PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS’ DISPOSITIONS TOWARDS DIVERSITY:
ARGUING FOR A DEVELOPMENTAL HIERARCHY OF CHANGE

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Abstract
This article explores Australian pre-service teachers’ beliefs about and attitudes towards diversity. Building on Garmon’s (2004) argument that there are three dispositional factors that influence students’ likelihood of developing multicultural awareness and sensitivity in teacher education programmes, the authors explore the relationship between such dispositions as exhibited in students’ autoethnographic work. In so doing, the authors posit that these dispositions may be hierarchically developed: beginning from ‘self-awareness/self-reflectiveness’; moving towards ‘openness’; and finally a ‘commitment to social justice’. After exploring the nature of this hierarchical development through the in-depth investigation of six representative student accounts, the paper concludes by discussing the implications for teacher education, including the necessity to adjust our expectations of changing the dispositions of pre-service teachers in discrete, short courses.

Keywords
Diversity; social justice; pre-service teacher education; dispositions
Introduction

Although Australian schools are very diverse, representing the linguistic and cultural diversity in Australian society, teachers are typically Anglo-Australian and of middle-class background (Allard & Santoro, 2006). In this way, Australian teachers are demographically quite similar to teachers in other Western countries such as the United States (Cochran-Smith, Davis & Fries, 2003). There are significant discrepancies between the backgrounds of teachers and pre-service teachers and the increasingly diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic experiences of school students (Allard & Santoro, 2004; Brown, 2004; Causey, Thomas & Armento, 2000).

As populations in contemporary Western societies grow more diverse, the need for teachers to better understand and work with difference productively becomes increasingly critical (Allard & Santoro, 2006; D’Cruz, 2007). However, while most teachers are competent in their subject areas, Sogunro (2001) argues that they lack adequate knowledge, skills and attitudes that are necessary to successfully teach diverse student populations. Indeed, the literature on teacher education shows that historically, teacher education programmes have aimed to address diversity with add-on or piecemeal approaches, with little success (McDonald, 2005).

Brown (2004), for example, reports that Banks (2001), Sleeter (1995) and others have found that many pre-service teachers enter and exit stand-alone cultural diversity courses unchanged, often reinforcing their stereotypical perceptions of self and others in the process. Hatton (1999) has also critiqued foundational teaching in initial teacher
education as failing to impact on the racism, sexism, classism and heterosexism of many pre-service teachers in Australia. In short, programmes where diversity is addressed in a fragmented and superficial way do not lend themselves to the development of dispositions in pre-service teachers that are aligned with a recognitive view of social justice (see Mills, 2008b; Ballantyne & Mills, 2008).¹ Our own research (Ballantyne & Mills, 2008) has indicated that beginning teachers in Australia, despite their best intentions in terms of improving the social and learning outcomes of their students, appear to have very narrow understandings of what constitutes inclusive practice, and how to implement it effectively in their classrooms.

Garmon (2004), in reviewing the existing literature, suggests that the impact of diversity courses has been mixed, with some researchers maintaining that students’ attitudes and beliefs have been positively influenced and changed by a course on diversity, while others have reported little or no change (see also Mills, 2008a). Perhaps this can be partly explained by Pohan’s (1996) research, which found that students who bring strong biases and negative stereotypes about diverse groups are less likely to develop the types of professional beliefs and behaviours most consistent with multicultural sensitivity and responsiveness. This finding is consistent with Kagan’s (1992) observation that “candidates tend to use the information provided in course work to confirm rather than to confront and correct their preexisting beliefs” (p. 154). That is, the personal beliefs and images that pre-service teachers bring to teacher education usually remain inflexible. The classic study by Lortie (1975), for example, argues that the

¹ Informed by the work of Young (1990) and Fraser (1995), recognitive justice (Gale & Densmore, 2000) includes a positive regard for social difference and the centrality of socially democratic processes in working towards its achievement.
predispositions teacher education students bring to teaching are a much more powerful socialising influence than either pre-service education or later socialisation in the workplace.

Dispositional factors may be particularly significant, then, because they may determine prospective teachers’ readiness (or lack thereof) to learn from their intercultural and educational experiences (Garmon, 2004). Garmon (2004) goes on to suggest that “if students are not dispositionally ‘ready’ to receive the instruction and experiences presented to them, even the best-designed teacher preparation programs may be ineffective in developing appropriate multicultural awareness and sensitivity” (p. 212).

