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## Teacher Education: Crossing the Cultural Borders of Australia and Asia

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### Abstract:

Becoming ‘Asia literate’ is a pivotal part of the federal government’s ‘Education Revolution’. The federal government asserts that ‘equipping young Australians with the knowledge and skills to communicate and work with our regional neighbours... such skills must be a core element of an Australian school curriculum’ (Gillard, 2008), especially in a climate of globalisation. Cultural intelligence, as suggested here, is of economic value, as intercultural knowledge and understandings are vital to preparing an Australia workforce that is globally competitive, and in particular, can capitalise on the economic opportunities available in Australia and region.

There are, however, increasingly problematic issues surrounding the implementation of curriculum that fosters intercultural understanding between Australia and Asia, the presence of which ultimately questions how teacher-educator programs can prepare graduates to engage effectively in crossing such cultural borders.

Using curriculum documents and a selection of teacher education, this paper explores how the concept of being ‘Asia literate’ resides in current federal government policy, and in particular, it explores the tensions around the development of an ‘Asia literate’ curriculum in terms of ideological differences with traditional Eurocentric approaches to education and what is known about effective cultural education. It then identifies and discusses the challenges for teacher-educator programs to equip graduates to realise these curriculum needs.

The dilemma of introducing ‘another’ or ‘other’ culture without enforcing unnecessary division or creating insurmountable borders is complex. In light of this, Said poses a critical question: “Is the notion of a distinct culture (or race, or religion, or civilisation) a useful one, or does it always get involved either in self-congratulation (where one discusses one's own) or hostility and aggression (when one discusses the ‘other’)?” (p.325-326) Fostering intercultural understanding is crucial to becoming ‘Asia literate’, however an approach that implicitly or explicitly promotes a division between cultures and communities is problematic, especially as the *National Statement for Engaging Young Australians with Asia in Australian Schools*, approved by the Ministerial council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs in 2005, highlights that: ‘our future is inextricably linked to the strength of the relationships and understandings that we forge with Asian countries’ (AEF, 2006).

On the basis of this analysis, the paper identifies and addresses three key implications for teacher educators in the context of the federal government’s ‘Asia literate’ policies. First, it investigates what knowledge base teachers need to ensure cultural awareness development of students immersed in ‘Asia literate’ curriculum. Then, it explores how teacher educator programs can prepare teachers for this challenge. The paper closes with reflections on what import existing teacher educator programs place on the ‘Asia literate’ focus, as available in current programs, and raises questions on the implications of the representation and circulation of ‘Asia literate’ knowledge in the tertiary setting.

**Keywords:** culture, curriculum, Asia, relationships.

## Introduction – Becoming ‘Asia Literate’

Becoming ‘Asia literate’ is a pivotal part of the federal Government’s ‘Education Revolution’. Promoted as a ‘key platform for productivity growth; an education revolution ... driven in part by [a] \$11 billion Education Investment Fund’ (Rudd, 2008), and now with the National Curriculum Board’s consultative process underway, the conceptualisation of ‘Asia literacy’ in Australia’s future curriculum warrants investigation. The announcement that the ‘Australian Government will make a total of \$6.3 billion available over the next four years to enable the Asia Education Foundation (AEF) to further this objective’ further strengthens this as ‘a major process of modernisation of Australian education that needs to take place if we are to equip our people to thrive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century’ (Gillard, 2008).

The utilitarian call for an educational agenda to develop an Australian “export culture which is ‘Asia-literate’: i.e. one which possesses the range of linguistic and cultural competencies required by Australians to operate effectively at different levels in their various dealings with the region – as individuals, organisations and as a nation” (COAG, 1994, p.2) has underpinned Australia-Asia related reports since the 1960s (Henderson, 2003). This momentum, however, was greatly impeded by the Liberal/National Federal government’s decision to cut funding of the National Asian Language/Studies Strategy for Australian Schools in 2002. Previously, Kevin Rudd, then Opposition Foreign Affairs Minister, was the Chair of the strategy’s precursor; the Council of Australian Governments’ report *Asian Languages and Australia’s Economic Future* (in fact, this report is also known as the ‘Rudd Report’). Now that he is Prime Minister, Rudd is in a prime position to generate an ‘Asian renaissance’ of sorts.

The shape this renaissance will take is still crystallising. The *National Statement for Engaging Young Australians with Asia in Australian Schools*, approved by the Ministerial council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs in 2005, states that:

Asia is now the region whose current emergence in one of history’s greatest catalysts for worldwide change. Australians require new skills, knowledge and understanding related to the Asian region and Australia’s engagement with Asia in order to meet the challenges and opportunities of living and working in the twenty-first century.  
(AEF, 2006)

Despite increasing moves towards engaging with Asia, Pang argues that approaches are problematic and the ‘sustainability of the policy initiatives is unpredictable’ (2005, p.173).

