Pedagogy for Future Educators

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Abstract: Global shifts in education mean that learning involves more than teaching knowledge and beginning teachers, in turn, need to appreciate the multiple realities and cultural understandings of all those in their care. In this paper the authors report on a unique pre-service teacher education program in rural Victoria, Australia. Students undertake a 12 month program after completing their undergraduate qualification, which enables them to teach all levels in primary and post-primary schools. During this time, lecturers in the program utilise a combination of lectures, tutorials, specialist seminar days, electives, fieldwork and teaching practice, to assist the students to develop a disposition that is both socially just and theoretically informed. Whereas it is impossible to prepare students for each and every situation they will encounter upon graduation, educating teachers to teach in a changing global environment requires approaches that attempt to deal with diversity in all its forms in sensitive, respectful and inclusive ways. Powerful elements of the program are the seminar days conducted throughout the year in which outside speakers – themselves practitioner specialists in their own fields with whom lecturers have developed partnerships over time – work with the students on issues associated with sexualities, Indigenous education, mental health and global education. Utilising outside professionals to provide specialist knowledge allows the students to experience multiple perspectives and to develop a range of viewpoints. Through a process of critically reflective practice developed in the 12-month program, these experiences legitimise, challenge, clarify and generally ‘make real’ the issues related to diversity that are raised in other parts of the course. These strong partnerships, the teaching team and the overall character and philosophy of the course provide an environment in which the students can develop an ability to work with diversity in their teaching environments, rather than merely tolerate it.

Keywords: Inclusive Teaching, Partnerships, Supportive Environments, Sexualities, Indigenous Education, Social Justice, Diversity in Teaching and Learning

Introduction

THE EMERGING IMAGE of what school education might be in the 21st Century is producing a mixed and varied picture. A range of factors such as the advent of technologies, ability to travel, rearrangement of territorial borders, and emergent economies are affecting the rapidly changing world in which we live. These issues and a growing awareness of impending global concerns, including climate change, are impacting not only on the nature of schooling and teaching, but also on the relationship of schools and the communities in which they are situated. In many instances schooling and teaching have been seen as preparing students for a certain world, although there has been a continuing argument about its fundamental purpose of either preparing for work or broader ideals. What is taught – curriculum – and how it is taught – pedagogy – continue to be placed under the microscope by educators, politicians, religious groups, and other stakeholders. The diverse perspectives of these various stakeholders all provide certain, and sometimes conflicting, visions of the role of education. The dialogue between these ideologies has resulted in a continual balancing and jostling of traditional views of schooling and more progressive ideals.

As Brady and Kennedy (2003, p. 75) point out, ‘the reproduction of what worked in the past cannot be a recipe for the future’. Bringing about cultural change through education holds the promise of challenging the concept of “Other” – a term used to describe people who are perceived by the majority of society as outsiders, or even deviants. In an exploitative process that actively works against a recognition and respect for diversity, Others tend to be perceived as an homogenous category (Riggins, 1997), therefore the potential exists for schooling and education to challenge these assumptions and the resultant behaviours that stem from them. Over the last ten years significant studies have been undertaken, such as Robinson (1999), who has called for a massive renegotiation of schooling and education to meet the challenges of the twenty first century:

Education faces challenges that are without precedent. Meeting these challenges calls for new priorities in education, including a much stronger emphasis on creative and cultural education and a new balance in teaching and in the curriculum…. Young people are living in times of rapid cultural change and increasing cultural diversity. Education must enable them
to understand and respect different cultural values and traditions and the process of cultural change and development. The engine of cultural change is the human capacity for creative thought and action (p. 6).

Within the Australian context, the National (Federal) government, provides funding (with certain provisions) to the various state and territory governments who are responsible for the delivery of school education. State governments in Australia are responding to the rapidly changing world in which we are living and are attempting to address the complexities of what schooling and education for the future might mean. Within this reform process, the discourse of “what is essential” for young people to learn has emerged – and is now referred to as “essential learnings”. In the State of Victoria, where the program being described is situated, the *Victorian Essential Learning Standards* (VELS), provide a comprehensive curriculum in response to the challenges of today’s globalised knowledge economy, consistent with how students learn (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2005). *VELS* is based on the premise that there are three components of any curriculum that are necessary to enable students to meet the demands of our modern, globalised world. They are outlined in the *VELS* as: the processes of physical, personal and social development and growth; the branches of learning reflected in the traditional disciplines, and the interdisciplinary capacities needed for effective functioning within and beyond school. By the end of their life at school, the intention is that all students should leave school with the capacity to manage themselves as individuals and in relation to others; understand the world in which they live, and act effectively in that world (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2005).