The notion of dispositional factors is also reflected in literature pointing towards the importance of selective recruitment processes. Haberman (1991, 1996) argues that teacher educators have to find ways to focus on “picking the right people” rather than trying to “change the wrong ones” through teacher education. By this, he is advocating for the recruitment and selection only of those who bring knowledge, experiences, commitments and dispositions that will enable them to teach in culturally diverse student populations well.

Specifically, we would argue that the three dispositional factors identified by Garmon (2004; 2005) of openness (receptiveness to others’ ideas or arguments, as well as receptiveness to diversity); self-awareness/self-reflectiveness (having an awareness of one’s own beliefs and attitudes, as well as being willing and/or able to think critically
about them); and commitment to social justice (a commitment to equity and equality for all people in society) are highly instrumental to this task.

Garmon (2004) based his findings on a study that involved extensive interviews with one 22-year-old White female pre-service teacher. He identified six major factors that appeared to play a critical role in facilitating the changes that occurred in this pre-service teacher’s beliefs about and attitudes towards diversity and that may be important predictors of how likely pre-service teachers are to develop multicultural awareness and sensitivity during their preparation programme. While three of these six factors were dispositional, relating to character traits or personal dispositions, the other three were experiential, relating to experiences that she had had – namely intercultural experiences (experiences in which there is an opportunity for interaction with individuals from a cultural group different than one’s own); support group experiences (experiences with a group of individuals who encourage a person’s growth through helping him or her make sense of experiences); and educational experiences.

Through analysis of excerpts taken from student assessment, this article explores the development of and the relationship between these three dispositional factors in pre-service teachers through an educational experience – specifically, one stand-alone course about identity, diversity and difference.
Research design

As teacher educators, Allard and Santoro (2004; 2006) suggest that part of our role is to offer experiences to our students that enable them to understand and examine their own positionings as a starting point for developing understanding and insights into taken for granted beliefs about themselves and ‘others’. This is particularly important as many of our students are located in dominant cultures. Such “awakening of consciousness” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 116) may help to challenge deficit thinking and “naïve egalitarianism” which can cause student teachers to “deny the privileges they may enjoy because of their skin colour and social class” (Causey et al., 2000, p. 34). One of the core courses undertaken by pre-service teachers in the first semester of their degree at a university located in an outer suburb of an Australian city, and which one of the authors was involved in teaching, aims to offer such experiences.

The course sought to provide students with the opportunity to develop a strong understanding of notions of belonging, individual and national identities, and the significance of difference and diversity as features of social and classroom life. Through a series of 13 weekly lectures and tutorials, the teaching staff endeavoured to develop students’ knowledge in pedagogical implications of matters of identity, diversity and difference in the context of contemporary Australia. Tutorial sessions were viewed as particularly valuable as they provided students with an opportunity to be involved in a variety of individual, small group and whole class learning experiences. The learning was designed to encourage students to engage with and unpack academic literature and make sense of this in relation to their own experiences of identity, diversity and
difference. As the State’s teacher registration body specifies the philosophies, goals, structure and content of teacher education programmes required in order for graduating teachers to qualify for registration, the course shares many similarities to those in other institutions in the State in terms of its content and pedagogy.

The major assessment piece for this course was an autoethnography, which asked pre-service teachers to represent their gendered, raced and classed identities in the form of one of three creative artefacts: a television guide, a restaurant menu or a CD cover. These artefacts incorporated an analytical review of the author’s experience of race, class and gender, and of the nature of identity; and a diary documenting and reflecting upon the author’s experience of the autoethnographic process. The data for this article are excerpts drawn from a pool of autoethnographies submitted by 48 pre-service teachers (approximately 29% of the cohort) who gave consent for their work to be analysed when expressions of interest to participate in the research were called for.

Although participants were self-selecting, groups of pre-service teachers enrolled in the programme (reflective of gender, race/ethnicity, socio-economic class, prior experience, age) appear to be well represented in the sample. Despite the fact that all participants are anonymised, they are always potentially identifiable at least to those involved, if not to wider audiences. In order to preserve the anonymity of participants, differentiation between participants is indicated only by pseudonym within the article, and by number within Table 1.
Participants were assured that their decision to participate in the research would not impact on their results in the course. In research where lecturers use assessment tasks as data, there is always the possibility that some respondents may have given ‘socially desirable’ responses and completed their assessment task in ways that they guessed may have been in accord with the beliefs of their lecturer. Although we cannot rule out the possibility that such responses have been included, as discussed below, only three students (6% of participants) submitted autoethnographies that were infused with what we would view as a highly ‘desirable’ response: a commitment to social justice (see Table 1).