This paper explores the complexities of what being ‘Asia literate’ means in the Australian educational setting through discourse analysis. This involves looking not only at what is considered to be ‘Asia literate’, in policy documents but also the ways in which it is negotiated and constituted in and out of school discourse of ‘Asia literacy’, and ultimately informing how notions of being ‘Asia literate’ is taken up by teachers. In particular, it explores the tensions around conceptualisations of culture and the development of an ‘Asia literate’ curriculum in terms of ideological differences with traditional Eurocentric discourses. There are increasingly problematic issues surrounding the implementation of curriculum that fosters intercultural understanding between Australia and Asia, the presence of which ultimately questions how teacher-education programs can prepare graduates to engage effectively in crossing such cultural borders and realise the curriculum needs demanded by the government’s ‘Asia literate’ education revolution.

The discussion starts with a definition of what ‘Asia literate’ means. This definition is then discussed in terms of its relevance to growing notions of ‘cultural literacy’ to establish the assertion that being ‘Asia literate’ means knowing Asian culture. This is followed by an investigation of how being ‘Asia literate’ manifests in curriculum and how teacher education, which empowers pre-

service teachers to engage effectively with curriculum demands, facilitates this manifestation in multicultural education. The final reflection identifies key factors for further exploration of the role of teacher education in fostering positive cultural understandings to realise an ‘Asia literate’ future for Australian schools.

### **What does ‘Asia literate’ mean?**

Not surprisingly, what constitutes ‘Asia literacy’ and effective cultural education in this educational policy continues to be surrounded by considerable debate. ‘Literacy’ has increasingly become a political construct that facilitates marketing of various agendas for various reasons. The *Shape Paper Consultation Report* (2009) offering feedback on the proposed national curriculum cites areas of financial, consumer, Asia and statistical literacy as items for consideration in future implementation. Discourse surrounding the term literacy goes beyond a narrow definition of the function of language and extends to other intellectual and educational practices. The term ‘Asia literate’ was made public by the then Prime Minister Hawke in the 1980s. It has been circulating in political and education policy rhetoric since. The Ministerial Consultative Council (MCC) on Curriculum paper; *Asian Studies in Queensland Schools*, published in 1991, explains that:

although the concept of Asia literacy does include language competency, it goes beyond this. The concept also embraces the notion of cultural literacy...the term ‘Asia literacy’, therefore, refers to the intellectual uses of the study of Asia and the question of Australian identity. (p.3)

Muller further elaborated on ‘cultural literacy’ at the Social Education Association of Australia conference in 2006 by suggesting a framework for the discussion of cultural literacy through 11 attributes of the ‘globally, culturally literate person’; these attributes included knowledge of the complexity and constructedness of culture, and the problematics of cultural universals, cultural arrogance and cultural stereotypes. The term ‘Asia literate’ therefore has become a catchphrase used by the Australian government to encompass a complex endeavour of ‘Asian studies’ that encompasses both ‘Asia’ and ‘cultural’ literacy:

which can be difficult to define given the enormity and diversity of Asia and the multifaceted nature of its cultures...Asian studies is regarded as the study of Asia, its languages, societies, cultures, economies, history and geography...This concept also embraces the notion of cultural literacy in a form that transcends a superficial familiarity with customs, dress, food and social norms. (MCC, 1991, p3)

Therefore, there are clear links between being ‘Asia literate’ and knowing Asian culture. Thorough understandings of the concept of ‘culture’ are inherent not only to knowing Asian culture and becoming ‘Asia literate’ but in broader calls from both educational bodies and wider society for multicultural education. ‘Asia literacy’ fits agreeably with educational discourses of globalisation, multiculturalism and internationalisation of the curriculum. The *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* calls for Australian education to ‘ensure that schooling contributes to a socially cohesive society that respects and appreciates cultural, social and religious diversity’ (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2008, p.7) and create active and informed citizens that ‘are able to relate to and communicate across cultures, especially the cultures and countries of Asia’ (op.cit, p.9). The reality though is that the potential of these educational trends is broad and the curriculum already crowded, therefore implementation is increasingly problematic.

### **What does ‘cultural literacy’ entail?**

Becoming ‘Asia literate’ requires that Australian students engage meaningfully, and regularly, with dynamic and complex Asian cultures that may not be their own. There are two significant issues to

be addressed here; firstly, understanding the concept of culture, and secondly, incorporating cultural education into a curriculum that already seems insurmountably fraught with Anglo-Australian alliances.