The *Victorian Essential Learning Standards* do not exist in isolation, and as part of the Victorian State Government’s *Blueprint for Government Schools* (Department of Education and Training, 2003), they are accompanied by two companion frameworks: the *Principles of Learning and Teaching P-12* (PoLTS) (Department of Education and Training, 2005), which promote pedagogical approaches that focus learning to meet the diverse needs of students in a flexible and innovative fashion, and *Assessment and Reporting*, which is concerned with how learning is assessed. Although developed for the school sector, these frameworks are reflected in the Graduate Diploma in Education (Preparatory Year to Year 12) – GDE (P-12) – which is the focus of this article. When educating in a world of difference, being able to transfer insights from different educational sectors and to break down the boundaries of independent silos of knowledge and practice, is increasingly important.

### Context of the Course in Focus

While the main campus of La Trobe University is in metropolitan Melbourne, this paper concentrates on the Albury-Wodonga Campus, which is one of the University’s smaller regional campuses of approximately 1,200 students. The Albury-Wodonga Campus is a major regional campus of the La Trobe University network. The campus is located in Victoria in the City of Wodonga, with the City of Albury across the border in New South Wales. Together, Albury and Wodonga make up the largest rural regional centre in Australia (population: 105,000).

The Graduate Diploma in Education (P-12) – a course designed to prepare teachers to teach from the Preparatory Year to Year 12 – commenced in 1997. The course was developed to reflect the curriculum offered in Government schools throughout the State of Victoria at that time. The current structure and philosophy of the GDE (P-12) course has been as a result of a collaborative and evolutionary process involving lecturing staff; students in the course; graduates from the course, and members of education communities, including the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT), the statutory authority for the regulation and promotion of the teaching profession (School of Educational Studies, 2005). The initial student intake was twenty students, and since its inception, demand for the course has been high and competitive. Since 2005, the course intake has increased to eighty students.

The GDE (P-12) course is a unique teacher preparation course in that it provides students who possess at least a bachelor degree (3 years at university with at least one major sequence of study) with the opportunity to become qualified to teach in both primary (children 5 – 11 years of age) and secondary (children 12 – 18 years of age) school settings by undertaking a further twelve months of study in a pre-service teacher education course. Traditionally, teacher education courses in Australia prepared students for either primary or secondary school teaching, though the contemporary emphasis is on Early Years (a Preparatory Year to Year 4), Middle Years (Years 5 to 9) and Later Years (Years 10 to 12). An advantage of a P-12 pre-service course is that the students approach teaching in a seamless manner as school students move between the various stages of schooling. A course such as the GDE (P-12) provides pre-service teachers with knowledge, skills and attitudes of teaching and learning that relate to all of the stages of schooling, without limiting thinking to either ‘primary’ or ‘secondary’ mindsets. Further, pedagogical strategies used by academic staff in the course, work in ways that are counter to traditional teaching approaches, that is, lecturers shun the view that they are simply there for the purposes of transferring knowledge ‘from expert to novice’ (Beare, 2001, p.
1. The approach adopted in the GDE (P-12) is one that respects and assumes that we all have knowledge; that some are more knowledgeable than others in certain areas; that knowledge is both unstable and dynamic, and that change is relative to culture, context and environments.

The course consists of three units: *Issues in Education* and *Methods of Teaching* inform the students’ fieldwork and teaching practice experiences, which comprise the third unit, *Teaching Practice* (refer Figure 1). In the *Methods of Teaching* unit, students identify where and how to source content and experience a range of teaching methodologies for each of the disciplines: Arts, English, Humanities, Mathematics and Science. All students study methodologies for each discipline to Year 10. The content from the students’ previous undergraduate degree provides the focus of their senior secondary school (Years 11 and 12) teaching method/s. The course is delivered in an intensive mode where students attend university fours days per week, and spend at least one day per week in schools and other learning settings through fieldwork opportunities. The students also participate in several block periods of time throughout the year on practicum placements, locally, in schools across Australia, and sometimes internationally. The combination of a minimum of 20 days of fieldwork and 45 days of supervised teaching practica, comprises the unit, *Teaching Practice*.