We should clarify that we do not have evidence of students’ dispositions prior to their engagement in the course. We are therefore drawing on students’ perceptions of whether and how their attitudes and beliefs have shifted as a result of the course, which we do not necessarily regard as a weakness of the research. Exploring teacher perspectives in educational research can provide “personal practical knowledge ... a particular way of reconstructing the past and intentions of the future to deal with the exigencies of a present situation” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, p. 25). In addition, students may not have considered their beliefs about and attitudes towards diversity prior to their involvement in the course. In this way, the course’s encouragement of the articulation of students’ perceptions had the potential to promote critical reflection, which helps teachers to “modify and enhance their understanding of professional practice” (Yost, Sentner & Forlenza-Bailey, 2000).
To prepare the autoethnographies for data analysis, the 48 television guides, restaurant menus and CD covers were first transcribed word for word into an electronic textual form within word processing documents by one of the authors for ease of manipulation. After removing all identifying features, relevant excerpts from each autoethnography were transferred to one master document. Each researcher analysed the excerpts from the autoethnographies independently, looking for evidence of the three dispositional factors identified by Garmon (2004), and categorised and documented the dispositions demonstrated by each of the students. We then came together to discuss our interpretations and to ensure consistency.

It was agreed that for responses to be categorised as representative of one of the three dispositions, evidence of this disposition should be apparent in more than one location and it should almost infuse or permeate the response. Although we acknowledge that this is a very cautious approach, we decided upon this protocol to eliminate the possibility of categorising student responses incorrectly based on possible throwaway lines. Where discrepancies existed between our individual assessments of students' work, we both went back to the data to reconsider whether particular dispositions really did ‘infuse’ the response. Slight adjustments were made, and the table documenting the dispositional factors evident was finalised (see Table 1).

*Insert Table 1 here*

**Findings and discussion**
As is highlighted in Table 1, of the 48 autoethnographies that made up our data set, 36 (75%) were demonstrative of self-awareness/self-reflectiveness; 19 (40%) demonstrative of openness; and three (6%) demonstrative of commitment to social justice. 12 (25%) were determined to be demonstrative of none of these dispositions. What was of most interest to us was the relationship between these demonstrated dispositions, which is perhaps best illustrated visually by the table itself. All students who demonstrated openness also demonstrated self-awareness/self-reflectiveness. Similarly, all students who demonstrated commitment to social justice also demonstrated both openness and self-awareness/self-reflectiveness.

While Garmon did not state that these dispositions evolve developmentally, it was suggested in the ways that he defined each of the dispositions that there may be some movement from (i) openness to (ii) self-awareness/self-reflectiveness and finally to (iii) commitment to social justice. In this article we posit that these dispositions evolve developmentally: beginning from self-awareness/self-reflectiveness; moving towards openness; and finally a commitment to social justice. This developmental progression is illustrated in Figure 1.

[Insert Figure 1 here]

The remainder of this article draws on excerpts from six autoethnographies (two students demonstrative of each of the three dispositional levels) to explore dispositions towards diversity in pre-service teachers. We begin with two examples representative of
the majority of students in that what they exhibited was limited to self-awareness and self-reflectiveness at the time of the research. This is followed by excerpts from two students who demonstrated two of the dispositions (openness and self-awareness/self-reflectiveness). We conclude by providing examples drawn from two students who demonstrated all three of the dispositions proposed by Garmon.

As we are proposing this developmental hierarchy of change, we have made a conscious effort to include as much data as possible to allow the voices of the participants to be heard. Our hope is that the deliberate incorporation of this data will enable readers to draw their own conclusions about the usefulness of our proposal, or encourage comparative and/or longitudinal studies to further investigate this matter from a variety of theoretical perspectives.

