


Chapter 8

Harnessing Funds of Knowledge in the Master of Teaching and Learning Program through a Culturally Responsive Approach

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ABSTRACT

This chapter critically analyzes the integration of the funds of knowledge framework within New Zealand's Master of Teaching and Learning (MTchgLn) program, drawing on Safa's (2021) research. It explores how this program incorporates culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP), adaptive expertise, and teacher identity development to prepare educators for superdiverse classrooms. Through a mixed-methods approach, the study synthesizes quantitative and qualitative data to evaluate the program's effectiveness in enhancing educational professionalism, strengthening family-school partnerships, and improving community placements. The findings underscore the program's ability to address the diverse needs of priority learners while providing insights for further enhancing teacher education. This chapter emphasizes the connection between local diversity and global educational standards, offering policy recommendations to promote equity, inclusion, and high-quality education in diverse settings.

INTRODUCTION

New Zealand's education sector, much like those in other countries, is facing the growing complexities of shifting classroom demographics due to increased migration and global mobility. According to projections from the Education Review Office (2023), by 2043, over 25% of students in Aotearoa New Zealand will be from ethnic communities, and in Auckland, this figure rises to more than 40% for students of Asian descent. While many ethnic minority students demonstrate strong academic performance and progress to higher education, they nonetheless encounter significant obstacles, including racism, social isolation, and insufficient cultural recognition. These factors underscore the imperative for education systems to effectively address the diverse needs of all learners. Initial Teacher Education (ITE) faces both

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challenges and opportunities due to the growing diversity within classrooms. Educators must now tailor their teaching methods to meet the needs of increasingly varied student groups (Chan & Ritchie, 2020; Spoonley, 2023; Wood, 2024). This complex mix of backgrounds means that teachers need to take into account everything from students' languages and religions to their economic situations (Vertovec, 2007). Effectively managing this diversity is essential for creating classrooms where all students, regardless of their background, can succeed academically and feel that their cultural identities are respected.

The Master of Teaching and Learning (MTchgLn) program takes an innovative approach to preparing teachers for these diverse settings. It combines four key ideas: funds of knowledge, culturally responsive teaching, adaptive expertise, and the development of teacher identity. Together, these ideas equip pre-service teachers to support a wide range of learners, particularly those who face systemic barriers. A core element of the MTchgLn program is the “funds of knowledge” approach. This teaching method emphasizes the importance of acknowledging and using the varied cultural and community knowledge that students bring to the classroom. By integrating this understanding into their lessons, teachers can access a significant resource (González et al., 2005; Moll et al., 1992). When teachers apply culturally responsive strategies in their lesson planning and execution, they can leverage their students' varied backgrounds to create more equitable and inclusive learning environments.

This preparation is essential for educators who wish to succeed in today's diverse classrooms, ensuring that students from marginalized backgrounds receive meaningful educational experiences that resonate with their lives. Traditional ITE programs are criticized for not equipping teachers for the complexities they will face in modern classrooms (Bertram, 2023). Adding to this point, Hipkins and MacDonald (2018) suggest that ITE must move beyond traditional practices by cultivating technological skills, critical thinking, and the ability to address students' diverse needs. In a similar vein, Radulescu (2020) emphasizes the growing necessity for teachers to acquire skills for navigating change, understanding their own emotions as well as those of their students, and even incorporating mindfulness practices. This is essential for managing the increasing complexities of school environments. As a result, educators have started exploring innovative approaches within ITE, arguing that these innovative methods must better reflect the realities of effective teaching today (Yeigh & Lynch, 2017).

Efforts to bridge the gap between educational theory and practical classroom work are evident in initiatives that employ inquiry-based learning (Bridges et al., 2018; Stringer & Jhagroo, 2019). The MTchgLn program serves as an example of this reform, aiming to develop pre-service teachers' adaptive expertise so they can continuously refine their instructional approaches to meet the evolving needs of their students. New Zealand's changing demographics highlight the critical need for ITE that prioritizes equity. Persistent disparities in educational achievement affect priority learners—Māori, Pacific Islanders, and students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. As a result, it is vital to implement innovative strategies designed to promote equity and reduce achievement gaps (Education Review Office, 2012). The MTchgLn program seeks to prepare teachers for increasingly diverse student populations by combining theoretical knowledge with practical, hands-on experience.

The importance of enhancing ITE is recognized worldwide, especially as educational reforms seek to improve the performance of students facing academic challenges (Darling-Hammond, 2017; Ingvarson & Rowley, 2017). A growing body of evidence points to a strong connection between more thorough ITE and a more consistent level of teaching quality, ultimately leading to improved student outcomes (Grudnoff et al., 2017; Heng et al., 2019). Moreover, educational researchers consider the initial phase of a teacher's professional journey a notably significant period for development and argue in favor of

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