

## **“Come in and look around.” Professional development of student teachers through public pedagogy in a library exhibition.**

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*This paper describes a public pedagogy project embedded into *The Global Teacher*, a subject within the Bachelor of Education program for student teachers at an Australian university. The subject provides a global perspective on socio-political issues that shape education. In 2013, *The Global Teacher* introduced an approach that asked student teachers to create a museum-style exhibition depicting six global education themes. This exhibition was displayed in the State Library and the public were invited to engage with the installations and the student teachers who created them.*

*Our paper describes how the project was implemented by means of close collaboration between the QUT teacher educators, curators at the State Library of Queensland (SLQ), and student groups working on visually translating their understandings of global educational issues into a public exhibition. We discuss what was learned by our students and ourselves, as teacher educators, by engaging in this public pedagogy.*

**Keywords:** *global education, public library, group work, transformative learning, social justice, public learning space.*

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## Introduction

The public pedagogies project, which is described in this paper, was embedded into *The Global Teacher*, a subject within the Bachelor of Education program for student teachers at an Australian university.

As part of the process of globalisation, schools and colleges across the world are undergoing a transition from being nation-centered to becoming institutions that engage with diversity in a more interconnected world. Since 2004, *The Global Teacher* subject has been included at Queensland University of Technology (QUT) as part of the Bachelor of Education course because it helps educators prepare students to live and work interculturally, with a greater global understanding of socio-cultural, educational issues of planetary significance.

In 2012, QUT's *Global Teacher* subject became part of a project on 'Learning and Teaching in Public Spaces' led by Professor Maureen Ryan and Dr. Karen Charman at Victoria University. The focus of this library/museum research project, funded from the Australian Office of Learning and Teaching, was that of organising and implementing 'collaborative exchanges with museums/ libraries in experiential learning and citizenship'. The project was implemented in four Australian universities which were partners in the project: Victoria University, Deakin, Charles Sturt and QUT.

As the two teacher educators leading *The Global Teacher*, in 2013 we developed an approach that asked student teachers to create a museum-style exhibition as the outcome of their professional learning in this subject. They were asked to bring together six inter-related global education themes into a coherent exhibition, which would be displayed in the State Library for the public to interact with. The student teachers were therefore being invited to engage in public pedagogy as part of the 'Learning and Teaching in Public Spaces' project. Through the project, we were able to ask two research assistants to help us by documenting the development of the student exhibition, and interviewing the students and teacher educators about how they experienced it.

In our paper we outline the close collaboration with curators at the State Library of Queensland (SLQ) through which we scaffolded the student

teachers' learning with the help of experts in the pedagogy of exhibiting, while we carried out our role of extending their knowledge of global education perspectives. We discuss the learning of the student teachers in this project and also reflect on our own learning as teacher educators instituting a new pedagogical element into our Global Teacher subject.

The words "Come in and look around" in the title of this paper are those of the students themselves. Having mounted their six installations comprising the Global Teacher exhibition, they extended to members of the public at the State Library the invitation to 'Come in and look around' the exhibition room, so that these visitors could participate in viewing and discussing the learning displayed in the group installations.

### **Linking public pedagogy with the project 'Learning and Teaching in Public Spaces'.**

Public pedagogy is a concept that explores the learning opportunities made possible through different processes and spaces of education being offered outside formal schooling, for example in institutions such as museums and libraries. In our study, the collaboration between the teacher educators in a Faculty of Education and curators at the State Library Queensland, offered new learning opportunities to the student teacher participants, who were asked to recontextualise their knowledge of global educational issues as a public exhibition at the State Library. Burdick, Sandlin & O'Malley (2013) rightly note that the concept of public pedagogy focuses on *pedagogy*, as distinct from curriculum, and hence emphasises the theory and practice of teaching and learning with a particular focus on the experience of the learner (Sandlin, O'Malley, & Burdick, 2011). The philosophy shaping the concept of 'public pedagogy' has provided a natural synergy with the professional development focus of the Global Teacher on social justice and transformative pedagogy. Like Giroux (2004), we reject the limited definition of pedagogy as a set of applied methods limited to the classroom, and instead acknowledge that pedagogy constitutes both a form of cultural production and of cultural criticism, which is crucial for questioning dominant social and educational discourses:

*As a critical practice, pedagogy's role lies not only in changing how people think about themselves and their relationship to others and the world, but also in energizing students and others to*

*engage in those struggles that further possibilities for living in a more just society. (Giroux, 2004:64).*

This understanding of public pedagogy has at its centre a focus on ‘identifications’ in a globalised society and how we interact with ‘difference’, civic responsibility and notions of belonging that accentuate the agency of individuals and the power of community. As Hall has expressed this:

*By using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not ‘who we are’ or ‘where we came from’ so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves. (Hall, 1996:3)*

We take up these broader definitions of public pedagogy and relate them to the specific context of teacher education in Australia and a concomitant focus on educational practices around the globe. Such an approach can, for example, elucidate the nature of ‘race’ and advance the idea of ‘whiteness’ as social constructs arising in particular historical and social contexts, opening them up for analysis and critique (Kaillin, 2002). These understandings can then be considered in relation to social action and how teachers can incorporate anti-racist strategies within their teaching (Dadzie, 2000).

Having briefly outlined the theoretical basis of our approach to public pedagogy, it can be seen as a logical step to seek a public forum for the student teachers in *The Global Teacher* to share their global learning. In this case, the public arena took the form of an exhibition at the State Library Queensland, which contains public exhibition spaces and is located in the cultural centre in Brisbane city. The ethos at State Library Queensland dovetailed with our approach to public pedagogy, reflecting a contemporary self-awareness of the State Library’s role “as an intricate and potentially powerful instrument of communication, [which] will make available to the community and for the community’s purposes, its profound expertise at telling stories, eliciting emotion, triggering memories, stirring imagination, and prompting discovery – its expertise in stimulating all those object-based responses” (Weil, 2007:36). In this collaborative ‘Public Spaces’ project, the State Library demonstrated its community-centred approach, providing their exhibiting expertise

to support the student teachers in finding appropriate and powerful ways to express their global teacher understandings through group installations. As Race (2013:83) has noted, "Teaching methods are as important as content and it is how teachers are given opportunities to develop their practice which matters".

The students in our *Global Teacher* elective were in the first, second or third years of their Bachelor of Education degree, some specialising in early childhood and primary education, others in secondary education. Their reasons for enrolling in this elective were generally because they were interested in studying education in a global context, an approach not systematically offered in most other subjects within the B.Ed program. *The Global Teacher*, which started in 2004, engages students as future teachers in understanding and designing strategies for tackling problems of racism, poverty, violence, environmental sustainability and conflict/resolution in their classrooms in a context of understanding how other education systems across the world have been tackling such problems (see Hickling-Hudson, 2011, for an account of the themes and goals of the subject). The subject has offered between 30 and 50 undergraduate student teachers each year the opportunity to engage with these global education issues, which are expressed in the subject outline through the following topics:

- Identity and cultural representation
- Racism and anti-racist strategies in education
- Poverty and anti-poverty strategies in education
- The role of education in tackling violence
- Education for environmental and community health
- Changing schools for a changing world.