**Evidence of self-awareness/self-reflectiveness in student accounts: Marianne**

As has been mentioned previously, 75% of the autoethnographies analysed for this research were demonstrative of self-awareness/self-reflectiveness (*having an awareness of one’s own beliefs and attitudes, as well as being willing and/or able to think critically about them*). Marianne’s work provides a particularly good example of what we understand by this disposition. She writes:

I’ve been thinking a lot about this assignment and finally feel like I’m beginning to understand what’s needed … in terms of … the axes of identity. These axes may not seem to be a significant part of who I am, but I need to look at how they
are a part of my life – particularly where it is not immediately evident. These axes and their impact can be hidden, but it’s important to try and uncover them. By looking more closely … I will definitely uncover a greater understanding of why I am the person I’ve become. (Marianne)

Marianne’s experiences living in Alice Springs, with its high Indigenous population, provided particularly fruitful areas for reflection. She reported that as a result of this course and the associated assessment task:

the impact of race in my life, while not immediately self-evident to me, became clearer … The photo montage shown on the back cover of my artefact is a reflection of the predominately, almost exclusively, white social grouping of my school life and early 20’s. Despite often living in areas with a high Aboriginal population, social convention and the views taught to many of my peers, ensured there was very little mixing of race outside of school … It would have been difficult for me to gain acceptance in this community had I not been white. While at times there were members of our group who were Aboriginal, this generally faded away after high school, in part due to the different educational and employment opportunities available to us … Many of my childhood friends on completion of high school were not able to gain employment. In small country towns employers can be unwilling to hire Aboriginal staff, fearing a backlash from a narrow minded and racist community. This was expressed to me
personally by my Mum when she was looking to hire a shop assistant for her business. (Marianne)

Critical attention to this particular stage in her life continued:

Alice Springs was a confronting experience for me … Living in Alice Springs led me to consider more carefully my views of race and difference … At my workplace, Aboriginal staff were given a lower standard of accommodation, and were not invited to eat at the house with other staff … Living in this environment meant I was regularly confronted by my views. I also needed to confront my feelings of relief, and the subsequent feelings of guilt generated by making the most of opportunities afforded me purely because of my race. Had I not been white, I would not have been offered a job, I would not have been able to socialise in the same places, or eat out in the same places. I could not have even gone to the same supermarket. (Marianne)

The educational experiences offered in the course and the ensuing conversations students were involved in appeared to act as something of a catalyst for processing some of the events of Marianne’s life:

Today’s discussions on race made me particularly mindful of how I felt when I first arrived in Alice Springs. Looking back I was rather cocky. I didn’t believe I was racist; I’d had, and still [have], a number of Aboriginal friends. Going to
Alice Springs taught me that perhaps I was more racist than I wanted to believe. In particular what I noticed was how differently the majority of Aboriginal people in Alice Springs behaved and lived [compared] to the Aboriginal people I had grown up with. I found the presence of large groups of non-English speaking Aboriginal people, with different customs, standards and behaviours, very threatening. It made me consider if perhaps I was only accepting of other races if they conformed to my norm. (Marianne)

The way that Marianne demonstrates awareness of her beliefs and attitudes, and is willing and able to think critically about them, is particularly noteworthy and places her squarely within the category of demonstrating self-awareness/self-reflectiveness. She does not, however, seem to move to coherent statements stating her openness to diversity. We would argue that while receptiveness to diversity and a commitment to equity and equality for all people in society is alluded to, these are not dispositions that permeate her written responses, and are still under development.

**Evidence of self-awareness/self-reflectiveness in student accounts: Bronwyn**

Another student who demonstrated an ability to be self-aware and to self-reflect on her past was Bronwyn. Writing in the third person, Bronwyn demonstrates such reflectiveness below:

Even though she was born in a vastly different country thousands of kilometres away, Bronwyn asserts that her comfortableness in this foreign environment
resulted because her physical appearance and cultural practices were common to the majority of the population. At the time this was not a conscious thought and it is only upon reflection that this truth is apparent. Indeed among dominant white races most are not consciously aware of this belonging … They consider race a term used only for non-white ethnic groups and are unaware of the privileges associated with whiteness. (Bronwyn)

The diary that accompanied her submission gave Bronwyn an opportunity to reflect on her thought processes as she completed the assessment task. It also gave us a window into her moments of self-awareness.

