have drawn on this framework because it allows us to discuss the nexus between pedagogies and assessment in a theoretically rigorous and professionally meaningful way. Following Lingard, we acknowledge the limitations of teachers in single-handedly achieving socially just outcomes from schooling and agree that "of all the schooling factors it is teachers and their pedagogies, which contribute most to better learning outcomes for all, particularly for students from disadvantaged backgrounds" (Lingard, 2005, p.166).

Thus, the framework of productive pedagogies is a model that describes the classroom practices that ‘make a difference’ rather than relying on ‘good intentions’.

Drawing on the Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study (QSRLS), productive pedagogies presents a framework for quality teaching “that is deemed to be socially just and appropriate for the contemporary post-modern globalised world” (Lingard, 2005, p.165). According to Debra Hayes and her co-authors, productive pedagogies:

describe approaches to teaching that are linked to improved intellectual and social outcomes for all students. Productive pedagogies are intellectually challenging, they recognise difference, they are embedded within a highly socially supportive classroom and they are strongly connected to the world beyond the classroom. (2003, p.1)

Given that productive pedagogies are concerned with education for social justice and given further that assessment practices are generally associated with sifting and sorting students in ways that, more often than not, legitimate social inequalities according to the “possession of requisite cultural capital” or individual “ability”, how then can assessment be viewed as productive rather socially divisive? (Lingard, Mills, & Hayes, 2006, p.84). Following Bernstein (1971, cited in Lingard, 2005), Lingard suggested that

the three message systems of schooling, namely curriculum, pedagogy and assessment sit in symbiotic relationships with each other. [Our research] demonstrated the importance of the alignment between the three message systems for maximising student learning. (2005, p.169)

While acknowledging the “inherent tension” between assessment that is of a more diagnostic kind and used for “educative purposes” and assessment undertaken in response to “political desires for outcomes accountability” (Lingard et al., 2006, p.86), Lingard et al. argue that it is the purpose of testing that is central. For example, do assessment tasks “shape pedagogy in ways that support students’ leaning?” or are they simply an “input-output measure in a time of fiscal constraints and marketization”? (Lingard et al., 2006, p.86). Certainly, within our teaching context, we are bound to demonstrate that we have achieved certain outcomes. However, it is not students’ grades that are primarily at issue for us but the extent to which students have made sense of the material and are able to translate their learning into their own teaching.

As teacher educators, the model of productive pedagogies offered us a basis from which to examine our own pedagogies in that it “seeks to provide a lens through which

educators can see existing teaching practices, with a view to reconceptualizing them in ways that increase the academic and social outcomes for all students” (Lingard et al., 2003, p.410). We believe that it is an exciting model because it argues the centrality of teachers in improving student outcomes, and while our pedagogies have long been implicitly grounded in aspects of productive pedagogies in that we seek to foster higher order thinking (intellectual quality), connect lecture material to real life contexts (connectedness), make criteria for student performance explicit (supportive classroom environment) and above all by bringing diverse cultural knowledges into play (recognition of difference), the exhortation to better align pedagogy and assessment was not lost on us. As we will show, an analysis of the test items in terms of aspects of intellectual quality, connectedness, supportive classroom environment and recognition of difference show some discrepancy between our stated aims for the unit and the construction of the test items.

### **The specifics of this study**

As we have argued earlier, the attitudes and perspectives of teachers and what knowledges are taught is important (Lou, 1994). We, like Lingard, Mills and Hayes (2006, p.84), suggest that “teachers and schools can make a difference” and argue further that a sound understanding of concepts and issues embedded within the field of Aboriginal education and the education of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds is an important component of quality teaching within the schooling sector, and specifically within the Australian context. This is important for all teachers, regardless of the subject being taught or the cultural background of the student cohort.

