Chelas, Ansars and Acolytes: Becoming a teacher in, and for, a remote and culturally diverse community

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I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree in any tertiary education institution.

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Abstract

This study examines the way in which three Education Assistants (EAs) engaged with an Initial Teacher Education (ITE) program at an Australian Higher Education Institution (HEI). In order to assist the EAs to engage with the ITE program the school in which they worked developed a series of intervention strategies. These strategies combined to form what became known as the Christmas Island District High School (CIDHS) Trainee Teacher Program. Through this program the EAs were provided support in the various critical aspects of the ITE program.

Within an Australian context the EAs were from non-mainstream backgrounds. They were mature age women who had disrupted educational backgrounds, spoke English as a second language, and were living in a geographically remote location. Their journey from 'Education Assistant' to 'Teacher', via an ITE program and with the support of the school, is the subject of this inquiry.

A grounded qualitative research methodology is used to investigate and analyse the participation of the EAs from their points of view. The personal and grounded experiences of the participants in this study are then supplemented by a review of the international literature pertaining to non-mainstream participation in Higher Education.

Specifically, the study examines significant aspects of an ITE program including:

- Entrance via alternative access programs
- Engagement with course theory and school practicums
- Recognition for Prior Learning (RPL)
- The implications of studying via distance mode
- The role of mentors
- The impact of funding structures and fees on non-mainstream students

As well as the pragmatic aspects of the program, this study also examines the critical impact that various Discourses (Gee, 1999), and the ideologies that underpin them, had on the ability of the participants to successfully make the transition from Education Assistant to Teacher.

The dissertation ends with a series of recommendations for action for the HEI sector, schools sectors and regulatory authorities. The aims are to add to the international literature on non-mainstream participation in ITE and to aid in the development of ITE programs that better address the needs of non-mainstream students.

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