I was considering my race [and] Anglo heritage as my Scottish mother immigrated to Australia in her late 20’s. When I was young I travelled back to the UK with my family and lived there for almost two years. I was planning on delving into how the experience of travelling and having a mother with a strong accent and obviously from a different country shaped me as the major topic to explore when discussing race [in my assignment]. Then I read White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack by Peggy McIntosh which I found enlightening. It made me reassess how I see myself, not simply as an Australian but also as white, with unspoken, unearned and unfair privilege. It is not that I was born in the ‘lucky country’ but that I was lucky I am white. (Bronwyn)
In reflecting on her own experiences, she also demonstrates some understanding of the inherent privilege she carries in relation to her racial background:

It was Bronwyn’s whiteness that allowed her to feel included and normal in a distant country. It was whiteness that allowed her family to choose which country they would like to live in and not have to consider that they may be discriminated against because of race. In contrast, the original inhabitants of Australia and New Zealand – the Maori, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people – do not enjoy this favoured state. For them, their home is not the ‘lucky country’ it is to white people. They cannot count on having the basics white Australians view to be necessities such as health care, adequate housing and education. (Bronwyn)

This understanding enabled Bronwyn to reflect on what this privilege may have meant in terms of educational outcomes for herself and others:

Racism is not simply individual acts of meanness to a minority group but the lack of feeling welcome and normal in the usual walks of public life including the classroom. While at school in New Zealand with Maori children Bronwyn did not consider herself unfairly advantaged but upon reflection it was taught that white people civilised the country, white history was commemorated with days of celebration and the picture books, dolls and toys in the classroom depicted white people. While her skin colour made Bronwyn feel comfortable and accepted in this
situation, it is likely these same factors were making others in the class uncomfortable and alienated. (Bronwyn)

While it could be argued that an openness to diversity is implied in what Bronwyn says, she stops short of suggesting that she is receptive to such diversity. Recognition of her own privilege and acknowledgement that others may not enjoy this same advantage is different, in our view, to openness permeating her response. Although she has not articulated anything that would suggest that she is against this state of affairs, or offered suggestions about what could or should be done about it, we believe that with appropriate experiences, this disposition could become evident in the future.

**Evidence of openness in student accounts: Christina**

Christina is an example of a student displaying both self-awareness/self-reflectiveness and openness (*receptiveness to others’ ideas or arguments, as well as receptiveness to diversity*) in her assessment piece. Her ability to self-reflect in a critical way was particularly noteworthy. Although she acknowledged that she was “born into a white wealthy privileged family”, she was able to go beyond this and reflect at a deeper level:

> As a child I was a member of the ruling class, we had a big home, servants, and a privileged and protected lifestyle … I feel lost on the axis [of class] now as a divorced mother of four. A sole parent, not privileged now, I’m floating in limbo until I can regain a footing … Not being a member of the workforce has stripped me of a marker that stated middle class and slides me down to welfare. It feels really
uncomfortable and makes me reflect on my perceptions of ‘the welfare class’ now that I belong to it albeit temporarily. (Christina)

Her thinking extended beyond social class to encompass issues of ethnicity and race, although it is interesting here that she considers herself to be marginalised when she has also noted previously her privileged position:

my friends throughout my life have always been from minority groups. Because I have always felt marginalised myself (due to my dysfunctional home life), I identify with these ‘others’. Those with a visible difference, colour or those fringe dwellers of our society; the artists, musicians and non-conformists. (Christina)

In addition, Christina demonstrated openness in her autoethnography through her receptiveness to diversity:

In Sydney almost everyone I met was born overseas, with very different lives … I formed new perceptions of race, gender and class. Now for the first time I was outside the circle with the ‘others’. I learnt much about the ethnic communities when I was nursing and formed my own generalisations away from media views and gained insight into community and cultural systems. (Christina)
Christina’s perceptions of herself and ‘others’ suggests an openness to diversity. The theme of colourblindness in relation to such diversity was evident later on in her assessment piece:

A question of race arose today. My nine year old daughter asked me why all her friends “weren’t white”, obviously in response to a comment made at school. I told her that we were colourblind, we only saw people not races. I have noted that all [my daughter’s] close friends are from minority groups, and that she is the only girl at her school who does not subconsciously exclude Tahlia (Murri), Audrey (Taiwanese) or Lizzie (Vietnamese) from her inner circle … Our home is the only home, correction, only white home, these children are invited into. (Christina)

In reflecting on the task as a whole, Christina wrote:

I will be pleased to finish this piece. The more one examines one’s life the more one sees, in oneself and in others. This is not always an entirely pleasing exercise, and inevitably raises more questions than it answers. The awareness raised, however, taken into the classroom, could make a world of difference to many students I encounter. (Christina)

While Christina’s depth of self-reflectiveness and openness are evident and commendable, what we have made sense of in her statements stop short of expressing a commitment to social justice. While issues of social justice may be becoming part of
her way of understanding teaching, they are perhaps not yet as central to Christina’s practice as they may be to other students.