Data for this paper has been taken from 257 students’ responses to an examination that was held at the end of the second semester in 2006, the majority of whom were teacher education students. Although the majority of students sitting this examination were also ‘white’, they came from diverse social class and ethnic backgrounds and were, not surprisingly, predominantly female (76%). Students completed this unit either in the internal (63%) or the external (37%) mode. Data from both groups are used in this study.

The examination itself was designed to elicit student teachers' conceptual understanding, rather than test their factual knowledge. We had decided on a closed book examination because we felt that this would free students from the tyranny of attributing quotations and the necessity of referencing and thus allow students to better demonstrate what they had learned. The examination questions took the form of ten short answer questions and were aligned with the aims of the Unit (see Table 1 below). The basic concepts and issues on which we based the questions had been presented during the semester and addressed through lectures, videos, group discussions and simulation activities. We had selected readings for students that 'fleshed out' these issues and specifically focused on: the educational provisions for Aboriginal students (Gray & Beresford, 2002; Sarra, 2003), Aboriginal studies in schools (Aveling, 1998; Craven, 1999a), multiple perspectives in Australia (Craven, 1999b), different racisms (Craven & Rigney, 1999), the social construction of race and ethnicity (Hollinsworth, 1998), gender and social class issues (Collins, Kenway, & McLeod, 2000; Gale & Densmore, 2000; Tsolidis, 2001), multiculturalism as life styles and life chances (Jamrozik, Boland, & Urquart, 1995; Mares, 2001), privileges of whiteness (Aveling, 2004a; Kivel, 1996; Powell, 2001), disrupting 'deficit' models (Parbury, 1999), and specific teaching strategies in the classroom (Halse & Robinson, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

**Table 1: Alignment of Unit aims with examination questions <sup>1</sup>**

<b>Unit Aims</b>	<b>Examination Questions</b>
Demonstrate a knowledge base about Aboriginal cultures and histories	Underpins all questions
Demonstrate a theoretical understanding of key sociological concepts	1, 5, 6, 7, 8
Examine selected educational issues	2, 3
Debate and critique current strategies	4, 9, 10

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<sup>1</sup> Although specific examination questions have been connected to the unit aims, these aims are often inter-related and the divisions are somewhat arbitrary. Our first aim, that students should demonstrate a knowledge base about Aboriginal cultures and histories underpinned all questions in the examination.

## Analysis and Discussion

There are, of course, different ways of grouping and interpreting examination results, however, we were primarily interested to find out ‘what was going on’. Informal discussions with tutors had suggested to us that there were one or two questions that were well done and a few that were shocking in the lack of understanding they seemed to demonstrate. We found no discernible patterns in responses, either in terms of gender (although overall females tended to score marginally more highly than males) or mode of enrolment, nor did there appear to be any noticeable tutor effect. Thus, we eventually decided to group results according to whether students demonstrated ‘clear understanding’, ‘some understanding’ or ‘limited or no understanding’ of the issues and concepts embedded in the question. From a possible score of 3 marks for each question students who scored 75%+ for any question were rated as having ‘clear understanding’, students who scored 50-74% were rated as having ‘some understanding’ and students who scored less than 50% for any question were rated as having ‘limited or no understanding’ of the issues and concepts embedded in the question. The results that emerged according to this rating scale are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2: Examination Outcomes**

	Demonstrated limited or no understanding	Demonstrated some understanding	Demonstrated clear Understanding
<b>Question 1</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>12%</b>
Question 2	40%	30%	30%
Question 3	43%	34%	23%
Question 4	35%	38%	27%
Question 5	34%	35%	31%
Question 6	42%	32%	26%
Question 7	44%	37%	19%
<b>Question 8</b>	<b>74%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>10%</b>
Question 9	29%	34%	37%
<b>Question 10</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>56%</b>

As Table 2 illustrates, students' responses to examination questions exhibit a range of responses, from demonstrating clear understanding to demonstrating limited or no understanding. In other words, most questions tended to be answered very well, reasonably well or quite poorly in roughly equal proportions. What was of particular interest, however, was question 10 which was, almost without exception, well done and questions 1 and 8 which were very badly answered. It is these questions that have the potential to illuminate ways in which we can better align our content and pedagogies with assessment. They are, therefore, the subject of close analysis.