![Figure 1: Diagrammatic Representation of the Three Units in which the GDE (P-12) Students Enrol](image)

Woven throughout the units that comprise the GDE (P-12) are a range of avenues in which students are able to consider notions of diversity. Topics are covered using a variety of teaching and learning approaches, including formal lectures and tutorials and other interactive activities. Particular areas addressed in the GDE (P-12) units include:

- students with special needs;
- diversity and inclusion;
- catering for different learning styles;
- mixed ability classrooms;
- community engagement;
- personalised learning;
- approaches to student management;
- autonomous learners;
- identity formation;
- health issues in schools;
- Aboriginal learning perspectives;
- mathematics for social justice, and
- catering for the needs of children with disabilities.

Students are also provided with several opportunities to undertake their own investigations, individually and in groups, to document their approaches to diversity through:

- considerations in lesson planning;
- integrated assignments;
- critically-reflective journals.

Within the *Issues in Education* unit students select an elective issue and present their findings to their peers in student-led tutorials. The elective topics include:

- an investigation into Indigenous education;
- health issues for young people;
- gender and education;
- diversity in the classroom;
- literacy for a democratic society, and

The continual emphasis with all these tasks is for students to consider these in relation to their own reflective practice and their emerging philosophy of education.

Within the GDE (P-12) there is an emphasis on learning as a social process involving interaction with others in groups or teams. Learning does not
happen in a vacuum inside a classroom or formal institutional setting; communities and many people beyond the school environment can be, and are, involved in a manner described by Illich’s webs of significance (Illich, 1971) where learning ‘real’ and meaningful knowledge, happen in informal and random ways, and ‘learning or educational webs’, occur through numerous sources and resources for learning. As a result of these underpinnings the desirability of working in partnership with a range of individuals, organisations and communities to enhance learning has been embraced.

In Victoria, teacher education courses are approved by the Accreditation Committee of the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT). On a cyclical basis, universities apply to the Victorian Institute of Teaching for approval by providing documentation that describes the course and indicates how the course will prepare graduates in accordance with the guidelines (Parliament of Victoria, 2001). The GDE (P-12) was due for reaccreditation by the VIT late in 2004. On this occasion, the proposal was for a course that was at the forefront of educational changes in Victoria and which attempted to pre-empt both VELS and PoLTs initiatives, which were introduced in Victoria in 2005. The GDE (P-12) course developers recognised that it was necessary that students be given guidance about what is expected of them as graduating teachers via VIT’s Draft Standards for Graduating Teachers (Victorian Institute of Teaching, 2004). The Draft Standards comprise eight standards as well as the nominated characteristics for each of the standards, and are organised around three themes: professional knowledge; professional practice, and professional engagement. Rather than seeing the standards as weapons, which can be used to control or restrict, the standards are used as tools in the GDE (P-12) to guide the development of opportunities for deep learning and understanding in an engaging manner for the students in the course (Bottrell, Keamy, & Newton, 2005).

An inspection of the forty-seven characteristics of teaching that fall under the three themes in the Draft Standards reveals that approximately seventeen could readily be regarded as having a concern for diversity. A selection of these is provided below in Table 1:

<table>
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<th>Graduating teachers…</th>
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<tr>
<td>• demonstrate empathy and positive regard for and rapport with students;</td>
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<td>• regard all students as capable of learning and demonstrate an understanding of and commitment to equity in their practice;</td>
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<tr>
<td>• have an understanding of cultural and religious diversity and of sociological factors which may influence the students they teach;</td>
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<tr>
<td>• model exemplary behaviour for co-operative learning and positive interactions with others;</td>
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<tr>
<td>• are aware of and can use a range of strategies to establish a positive and inclusive learning environment where all students can learn and are challenged;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• work co-operatively and purposefully with colleagues and other professionals who share responsibility for the learning and welfare of their students, and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• understand and employ strategies for building effective relationships with students, parents and colleagues.</td>
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Table 1: A Selection of Characteristics of Teaching within the Draft Standards for Graduating Teachers with a Concern for Addressing the Diverse Needs of Students (adapted from Victorian Institute of Teaching, 2004)