**Evidence of openness in student accounts: Amanda**

In her assignment, Amanda referred to a critical incident in her life that enabled her to become more self-aware, reflecting on her own beliefs and attitudes through her life. The critical incident concerned the birth of her first child:

> The two doctors looking after me were foreign. I had not thought twice about this until they gave me some instructions about the procedure they were going to perform. I could not understand what they were saying. This frightened me because I was already nervous about the thought of labour. Having the authoritative people around me being foreign made me feel like a white minority in a country where I had always been part of the majority. (Amanda)

This experience highlighted for Amanda in a small way how until this point she had “lived in Australia as a white Australian and had always felt like I belonged … I only had contact with white Australians [and] had never encountered a situation where my ethnicity was challenged”. Amanda continued to reflect on this critical incident:

> … a language barrier can be prevalent [between] white Australians and people from other races. I had not given much thought to the language differences until this day. I was scared because I could not understand what the doctor was
saying to me, I was scared to keep saying “pardon”, so I went with what was happening and did not understand what that was. I always felt that I had been actively involved in every part of my life. In this situation, I felt left out and isolated. (Amanda)

The experience of being an ‘outsider’ was, for Amanda, an incident that enabled her to reflect on her own beliefs. When she goes on to explain how this will impact on her practice as a teacher, we see her willingness to see past preconceptions and stereotypes:

As an educator, I will encounter many different symbolic traditions amongst children, parents and staff. I will need to see past the preconceptions related with particular traditions and treat the people as individuals rather [than] stereotyping them. (Amanda)

Comments taken from her assessment piece about making the learning environment inclusive also demonstrate her openness to diversity:

Children will need my support to make their learning environment inclusive [of] different languages, races and cultures. I have experienced firsthand how uncomfortable it is to feel left out and not understand what is happening around you. I will take this experience with me into my classroom. (Amanda)
Similarly:

I feel that honouring different cultures and races can be a way to eliminate preconceptions children may develop about a certain race or culture. (Amanda)

Amanda’s story exhibits strong elements of both openness and self-awareness. She is able to reflect on her own experiences in a critical way and then continues by exploring the impact of these on the ways that she will act as a teacher in the future. However, she has not yet taken what we would argue could be the next step: demonstrating a commitment to social justice. However, in outlining her desire to reject preconceptions and treat people as individuals (both of which are part of a socially just approach), we are very optimistic that we see the beginnings of a real commitment to social justice in her discourse.

Evidence of a commitment to social justice: Carolyn

One student whose assignment showed clear evidence of all three dispositions was Carolyn. In particular, her approach shows a clear commitment to social justice (a commitment to equity and equality for all people in society). In her ethnographic diary, Carolyn demonstrates her deep level of self-reflectiveness:

I see myself sitting at my computer doing a Jack Nicholson in “The Shining” – typing these words endlessly … “identity, identity, identity, class, crazy” … I go to
work and I find myself considering my memories and asking myself, “Yes Carolyn, but why do you feel that way now? How did it affect you?” (Carolyn)

Similarly, she commented:

despite what is going on in my life, I see this assignment as something very important that I need to do. Like an accomplishment, once I’ve done it, that will help me better understand and appreciate who I am, where I’ve come from, and where I’m going. (Carolyn)

It is her willingness to think critically about her own attitudes and beliefs that is central to this disposition here. However, Carolyn admitted that this willingness was not something that came to her easily when she made the point that “It’s hard when you don’t really want to know who you are, or why you are you!” She suggested that her difficulty with the task may be connected to her social class background:

I am struggling with this assignment. I knew this would be difficult, and that it would take a lot out of me – but this much??? … I’m finding it hard because I feel I have had a very privileged upbringing. (Carolyn)

Carolyn also demonstrated a disposition to openness. She chose to present her autoethnography as a CD cover and her related analysis as though she were being interviewed about her album. Within this context, she writes:
I wrote [the song] “Sheltered” in 2004, and it is essentially about how I felt my parents had sheltered themselves from knowledge, fostering ignorance of other cultures and people they considered not to be ‘Australian’. It was only well into my youth, and early adulthood, that I realised how unhealthy their views were, and how misinformed, (or uninformed) … and that they were only opinions. Australians have long believed themselves to be superior to any other race/immigrant that joins this country. I believe it is generally ignorance and arrogance that encourages this overwhelming sense of self importance, and lack of knowledge about the rest of the world. Being a part of this type of society encourages me to want to learn about and appreciate other cultures and people of different backgrounds to those I am most familiar with. (Carolyn)

While Carolyn demonstrates self-awareness in thinking critically about her own and others’ beliefs, receptiveness to diversity is also evident in her desire to learn about and appreciate other cultures.