*The Global Teacher* subject thus helps educators prepare students to live and work interculturally and as globally aware citizens. This subject is informed by a postcolonial theory framework which provides a much needed focus on global justice:

*to help us tackle the challenge of current crises, including the failures of capitalism, the devastation of the environment, the intensification of injustice for the poor and for women, the escalation of ethnic, religious and political conflicts, skewed migration and refugee flows, and the threat of nuclear war.*

*Without studying a critical global context, it is difficult for teachers and researchers to analyse fully the intellectual and material violence of the traditional model of schooling inherited from European colonialism and perpetuated today....,or to have a foundation for alternative ways of thinking about and changing education to work towards social justice. (Hickling-Hudson, 2011:453)*

The syllabus of *The Global Teacher* is designed to engage students in critically studying these global issues and their relationship to education (see also Hickling-Hudson 2010, Hickling-Hudson 2006, Hickling-Hudson, Matthews and Woods 2004). The program starts by asking the student teachers to consider the distortions and omissions that occur when the dominant discourses of cultural identity articulated within many cultures are predominantly and uncritically heroic and exclusive. For example students examine and uncover the biases inherent in the discourses underlying the portrayals common in history and literature of 'benevolent' European societies bringing to the 'Other' the benefits of western civilisation, 'discovering' 'new' worlds, 'giving' aid to 'poor' countries, and helping them to become 'modernised'. We ask students to critically analyse these portrayals by considering these questions as: What messages are being sent by this discourse? What elements are left out? What elements are distorted? How well do selected curriculum areas (for example, literature, history, languages, art, drama, music), deal with these messages of cultural identity?

From the basis of immersing students in analysing cultural identity and representation, which was a foundational part of the subject, we were able to move directly into the goals of the 'Learning and Teaching in Public Spaces' project. These goals challenged us to expand the Global Teacher subject by means of getting students to think about public pedagogy – that is, extending their pedagogy beyond the classroom into the public sphere.

To prepare the students for this, we asked them to consider the role of public places in opening up discourse, and encouraging new ways of seeing. Selecting from the Internet examples of innovative and provocative public display spaces, including museums, libraries and art galleries, we asked students: "How do public places like these challenge

biased cultural discourses, and get people thinking otherwise?" The students were asked to consider the role of museums such as the Immigration Museum in Melbourne, the Te Papa Museum in Auckland, and the Museum of Slavery in Liverpool, England, in helping visitors to explore cultural ideas. They were invited to think about how they could as future 'global teachers', organise for their own students to visit local museums and explore how curators represent themes by displays of selected objects and artifacts. The technique of critical analysis would be employed to understand which stories are being told by the display, which are omitted and why, and how all of this represents cultural identity discourse. We arranged for students to visit local museum displays and analyse their approaches, and discuss how they might design their own class 'museum' to illustrate themes of cultural diversity and inclusivity.

Until involvement in the 'Public Spaces' project, the pre-service teachers in our elective had had no experience of a three-dimensional representation of information. They had communicated their study of 'Global Teacher' themes through two tasks on which they were assessed, (a) a group-based curriculum development project, and (b) an individual, research-based, theoretical essay. The curriculum project was carried out by six small-groups, each one presenting a seminar on an issue that it selected from the six Global Teacher theme options. The seminar involved skills of researching and designing an interactive lesson, and communicating it to their peers. The dialogic nature of this group task enacted the type of collaborative pedagogy that we as the teacher educators were advocating. The second assessment task was an essay that asked students to reflect on their experience of studying selected themes in the subject.

With the 'Public Space' project, we were now asking students to translate their knowledge into arranging objects in an exhibition involving visual and sensory modes. We explained that the exhibition would not itself be graded, but would be an experiential project upon which the students could draw to inform their reflective essay. In this way we sought to embed reflections on the Global Teacher Exhibition as a central learning outcome for this subject.

We also undertook a collaborative consultative process with educators at the State Library Queensland to establish the framework for this new public pedagogy within the existing Global Teacher curriculum.

### **Dimensions of a public pedagogies approach**

#### *Protocols for collaboration*

The stages of the collaborative process that underpinned the mounting of the Global Teacher Exhibition were first sketched out in a Memorandum of Understanding, drawn up between the coordinator of learning and participation at the State Library Queensland and the two teacher educators at QUT. This MOU confirmed the protocols for collaboration so that the expertise of both parties was brought together in innovative and creative ways. A testament to the positive outcomes of this collaboration is that this MOU has been re-established along very similar lines each year since its inception in 2013. At the heart of this collaborative project is the commitment to ensuring that the student's professional learning experiences should benefit from the different pedagogies underpinning the professional work of the State Library and the Education Faculty at QUT.