The aforementioned initiatives: VELS, PoLTs and the Draft Standards for Graduating Teachers, form a scaffold and assist in guiding the content and delivery of the GDE (P-12). These initiatives are blended with the particular philosophy of the course in which the students become critically reflective practitioners (Brookfield, 1995), through the combination of theoretical underpinnings that inform practice, as well as the creation of numerous links and partnerships with diverse communities within the Albury-Wodonga region, and elsewhere throughout the State and nationally. The initiatives are utilised to inform the delivery of the course and potentially model the teaching that occurs in the course; the value of community emerges from a sequence of learning activities that are spread across the entire curriculum (Starratt, 2002). Most noticeably, these community partnerships occur as a result of pedagogical
strategies implemented by teaching staff. In the following section of this paper, the focus turns to a series of seminar days in which community partnerships are exemplified to recognise the diversity within communities and the richness that this provides.

Seminar Series

Partnerships have been forged with numerous community agencies, and these contributions appear in various parts of the course. Individual staff members who teach in the course bring a range of skills and knowledge and professional networks to the course and initiate dialogue with community members to develop specific seminar days around designated themes or issues. Within the GDE (P-12), a number of seminar days are scheduled within the Issues in Education and Methods of Teaching units, the aim of which is to meld theory with practice. The Seminar Series utilises the services of community-based agencies and professionals who delve deeply into salient topics and who expose students to a greater understanding of specific concerns that may relate to a particular teaching discipline or to explore complex issues from the perspective of specialist practitioners. The age range of the GDE (P-12) cohort generally extends from 22 years to 50+ years, and it is recognised that all have a range of life experiences that they bring to the course, providing a diverse and rich knowledge base for the GDE (P-12) course. Students who may have been actively involved in areas of community health, child protection, juvenile justice or other areas of expertise prior to undertaking the GDE (P-12) are encouraged to take on an active role in the organisation and presentation of seminar day events.

Individual seminar days are organised in such a way where two to three speakers (or groups of speakers) are invited to present concurrent sessions and the students are divided into smaller groups and rotate through these presentations over the course of a day. The smaller groups also allow the students to explore ways in which they can begin the process of networking and to extend their view of themselves as belonging to emerging communities of practice. By the end of a seminar day, all students will have attended each session and they have had an opportunity to work with the presenters in a more intimate or personable way. The following examples are provided from seminars conducted within the Issues in Education unit.

Issues in Education Seminar Days

In 2005 and 2006, the Issues in Education Seminar Days have comprised a number of seminars, with particular seminars being offered reflecting the availability of presenters, as follows:

- Sexualities and Health (2005 and 2006);
- Student Wellbeing and Engagement: Partnerships with Community Agencies (2005);
- Issues in Education for Indigenous Australians (2005 and 2006);
- Food and Nutrition (2006);
- Mental Health Issues in Schools (2006);
- Safe From Harm (2006), and
- Drug Education in Schools (2005 and 2006).

Two of these seminar topics are explored in greater detail here: the seminars on sexualities and health, and issues in education for Indigenous Australians. These seminar topics relate specifically to the sub-themes of the Diversity Conference, which are examples of diversity in the classroom, and education for Indigenous peoples.

Seminar Theme: Sexualities (2005 and 2006 Seminars)

Sexualities and Other Sex Bits provides insights and specific focus on topics that promote an understanding of diverse communities and ways of being; challenges established and sometimes stereotypical views, and provides the opportunity for GDE (P-12) students to move toward a more inclusive approach to teaching and learning. The seminar, first presented in 2005, was repeated in 2006.

Implicit in the rationale for seminar sessions is an endeavour to capture students’ interest. Identifying topics and approaches for these particular sexual health seminars involved academic members of staff working closely in the planning stages with a clinical nurse consultant in sexual health from a local health service. Developing the title of Sexualities and Other Sex Bits attempts to demystify and normalise issues of sexually transmitted infections and sexuality that may be fraught with taboos and uncertainty for many pre-service teachers.