Given the Productive Pedagogies framework, we analysed our selected examination questions in terms of (1) intellectual quality/disciplinary content, (2) connectedness, (3) supportive classroom environment, and (4) working with and valuing difference. By adapting the rating scale developed by Hayes et al. (2006), we subjected each of the questions (that is, questions 10, 1 and 8) to the following analysis:

- A. To what extent does success in this question require a working knowledge of a concept which is central to this unit? [score between 1 – 3, where 1 designates limited or no understanding, 2 denotes some understanding and 3 denotes substantial understanding];
- B. To what extent does this question connect to student teachers' future work in classrooms? [score between 1 – 3, where 1 denotes low connectedness and 3 high connectedness];
- C. To what extent are the criteria for evaluating this assessment task transparent? [score between 1 – 3, where 1 denotes that no criteria are available to students and 3 denotes a totally transparent assessment task];
- D. To what extent does success in this question require students to demonstrate an understanding of multiple perspectives? [score between 1 – 3, where 1 denotes limited or no understanding and 3 denotes substantial understanding].

The analysis of the three questions in relation to the rating scale is shown in Table 3. It is to the responses of these three questions on the topics of teaching strategies, multiple stories and gender, on which we now focus and analyse in more depth.

**Table 3: Analysis of examination questions through a Productive Pedagogy coding scale**

	1. Limited or no understanding/low transparency of criteria/low connectedness	2. Some understanding/some transparency of criteria/some connectedness	3. Substantial understanding/high transparency of criteria/high connectedness
A. To what extent does success in this question require a working knowledge of a concept which is central to this unit?	Question 10 <sup>2</sup>		Question 1 <sup>3</sup> Question 8 <sup>4</sup>
B. To what extent does this question connect to student teachers' future work in classrooms?			Question 10 Question 1 Question 8
C. To what extent are the criteria for evaluating this assessment task transparent?		Question 1	Question 10 Question 8
D. To what extent does success in this question require students to demonstrate an understanding of multiple perspectives?		Question 10	Question 1 Question 8

<sup>2</sup> **Question 10:** "Schools cannot solve the problem of racism in our society. But they should surely not contribute to it" (Gillborn, 1990, p.1).

List some strategies that YOU could employ so that you as a teacher do NOT contribute to racism?

<sup>3</sup> **Question 1:** In the first chapter of your text Teaching Aboriginal Studies, Sally Morgan writes that "reconciliation will only come when thousands of stories have been spoken and listened to with understanding" (quoted in Burrige, 1999, p.1).

Briefly discuss the importance of this statement.

<sup>4</sup> **Question 8:** "One of the most ... pervasive constructions of the boys and schooling issue is the one offered by the popular press. In many of the stories told by journalists, boys are presented as losing out in both educational and social contexts, as a new super-breed of girls and women takes control of school, of jobs, of relationships, and of their bodies" (Gilbert and Gilbert, 1998, pp.3-4).

Within this context, the authors suggest that crucial questions are not being asked. What are these questions and why are they important?

### *Teaching Strategies*

The greatest understanding of issues was demonstrated in the responses to the question on teaching strategies (Question 10) where students were asked to list some strategies that they could employ so that they, as teachers, do not contribute to racism. This question related to the suggestion that: “Schools cannot solve the problem of racism in our society. But they should surely not contribute to it” (Gillborn, 1990, p.1). Perhaps it is the practical nature of this question that resulted in 56% of the students showing a clear understanding and another 35% showing they had some understanding of the issues connected to this question. However, 9% of the students still showed they had very limited or no understanding of strategies that could be implemented in the classroom. Student teachers’ responses to this question showed that they acknowledged the need, for example, to provide safe environments, embrace all cultures, to address racism. However, through their answers to other pertinent questions, their theoretical understanding of the issues relating to racism was shown to be low. Indeed, analysing this question through a Productive Pedagogy coding scale (see Table 3) shows that this question did not require a high working knowledge of central concepts and required only some understanding of multiple perspectives. In addition, analysis of this question showed that it had a high transparency of criteria and that it had a high connectedness to student teachers’ future work in classrooms. It appears that the practical nature, the high transparency of criteria, and the lower requirement for understanding the complexities of racism enabled most students to provide sound answers for this question. The following is indicative of the overall tenor of responses:

I would promote an environment that acknowledges and celebrates cultural diversity and individualism. I would provide an environment where students will feel safe to discuss and question, openly and honestly of their position in the world and how they think that affects them and others. I would inform and discuss with students that racism is more than a derogatory comment toward someone based on what they look like. That racism exists, institutionally and culturally. Institutional racism can be explained as a biased text and resources used within the Australian education systems which depicts a Eurocentric perspective. Cultural racism can be explained as the ‘White Australia’ ideology where being white is identified with superiority, therefore anyone else is considered inferior. It’s important to raise the awareness that people who hold powerful positions in Australia were raised in a culturally racist environment therefore they consider this racist perspective as the ‘norm’. Within my classroom these forms of racism will be discussed openly. (Female student)

### *Multiple Stories*

On the question relating to multiple perspectives (Question 1) students were asked to discuss the importance of the statement that “reconciliation will only come when thousands of stories have been spoken and listened to with understanding” (Sally Morgan quoted in Burrige, 1999, p.1). A high understanding of multiple perspectives and a substantial working knowledge of central concepts was essential for this question. In addition, a high understanding of the pertinent issues is important to student teachers’ future work in the classroom, because their students will have many different perspectives and many different stories to tell. However, in the exam, only a total of 12% of the students showed clear understanding of the issues concerned with a further 35% having some understanding. Significantly, over half the students (53%) showed very limited or no understanding of the need to understand multiple perspectives and related issues and the significance that stories ground theoretical concepts and issues in everyday lived reality. To improve social justice outcomes it is important to be able to connect theoretical concepts and ideas such as race/ethnicity, culture, gender, social class and poverty, discrimination and racism to the everyday lived reality of school students. As Hayes et al. write: “Schooling for the contemporary world involves providing students from all backgrounds with opportunities to engage in positive ways with non-dominant cultures as part of its social outcome.” (Hayes et al., 2006, p.39). On reflection, when analysing through a Productive Pedagogy coding scale (see Table 3), this question may not have been as transparent as it could have been with the inclusion of the word ‘reconciliation’, which seemed to detract from the central thrust of this question. We also found that other students just reworded and repeated the question as their answer. Thus, this low transparency of the question led to student responses such as:

Reconciliation is what all Aboriginal people want. They believe that they should be compensated for the decades of torment and heartache, but this is not going to happen unless all their stories have been heard as the white Australians do not feel they have mistreated the Aboriginal people and there is no need for reconciliation. This will soon change once they understand what the ‘white’ took from the Aboriginal people and how their lives will never be the same again. (Female student)

Reconciliation can only come when the real stories are told not just the “White Australian stories” people must be aware of the problems in the past to understand why things are the way they are. People must be told of the invasion as an invasion not colonisation white people and Aboriginal people must come together and tell each other their stories and accept them. (Female student)

Reconciliation will only happen when all Australians accept one another. We cannot change the past, but we must acknowledge our country's treatment of all Australians (whether it was good or bad), so we learn from our mistakes and do not repeat them. Our future generation of Australians should be taught Aboriginal Studies because it is part of our country's history. Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals will only be able to reconcile if both parties believe their issues are being heard and respected. (Female student)

In their responses, many students implied that reconciliation was an 'Aboriginal issue' and seemed to suggest that it was Aboriginal people whose stories we, as non-Aboriginal people, needed to hear. While this is certainly a valid point, what we also hoped to hear from students was the recognition that we, of all ethnic backgrounds, also had our stories, and that the ways in which our gender, social class and cultural background shaped us had implications for our own worldviews and by implication, our teaching praxis. In other words, we were disappointed that students' responses focused almost exclusively on the perceived differences of the 'Other'.