#### *Tour of SLQ*

The Public Pedagogies process in our project commenced with a tour of Queensland museum and the State Library Queensland exhibition spaces to study how socio-political and historical issues were represented in these public spaces. From this overview, the State Library then provided more finely detailed discussion of the key elements and concerns associated with mounting an exhibition. The aim was for the students to develop their own ideas about how they could represent the topics in *The Global Teacher* in a visual, three-dimensional way. The overall objective of the subject remained, in that they were asked to present their interpretation of education problems and solutions in a framework that is both global and local, taking account of critical post-colonial perspectives.

## *Workshops*

At regular intervals during the nine-weeks of the Global Teacher subject, the students attended workshops led by State Library curatorial staff in which the students were introduced to elements of the technique of curating an exhibition. These workshops were held at both institutions and also included an online session in which students accessed an overview of SLQ resources pertinent to their Global Teacher studies and the framing of their group installations for the exhibition.

## *Supervision of students*

The mounting of the exhibition within one of the SLQ public display spaces was supervised jointly by members of both institutions. The QUT teacher educators provided input and feedback on the global education content that was the focus of the exhibition. Meanwhile, the SLQ staff provided expertise and advice on the theoretical and practical aspects of successful exhibiting. The exhibition itself took place at the State Library on 1<sup>st</sup> May and was open to the public.

## **Student-teachers' learning through the exhibition**

The student groups presented six installations in the library exhibition, each one representing one of the topics from 'The Global Teacher' subject. Given the limitations of space in this paper, we describe only two of these installations in detail. We show how these two groups decided to deal with the content and presentation of their topic and their reflections on their associated learning, using these three sub-headings:

- 1) *Knowledge and content* – how the group interpreted and represented the topic
- 2) *Exhibiting in 3 Dimensions* – how the group used symbolic objects, how they linked these objects to create a statement, and how they interacted with the public, inviting visitors to examine and interact with their exhibition
- 3) *Reflections* on their learning through this experience.

## **Group 1: Violence and Peace Studies**

### **Knowledge and Content**

This group chose to focus on three dimensions of the ‘Violence and Peace Studies’ theme. Their exhibition showed how violence can be manifested in three sites: war (they chose the example of war in Syria), in the curriculum (for example, by the actual teaching of ethnic hatred for the ‘other’ as between communities of Greek and Turkish heritage in Cyprus, 1963-1974), and by school violence, including gender bullying and cyber bullying. They designed a Peace Studies curriculum program to suggest how the violence in schools could be countered by ethical teachers.

### **Exhibiting in 3 Dimensions**

The group used the symbolic visuals of hanging two large umbrellas from the ceiling – these represented, in their words, “a metaphor for shelter away from the violence”. They attached three-dimensional objects to the spokes of the umbrellas to communicate their messages. One student described this installation vividly in his final essay:

*My group’s exhibit, titled ‘Violence Suspended’, [used] two large suspended umbrellas hung from the exhibition space ceiling to act as a metaphor for visitors to gain some insights into the Cypriot civil conflict and the implicit teaching of violence against the ‘other’ to students. [We] attached laminated documents including pictures, graphs, personal stories from those who experienced the civil war, and explanations of peace/future studies as strategies to redress the teaching of hatred for the ‘other’ in Cypriot schools.”*  
*(Student essay, 2013)*

The objects hanging from the umbrellas were clearly linked to make implicit statements that illustrated the theme. The ability of this installation to engage visitors’ attention on a number of levels was well explained by one of the group members:

*People are drawn to ...the artifacts: pictures, information about violence in Cyprus & Syria, information about violence against women. Also a look at a peace studies program. So it’s all just hanging there....drawing in people like a moth to the light so they*

**can come in and have a look around.** (*Student interview, 2013*).

### **Reflecting on their learning**

This opportunity of exhibiting their group's work on violence and peace studies as an installation at the State Library was a novel experience for these student teachers, and enabled them to see new pedagogic possibilities as the visitors to the exhibition spanned a range of ages, from young children to retirees, all of whom showed active interest and engagement:

*Through the library exhibition I have learnt how teachers can effectively change the way they present a topic to convey a message and engage an audience irrespective of their age.*

*Group members were also able to relate their new pedagogic skills to their future work as classroom teachers:*

*I found viewing this exhibition has taught me to think outside the box when it comes to representing ideas and information in classrooms.*

### **Group 2: The Environment and Community Health**

#### **Knowledge and content**

Like the other groups, Group 2 found that doing the exhibition helped them to think about overlapping points. Their interpretation and recontextualising of the content of their topic, showed how they could visually relate environmental issues to those of community health. Their mounting of the installation allowed them to display themes of concern to them including Environmental Footprints, Sustainability, Recycling and Community Health.

#### **Exhibiting in 3 Dimensions**

Creating a visual argument by their sequencing of photos and maps, this group displayed the connection in several countries between poor water supplies, inadequate sanitation and death rates. They symbolically represented the concept of recycling by displaying their exhibition on

cardboard boxes instead of tables. They created a tree of sustainability, and invited people to write their goals about sustainability and hang them on the tree. Once the visitors had done that, they would look at the group's photos of the problems that were being experienced globally in community health. One of the group members, in a recorded interview, described the rationale for designing their installation in this way:

*We are using cardboard boxes instead of tables to reinforce the concept of recycling... Our sustainability tree... is basically for people who walk into the exhibit to think about something they can do to promote sustainability. So the onus is back on them to write their goal down to display on the tree. So the tree will have everyone that comes in; it will show all the different goals they have and by reading that other people will be able to see what else they can do to live more sustainably. We've also got photos all around our exhibition with issues of different populations around the world... [For example] one of the things our group focused on with community health is water, and how sanitation influences the death rates around the world.*

It is clear from these words, that the group are primarily concerned with actively engaging members of the public in their display. They saw that this could be applied when as teachers they would have to engage their students in what they were learning:

*I thought that putting things together for the exhibition was more reflective than written work for me. It was more visual so I could look into it deeper and use my senses more, which is how I learnt as a kid and it was more powerful and I'd like to share that with my students.*

### **Reflecting on their learning**

Students had been introduced to curating as a new way of inviting an active engagement through the senses, not just through reading or listening to authoritative texts, as in usual classroom pedagogy. This broader appeal to the senses made an impact on the students' own learning experiences, with group members noting they were "immersed" and "involved" in questions of environmental sustainability and community health:

*Instead of keeping myself sheltered from the issues and problems happening around the world, I was immersed in a global setting, given the chance to explore dilemmas faced by many countries so I could absorb the sort of information I'd need to teach overseas.*

*The main insights I gained are the effective solutions to classroom engagement and the importance of encouraging students to get involved with the environmental initiatives and programs.*

## **Overview of Participants' learning in this Public Pedagogy project**

### **Student teachers' learning**

In the reflective comments of the students in the two highlighted groups, it can be seen that the task of mounting an exhibition of global education themes had a notable impact, invoking *deep* professional learning in the participants (Biggs & Tang, 2011). Their comments are indicative of the student participants as a whole. Interviews conducted by research assistants with all of the student groups at the end of the semester showed each group expressing strong learning outcomes from having created the Global Teacher Exhibition. They learnt to see themselves more clearly as teachers in a global context, realising that this involves connecting with the community – both with the State Library Queensland and a range of visitors. Some of the student teachers interviewed looked forward to possible long-term relationships with the library, bringing their own future students into the library space.