The content of the two Sexualities and Other Bits seminars included information and activities that reflected a social model of health, including the Ottawa Charter Health Promotion Principles (World Health Organisation, 1986), which augmented material previously covered in other areas of the GDE (P-12). Whilst aspects of sexually transmitted infection prevention were covered, an emphasis was placed on issues of sexualities among young people; identity formation, and the social, emotional, psychological, and physical impacts on students who are same-sex attracted (SSA). Latest evidence-based research (Hillier, Turner, & Mitchell, 2004) was discussed, as well as personal stories, with students being encouraged to think about their values and beliefs; the
legal responsibilities for teachers, and government legislation related to discrimination. Rather than using didactic approaches, discussion and practical activities were used to develop ways student teachers may consider the issues in their teaching lives and how they may develop strategies for inclusive practices.

Feedback from students has identified these two seminars as insightful experiences with comments from students’ evaluations over the two years including:

‘That school can still be very scary places for those that are outside the ‘norm’. That teaching acceptance and tolerance in all areas is vital.’
‘Was very interested in and learnt a lot about what SSA students face at school and how we can change this.’
‘Quite enlightening, to hear what SSAY have to say about their own situations in their own words. It’s opened quite a door for me I never saw anything before.’
‘Very open, brought up concepts that I don’t often understand or relate to ‘homosexuality’ good insight into concept and ways to address issues.’
‘Reinforced the importance of being an open, inclusive teacher.’
‘The importance of creating an inclusive and safe environment which alleviates the angst involved for students in grappling with your (their) own sexuality during adolescence.’
‘Good discussion in a relaxed environment. Good modelling of how to broach sensitive information / issues.’
‘Everyone has different views and values.’

Seminar Theme: Issues in Education for Indigenous Australians

The Journey we have taken til now (2005 Seminar)

The Journey We Have Taken Til Now involved a panel of Indigenous health workers from the area who worked in services such as mental health, social work, and maternal health. In the presentation the health workers identified issues that may have, or had, affected local Indigenous Australian communities; in a context that there has been some improvement on health outcomes for indigenous people. The interaction between the health workers and the students included the telling of personal stories along with accounts of issues that arose in the presenters’ professional practice. Whilst certain uniform information was presented, each session was designed to allow the presenters and participants to follow specific trails of interest to the group.

A unique part of this seminar was the documentation of each session, in which paintings were produced by one of the presenters, Karin McMillan. At the beginning of the seminar, the students as part of the welcoming to the group were asked to contribute a handprint to a specific canvas. As the discussion in each session unfolded, Karin also kept notes and made sketches. Karin then took the hand printed canvases away with her and then proceeded to overlay in pictorial form the discussion that occurred in each of these groups. The three final paintings captured Karin’s interpretation of each group’s discussion; Illustration 1 is an example of one of the paintings:
The evaluation undertaken of those who participated in the seminar sessions included the following comments by students:

‘That Aboriginality is not ‘one’ thing, that having acknowledged that there is a great diversity within the Aboriginal community is vital. Never judge without background knowledge.’ This was interesting mainly to gain some insight into things we as teachers can do to teach culturally appropriate lesson.

‘To be flexible and open to other ways of doing things.’

‘That sometimes white is black.’

‘I did not know the female talkers were Aboriginal until after the session. I had no idea.’

‘That we can never assume the cultural identity of our students and the issues raised by this.’

What Works: the Work Program (2006 Seminar)

Prior to this seminar, the students in the GDE (P-12) had addressed issues in education for Indigenous Australian children in various other parts of the course, and some had also completed elective tasks on the topic. In 2005, an attempt had been made for students to work directly with members of the local Indigenous agencies, but despite the best intentions, the attempt was limited because the approach placed too many demands on the already stretched local Indigenous workforce. In 2006, the approach changed so that there would not be so many direct demands on local Indigenous workers, and from early in the year, students were made aware of curriculum materials – known as What Works: the Work Program (Department of Education Science and Training, 2005) – that would assist them to pursue their interests in Indigenous education at a largely independent level.