### *Gender*

A surprise finding was in respect of the exam question relating to gender (Question 8) which began with a quotation from Gilbert and Gilbert (1998, pp.3-4) who wrote that:

One of the most familiar and pervasive constructions of the boys and schooling issue is the one offered by the popular press. In many of the stories told by journalists, boys are represented as losing out in both educational and social contexts, as a new super-breed of girls and women take control of school, of jobs, of relationships, and of their bodies.

Students were asked to identify what these "crucial questions" were, and why these might be important. This question required substantial working knowledge of the pertinent concepts, required students to demonstrate a high understanding of multiple perspectives, and clearly had high connectedness to student teachers' future work in classrooms (see Table 3). In addition, the criteria for evaluating this question were highly transparent, with the pertinent concepts also discussed in the unit readings, in lectures, and highlighted in their learning guide. However, only 10% of students showed a clear understanding of the issues surrounding gender and gender inequalities. A further 16% showed some understanding. Indeed, the vast majority (74%) of the students showed a very limited or no understanding of the issues in question. Misconceived aspects included "the current essentialist obsession with boys'

‘underachievement’, emphasizing short-term, narrowly defined male recuperative approaches” (Younger, 2007, p.408). Many students clearly accepted as a ‘truth’ the popular rhetoric that it is the boys who are now the disadvantaged, despite lectures and readings that clearly asked students to question this popularised rhetoric. As Younger suggested, “if we are to instil in trainee teachers a deeper understanding of gender based issues, then we need to ensure that our practices, in teacher education, are research informed” (Younger, 2007, p.409). If this is lacking teachers are highly likely to reproduce gender inequalities within (and subsequently beyond) the schooling arena.

Introducing dimensions of productive pedagogies like intellectual quality and recognition of difference could “signify a considerable paradigm shift in thinking and enacting ... the simplistic and essentialist understandings of gender that continue to drive curriculum and pedagogy in our schools” (Keddie, 2006, p.111). For example, intellectual quality would provide greater engagement with critical literacy that disrupts essentialised and normalised notions of gender, while recognition of differences would generate greater gender justice. What we expected as answers to this question was students showing that they understood that it was not that girls were advantaged at the expense of boys, or boys advantaged at the expense of girls, but that it was a much more complex issue with the need to consider other concepts such as ethnicity and social classes to explain which girls and which boys were advantaged or disadvantaged, and indeed how such concepts interacted with gender to provide different life chances. Instead, in many of the responses to this question, gender was essentialised and naturalised. At times it was assumed that teaching should be different for boys than for girls, and, surprisingly, some student teachers suggested that boys were dropping out for family reasons. Some responses also included the idea that a lack of male role models was responsible for boys failing. However, the need for male role models implicitly denigrates female teachers and undermines female teachers’ integrity and authority, and also situates and reinforces masculinity as a superior gendered ideal (Martino, Lingard, & Mills, 2004). Typical responses included the following:

Boys develop at a slower rate than girls. This couples with the traditional roles in society changing. Girls in the past in Australia were expected to leave school and marry only to become housewives. Boys were expected to be breadwinners and therefore allowances were made for immaturity. Girls are now able to participate in the workforce the same as men. Due to women maturing faster than men they are able to comprehend and understand courses of learning at an earlier age than

men. When this area of nature is pursued, boys are left behind. To combat this problem education policy need to be able to adapt to this difference in nature and accommodate all learners, boy or girl. (Male student)

The fundamental question would seem to be ‘How are boys being failed by the system?’ How can teaching/learning be made culturally relevant and meaningful to them? Such questions are vital if students are to engage with teaching/learning and develop self-esteem enabling them to progress and become functioning and critical members of society. (Female student)