### **Teacher educators' learning**

Whilst the focus in this paper has been primarily on the student teachers, their perspectives and their learning, we as teacher educators have also learnt much from this project. One insight was a deeper understanding of the nature of public pedagogy, including the strategies for organising and implementing student engagement in it. We learnt how effective this approach could be in helping student teachers to integrate content and pedagogy. Public pedagogy enabled a 'real world' outcome – the exhibition – as a product of the assessment process. We realised from the students' feedback how stimulating such an authentic task could be, and how it could influence their understanding of effective pedagogy. For example, a student told one of the interviewers:

*The exhibition has given us an extension. Normally the end point would be to write an essay, access some peer-reviewed literature, but this exhibition has sparked an interest and depth of understanding. It makes more impact on what we've been researching. It could be replicated in the classroom – it doesn't have to be in the State Library.*

In changing our pedagogy within The Global Teacher we needed also to change the assessment focus to include directly the goals of public pedagogy. We had initially thought it undesirable to directly assess the group installations in the exhibition. These student teachers were not art students and therefore we felt it inappropriate to evaluate the quality of their exhibition work. This was a misguided stance to take, as we realised once the students began detailed preparations for the exhibitions in their groups. Creating a coherent group installation and then bringing these six group installations together as a cohesive and meaningful exhibition at the State Library involved a large commitment of time and effort from the students. The learning outcomes from each stage of the process needed to be acknowledged as part of the assessment, rather than being only indirectly addressed through a broad-based reflection on the experience in the final essay. The students understandably felt that their hard work and creativity in mounting the installations needed to be more precisely accounted for in a way that acknowledged and rewarded their demonstrated professional development. We have changed the assessment practice in The Global Teacher subsequently.

We found that public pedagogy stimulates new learning for educators, as well as their students. This collaborative project has demonstrated to us that teacher educators and library/museum staff can negotiate strategies for sharing cross-institutional expertise in the preparation of teachers. Stepping outside of one's familiar educational discourses to create new pedagogy is an unsettling experience for academics and specialist curators, all of whom are used to being regarded as experts in their field. At the outset there was uncertainty about what roles to take and what strategies to use. Negotiation and a collaborative approach to achieving a successful exhibition opened up new ways of working together that have contributed to our professional development.

## Conclusion

Educators striving to promote an intercultural, global philosophy and environment for pre-service student teachers, face complex tasks. These involve educating future teachers to analyse global problems and possible solutions in areas such as: violence stemming from socio-cultural, ethnic, racial and gender conflicts; environmental devastation; and narrow, insular traditions of representation and pedagogy. Student teachers have to be introduced to skills of refashioning curricula and assessment systems, and designing pedagogies that deal creatively with the controversies between hegemonic traditions versus plural ways of seeing the world.

While the global teacher subject has been committed to these goals and strategies since its inception in 2004, we found that our particular role in the project “Learning and Teaching in Public Spaces” added a valuable dimension to the subject, giving the students the opportunity of working with library curators to create a public pedagogy exhibition. This experience engaged the students in a powerful strategy of communication, stimulating imagination, emotion, and discovery. Students learnt to communicate a detailed message in the public learning space of a library exhibition, using a different kind of creativity in conceptualising and representing ideas three-dimensionally. Mounting the exhibition showed them how teachers could engage the community, ranging from the SLQ curators to library visitors. They learnt to see themselves as teachers who could take their ideas beyond the narrow confines of a classroom into the public sphere.

As teacher educators, it was valuable for us to negotiate, with SLQ staff, strategies for sharing cross-institutional expertise in the preparation of teachers. The State Library became not only a resource for information, but also helped to develop the pedagogical skills of the student teachers by guiding them in exhibiting and curating themes of global education that were of interest to a wider public. Students and teacher educators alike learnt from the project the value of developing in future teachers an approach to public pedagogy.

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