What Works: the Work Program is an initiative of the Federal Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST 2005). In addition to a rich supply of case study and Web-based background material, more recent materials include dedicated hard copy publications on successful practices, literacy education, and reducing suspensions (Department of Education Science and Training, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c). Initially developed for use in Australian schools, the What Works materials are increasingly being adapted by pre-service teacher educators for their students. Within higher education environments, students are presented with four approaches when using What Works materials: historicising; politicising; intellectualising, and strategising (Hughes, Tur, & Price, 2006).

During the What Works seminar, the presenters, one of whom was an experienced school principal from a remote area in Australia, explored what an ideal school experience might be like for Indigenous Australian children. The presenters also provided anecdotes from the field, and because the students had previous knowledge about the What Works materials, the presenters explored the materials with the students and introduced them to particular topics for further investigation, by concentrating on the four approaches mentioned above.
Conclusion

The philosophy of the GDE (P-12) is to support equity and inclusiveness. The composition of the teaching team and the overall character of the course works toward establishing reflection, decisions on direction, collaborative implementation and attention to social justice. The Seminar Series is a direct result of staff members in the School of Educational Studies liaising with members of the community, particularly those with a focus on education, which generates networks of learning and energises communication.

Based on the various forms of feedback, seminar evaluations conducted by presenters, mid year online evaluations by staff from the School of Educational Studies, and formal quality assurance evaluations conducted by the University’s Academic Development Unit, it is evident that the Seminar Series is a particularly effective way of gaining current input from industry, whilst simultaneously establishing networks for students and strengthening the School’s relationship with local learning communities and organisations that have links to education. In the words of two of the students included in the independent course evaluation:

‘I found the seminar days of most benefit. The outsiders that came into the classroom were the most beneficial. People that ... came in and spoke were of amazing benefit;’
‘Seminar days in Issues were by far the most valuable parts of the unit. They meant that information was comprehended more thoroughly.’

The partnerships maintained via the Seminar Series allow GDE (P-12) students to experience issues and concerns that a pre-service teacher will possibly encounter when they begin teaching. Exposing students to a range of services and support networks that exist for teachers provides a clear picture to them of access to resources once they enter the teaching profession.

Based on the successful of previous Seminar Series, the 2007 program has been set and includes seminars that were conducted in 2006. The classroom strategies that have been established in the GDE (P-12) to celebrate diversity and to confront Othering practices will continue, because

[to] understand the Other necessitates that we come to terms with individuals in their full complement of activities, strengths, and weaknesses. It does not mean that when a discussion of racism occurs, only black students speak, or that when we speak of disabilities, only the physically challenged talk. To do so silences other people in the classroom and essentializes particular groups of students as if they are cultural experts and we turn to them only for one form of knowing. Instead, I am suggesting that we develop creative classroom strategies that enable students to see one another in their full array of diverse identities (Tierney, 1993).

It is impossible to prepare graduates for each and every situation they will encounter in their teaching career or the varied learning environments that they may find themselves working in. By encouraging students to work with concepts of diversity in sensitive, respectful and inclusive ways, rather than merely tolerating difference or Otherness, can provide a strong basis from which to work in this uncertain and rapidly changing world. The Seminar Series, combined with other elements of the course, assists students to develop socially just and theoretically informed dispositions, which is one of the aims of the Graduate Diploma in Education (P-12). The approach is, in reality, a pedagogy for future educators.

References


About the Authors

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Mark lectures in the School of Educational Studies at the Albury – Wodonga Campus of La Trobe University where he co-convenes the Graduate Diploma in Education (P-12). In the P-12 course he teaches in the areas of Issues in Education, Humanities, Visual Arts, and Health. Mark also continues to work as a practising artist, exhibiting work nationally and internationally as well as working in community art projects. Mark’s research interests include: powerful learning through the Arts; cultural education and visual arts; communities of learning; inter-relational learning in education settings; middle years of schooling; and gender and sexualities. He is currently undertaking doctoral studies related to the meanings that occur for artists when they enter sites of learning.

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Kim co-ordinates the activities of the School of Educational Studies (SES) at the Albury-Wodonga Campus of La Trobe University, having previously taught in a variety of educational settings that include primary education, physical education, drama, special education, prison education, adult education and Aboriginal education. As well as convening a number of adult education programs on the campus and supervising masters and doctoral students, Kim also teaches in the pre-service teacher education program, the Graduate Diploma in Education (P-12), a program he was instrumental in revising in 2005.