I believe two crucial questions are not being asked: Why are boys performing badly? Why are girls performing much more efficiently? Both questions are important because the male-centric view appears to come across as it must be due to extra privilege afforded to girls and the adoption of equal opportunity not being equal. By tracing the real answers to these questions, real initiatives and approaches may be utilized in bridging the gap (if necessary) and avoid unnecessary excuses. (Male student)

The questions that are not being asked are who is taught and by what means. Because clearly it seems to me that boys are not being taught effectively or they are being ignored in the curriculum. What Gilbert is saying is that as teachers it is not all about the content we teach. It is about the way we teach it and to whom that affects the results of the students. And in this case the boys are obviously being ignored and the methods of teaching don’t correspond to the way boys in general learn. (Male student)

The biggest question would be why are the boys not keeping up? Family life? These question are important because we need to look into why this is happening and how we can prevent it in the future. A lot of these issues are to do with the family. The boys leave home to look after the well being of their family while the girls stay at school to get an education. A lot of boys end up dropping out of school because of domestic violence or drugs. We need to know these things so we can try and fix it. (Female student)

The authors suggest that people are not asking why are boys not succeeding in school? And how should we address these problems? These questions are important because currently boys’ education is suffering. We need to look at the causes of their behaviour problems and lack of literacy skills. By addressing the causes we can take action on solving these problems. We also need to look at how we as schools are constructing the male gender. How are we portraying what it means to be a man? Many boys today lack good role models of a man and are very lost. We need to ask ourselves how we can address these problems so we can work towards creating a learning environment structured to suit both boys and girls equally. We need to look at our teaching and assessing methods and look at how we see ‘maleness’ and ask ourselves if we are being fair to boys. (Female student)

Inequalities are often normalised in schooling discourses (Hayes et al., 2006) yet it is by deep understanding of concepts and issues connected to these inequalities where teachers can make a difference. The exam questions, as discussed in this paper, aimed

to identify students' conceptual understanding rather than their factual knowledge. This understanding is considered important for students' future practice, yet analysis of students' responses clearly shows that many students do not understand these crucial concepts and ideas. We would argue that: "Authentic instruction requires higher order thinking, deep knowledge, substantive conversations and connections to the world beyond" (Lingard, 2005, p.177). More than good intentions on the part of future teachers are essential for quality teaching and to ensure social justice outcomes. Indeed, "speaking against the normalisation of inequalities is an ethical and political move ... to make sure that schools are places for learning, so that learning is one of the effects of schooling" (Hayes et al., 2006, p.210) for all students.

### **Supporting student learning through assessment: What can we learn from our analysis?**

This paper has analysed student teachers' responses to specific exam questions relating to teaching strategies, multiple stories and gender. Overall, students responses to the examination questions were disappointing, to say the least. The reasons for this are complex and despite our avowal not to 'blame' students for their 'poor' showing, factors related to things other than our 'poor' teaching are at play. Let us dispense with them at the outset. Firstly, it is a bit of a truism that, traditionally, students do not like examinations, even though they are fully aware that supervised assessment is university policy and that almost without fail all their units have an examination component. Certainly, students have frequently told us that they 'don't do well in exams' due to 'exam nerves'. Despite our best intentions to only examine those concepts and issues that have been explicitly taught, to demystify examinations as something 'hard' and to make the assessment process as transparent as possible, there is little doubt that 'exam nerves' is a factor for some students although we would question whether it would account for all the poor results. We have no real way of knowing how many students are affected by this. Secondly, some students do not engage with the unit. In other words, they simply do not do the work. Much as we try to inspire, enthuse or cajole or indeed, choose readings that are 'user friendly' and to develop engaging activities, some students have different priorities, either in terms of study overloads or personal commitments. When analysing responses to examination questions of these students it

becomes patently clear that their responses are in no way grounded in the literature they should have read or the lectures they might have attended. A subset of this group is the one we collectively refer to as the ‘resister’; those students who come into the unit, not because they have a burning desire to make a difference, but because it is a mandatory part of their professional qualification. Some of these students enrol with predetermined ideas and again, despite our best efforts, do not engage in the material presented in the unit or indeed, see social justice issues as a waste of time or yet another version of the ‘black armband’ view of history. Based on earlier studies, we know that this latter group consists of approximately 20% of students (Aveling, 2002, 2004b).