Continuing with the music genre, Carolyn wrote about one of the songs from her album and the experiences and memories she drew on in writing this song:

“Bridging the Gap” was written in Alice Springs, sitting at The Gap, atop the McDonnell Range. The song itself is a metaphor for the massive void between the ‘whites’ and tourists … and the Indigenous Australians native to the area, who are
treated like animals … I sat in restaurants where [Indigenous Australians] were forbidden to enter, but came in to eat scraps off people’s plates … I was escorted from the end of a line in a bank to the front of the queue, because I was white. I felt my ‘whiteness’ in the Alice. I knew the privilege my skin colour gave me, but by acknowledging that these issues exist, I can confront the race related issues that affect me, both now and in the past, and in the future. (Carolyn)

While there is evidence here of self-awareness and self-reflectiveness, Carolyn has clearly moved to the next level – that of a commitment to social justice. She recognises the privileged position she held in this context, but also demonstrates commitment to moving beyond awareness to action and confronting these issues of inequality in the future.

**Evidence of a commitment to social justice: Robyn**

Like Carolyn, Robyn showed evidence of an ability to self-reflect, a self-awareness of her own situation, an openness to others, and a commitment to social justice. As pre-empted in Garmon’s own study (2004), Robyn’s life experiences (before university) greatly impacted on her perspectives, and these may well have influenced her apparent pre-disposition to being moved towards a commitment to social justice.

Evidence of her ability to be self-aware and self-reflect is seen in this self-deprecating account of her childhood, observed as though by a third person:
Bring out the tissues. You can’t help but be a little saddened by Robyn’s interpretation of her childhood and growing up in poverty. You watch helplessly as she is forced to wear second hand boys’ clothing, which she knows is not the norm but never complains. You can almost feel her lack of self esteem which is expressed by her embarrassment to ask anyone if she could borrow a school uniform for her last primary [elementary] school photo. The ultimate understanding comes when you realise the stress of poverty on Robyn’s mother prevents her realising her parenting style to be distant and unloving. Robyn experienced the constraints with being prejudged by people due to her daggy appearance, not being invited to play with the other children and left out of important school photos. (Robyn)

Robyn also reflects on her new-found ability to see herself as ‘white’:

... she has taken her identity for granted without giving thought to what it means. Eventually she comes to the conclusion that her race is – Caucasian. This exciting discovery has then led to her understanding that her ethnicity is Anglo Saxon Australian ... Whites, being blind to their racial identity, do not understand the implications of race and how it has affected their lives. This blindness makes it difficult for her to understand that she has white skin, therefore white privilege. (Robyn)

She demonstrates an openness to diversity, but struggles with it, in a very honest way:
This has made me concede that I have expressed racial views. My identity as White Australian was in jeopardy of becoming a White Australian in an Asian culture. The significance of this discovery is that I am ‘for’ a multicultural Australia, however I fear I have been more ‘tolerant’ of this … I don’t feel superior, I feel reduced, therefore uncomfortable. [I want] to emphasise that [I] feel no intentional ills towards ‘others’ and treat all people with the same respect that [they] require. (Robyn)

This struggle actually pre-empts her movement towards a commitment to social justice. This is not a glib politically correct assignment; this is the result of deep consideration, and some real change in her approach:

Her original intent as an educator was to be ‘colour blind’. After careful consideration she has decided that this is not necessarily an appropriate method for teaching within a multicultural classroom … [because] by ignoring students’ most obvious physical characteristics … teachers are also disregarding students’ unique cultural behaviours, beliefs, and perceptions … It has also come to her attention that she will need to be aware of the cultural capital of her students so she can support their educational needs. Finally we see that she needs to be aware of her own stereotyped perceptions on gender and not inflict these biased identity beliefs on her students … They are
individuals and she must know them, understand them and do all she can to ensure equity within her classroom. (Robyn)

Similarly, she comments:

I need to put myself in the OTHERS’ shoes, to view through their eyes. To be honest, this is something I felt I have always done, but I have never given as much depth [of thought] to the influences and implications of race, class and gender … within each person. (Robyn)

It is Robyn’s openly articulated and repeated affirmation of her commitment to equity and equality for all people that signposts this commitment to social justice for us. But what is just as interesting, from our perspective, is the fact that as was the case with Carolyn, this commitment appears to go hand in hand with self-awareness and self-reflectiveness and openness to diversity.