Despite this somewhat jaded, even fatalistic, view of certain groups within student cohorts, we nevertheless contend that examination results can tell us as much about our pedagogies as they tell us about individual student performance. Given our analysis of the two questions that were poorly answered as well as the analysis of the question that was well done, it is clear that overall students had problems demonstrating that they had acquired a sound understanding of key sociological concepts like gender and social class and their effects on education but seemed to have grasped that ‘race’ was a social construct rather than a biological reality and were, moreover, able to intelligently discuss the pernicious effects of racism and to articulate a range of strategies to combat it. It is certainly evident that student teachers do better when they are explicitly asked to make connections between theoretical constructs and the implications these have to their future professional context and do less well when the theory is divorced from practice.

While this is an important insight — and one that we have taken on board — there are other, more fundamental issues that have emerged for us. In other words, what is the purpose of our assessment tasks and how do these align with our pedagogies, and ultimately reflect what students have learned? Given that we implicitly believed that assessment ought, not only to support student learning, but also to provide students with an opportunity to demonstrate what they have learned, on the basis of the evidence we have already changed our assessment practices quite drastically to better reflect those ideals. The challenge for us is to move from assessment that was more summative, to assessment that is more formative and at the same time paying attention to the four dimensions that support productive assessment. On a practical level this means:

- Making our pedagogies much more explicit

On reflection we had certainly spent more class time on discussing race and racism than we had on discussing gender and social class and the ways in which these sociological constructs interweave. While we had no intentions of prioritising one set of discriminatory practices over another, this may certainly have been an implicit message given the 'space' devoted to each. Explicating pedagogic approaches also means talking to students about what we are doing and why. We hope that in the future this serves to better model the productive pedagogic approach.

- Making explicit connections between theoretical constructs and school-based practice without sacrificing intellectual rigour

We continue to believe that firstly, much of student learning is based on how widely they are prepared to read and that secondly, lectures and peer discussions must be firmly grounded in the pertinent literature. Thus, while our primary objective is to encourage students to read, this needs to be much more explicitly tied to the sorts of situations they are likely to encounter in the classroom! We hope that we will achieve this with the 2007 cohort through a series of review questions that are grounded in the readings for each week. These review questions are available to students from the beginning of the semester and students are encouraged to refer to their text and other written materials to answer them. We have structured the review questions to be answered in two parts: part one requires students to outline their understanding of key concepts, while part two challenges students to relate these to their experiences, or indeed to their future profession. Students receive feedback on these throughout the semester.

- Greater transparency of assessment;

Given our increasing commitment to assessment that is more reflective of actual student learning we decided to abandon the closed book examination and substitute an open book, more open ended, essay-type form of assessment for the final examination (a university requirement) that, we reasoned allowed students greater scope to demonstrate their learning throughout the semester. To achieve maximum transparency the essay questions were outlined in the students' unit guide. In theory this allows students to read around the topic because in order to demonstrate depth of understanding they to be

familiar with the material. At the same time they have the security of knowing that they do not need to rely on memory.

We believe that these changes are likely to provide better scope for students to demonstrate what they have learned. In terms of the productive pedagogies framework we continue to attempt to challenge students intellectually while making explicit connections between the world of the lecture theatre and the professional world for which our students are headed, within the context of a learning environment that is supportive and assessment strategies that are transparent. As teacher educators we believe that we have a responsibility to equip our students with more than 'good intentions' if they are to become the quality teachers we envisage.

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