**Conclusion**

This article has explored the relationship between three dispositional factors that Garmon (2004) argues influence pre-service teachers’ likelihood of developing multicultural awareness and sensitivity (openness; self-awareness/self-reflectiveness; and a commitment to social justice). In building on Garmon’s thesis, pre-service teachers’ reflections exploring issues of identity were analysed for evidence of these dispositions. As dispositional factors may arguably be important predictors of how likely
pre-service teachers are to develop multicultural awareness and sensitivity during their preparation programme (Garmon, 2004), we have explored the development of and relationship between these dispositions in our research.

Given that all students who demonstrated commitment to social justice also demonstrated both openness and self-awareness/self-reflectiveness, and all students who demonstrated openness also demonstrated self-awareness/self-reflectiveness, our analysis suggests that these dispositions may develop in a sequential fashion from self-awareness/self-reflectiveness; moving towards openness; and finally a commitment to social justice. However, we acknowledge that, in a similar manner to many such tasks in similar courses, the assessment task explicitly asked students to reflect on their developing identities, and on diversity in general, and this may have increased the likelihood that they would demonstrate self-awareness/self-reflectiveness (although, as noted, some did not demonstrate any of the dispositions). We nevertheless propose that the dispositions discussed by Garmon (2004) may develop hierarchically (see Figure 1). The implications for teacher education are many if, indeed, this can be supported by further empirical comparative and/or longitudinal research.

While many teacher education programmes incorporate stand-alone courses which address issues of diversity and multicultural education, these understandings are historically not necessarily developed or built upon in other courses studied (Goodwin, 1997). Our hierarchical model suggests that given that this is the case, some students will not be able to demonstrate a commitment to social justice, or even the first steps
towards this in the form of self-awareness/self-reflectiveness, despite the best intentions of their lecturers and the incorporation of a course that asks them to critically reflect on their own and others’ circumstances. While we acknowledge that the prior experiences of students have a large impact on whether they are dispositionally ‘ready’ to be open to the messages contained within diversity courses (Kagan, 1992; Pohan, 1996), our model suggests that some students may never reach the required or pre-requisite levels of self-awareness in order to commit to social justice in their classrooms. This is particularly likely if teacher education courses on diversity continue to operate in fragmented ways, rather than encouraging students to move from dispositions of self-awareness/self-reflectiveness through to a disposition of commitment to social justice.

Based on our research, we would argue that one stand-alone course within a teacher preparation programme is not sufficient if we have expectations of changing the dispositions of our pre-service teachers. An alternative, more optimistic, interpretation of our model is that in order to promote socially just dispositions, teacher education programmes need to acknowledge the commitment of time that may be necessary in order to progress students along the hierarchy. In this context, the need for issues of social justice and diversity to be central components of the pre-service programme takes on particular significance. Indeed:

A well-articulated program with attention to diversity issues over several semesters offers the best hope for moving preservice teachers toward greater cultural

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2 We acknowledge, however, that some students (and therefore future teachers) may not ever demonstrate a commitment to social justice.
sensitivity and knowledge and toward strength and effectiveness in culturally
diverse classrooms. (Causey et al., 2000, p. 43)

It is our responsibility as teacher educators to support the teaching profession to
develop deeper, more meaningful ways of engaging with diversity in educational
settings. A reconsideration of the ways that issues of diversity and social justice are
integrated across programme settings is a possible first step to ensuring that teachers
are capable of making a difference for the most disadvantaged students and
“contributing to a more humane, equitable, socially just and democratic society” (Ambe,
2006, p. 694). Alternatively, our model suggests that given the developmental nature of
socially just dispositions, more realistic expectations of our ability to impact on these
within a limited timeframe may be in order if our desire is to graduate teachers who are
empowered to make a difference through their engagement with diverse student
populations.
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Table 1

*Disposition factors evident in the autoethnographies of participants*

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Commitment to social justice

Openness

Self-awareness/self-reflectiveness

Figure 1: Hierarchical development of dispositions