The conceptualisation of culture is a point of discussion that elicits a range of views in educational circles and beyond. The most common critique is that discourses of culture are too simplistic. Defining culture crudely as the ideas, customs and way of life of a particular society is an obscure brief and should not be prescribed by norms ‘as if culture is a static and hermetically sealed thing’ (Tsen Khoo in Ling, 2001, p.165). As such, negotiating ‘culture’ and the plethora of possible outcomes available is an undeniably complex task. In anthropological spheres, the concept of culture is under attack, yet arguments about culture in the school curriculum, in America at least, occur largely ‘in ignorance of, or indifference to, this conceptual critique’ (Wax in Hoffman, 1996, p.549). Geertz (1973) is extremely wary of absolutes regarding the study of culture and asserts that the study of culture is interpretive, in search of meaning, not complete explanation. As such, there is no definitive explanation for culture but rather a best practice approach that advocates social inquiry. This anthropological model highlights that to study culture is much more than a need to codify with straightforward interpretations, rather cross-cultural comprehension to understand the different levels at which anything ‘cultural’ (and anything can be cultural) operates at any given time, breaking down simplistic notions of culture.

Culture is commonly simplified to ‘visible’ terms. ‘Visible’ culture is defined by explicit characteristics of generally ethnic culture such as native dress, language and food. It is in this way that culture is frequently taught as either a distinct entity or a source of commonality. The former emphasis on culture as a discrete entity is significant as the teaching of an alternative culture as a separate, well-defined unit ensures that it can be seen as inherently different yet ‘equal’, and equal, in this reductionistic state, is non-threatening (Hoffman, 1996) to the dominant or existing culture. This perspective of culture, as defined by ‘visible’ facets also creates ‘other’ imagery; where a cultural difference becomes an aspect of the exotic ‘other’, portrayed as an ‘authentic’ and ‘unadulterated’ part of a particular cultural experience. This discourse of the ‘other’ has proved strong in cultural discourse, yet occludes other possible ways of viewing culture as it constructs cultural borders. The latter emphasis focuses on the familiar, often in a categorical way that ‘does little to help learners move beyond their own cultural frames of reference’ (Hoffman, 1996, p.553). It also means that ‘valuing cultural differences or developing positive attitudes is unlikely in the absence of real knowledge about culture – that is, knowledge that challenges one’s own ways of seeing the world’ (Hoffman, 1996, p.554).

A process that incorporates social inquiry and challenging one’s own ways of seeing the world is essential as prejudice still underpins assertions of tolerance and multiculturalism in the conceptualisation of culture in Australian schools. In many ways Australia has progressed dramatically from the days of the White Australia policy however historical acts do have contemporary consequences and it seems that the legacy of this infamous policy perseveres to some extent in Australian culture. Former Prime Minister John Howard identifies the dominant culture of Australia as Anglo-Celtic when he states that ‘most nations experience some level of cultural diversity while also having a dominant cultural pattern running through them’ (in Wong, 2007). Rizvi (1997) supports this realisation by stating that ‘in popular culture, the colonial legacy remain(s) entrenched in the nation’s collective psyche’ (p.17).

Furthermore, this reality is increasingly problematic as the ‘other’ potentially becomes increasingly marginalised and ‘exoticised’. Binaries between ‘East’ and ‘West’ are part of the colonial legacy and have long been examined in scholarly work. Edward Said is a respected critic in this area and poses a critical question: “Is the notion of a distinct culture (or race, or religion, or civilisation) a useful one, or does it always get involved either in self-congratulation (where one discusses one’s

own) or hostility and aggression (when one discusses the ‘other’)?” (1978/1991, p.325-326) The binary division of this problematic is further reinforced by the complexity of the term ‘Asia’ itself. Similar to ‘culture’, ‘Asia is also a historically contested concept. ‘Asia’ is often homogenised as one distinct entity, whereas the reality is that this one term is often used to delineate geographical, cultural, economic and political boundaries. Historically, the term ‘Asia’ itself is debatable: ‘while the word ‘Asia’ is in everyday use and is printed in atlases, it is nevertheless a widely contested concept’ (AEF, 2006, p.7). It can be defined in geographical, cultural, religious, historical and linguistic terms to create a point of reference. Too often ‘Asia’ or ‘Asian culture’ is essentialised as a single generalised culture or people, rather than a more dynamic conceptualisation that recognises the complexity of the collection of cultures that it really is.

### **How does being ‘Asia Literate’ manifest in the curriculum?**

For educators, the existence of cultural binaries should not serve as indenturing a paralysis from which it is impossible to engage with intercultural understanding, but rather an impetus to take Said’s further suggestion of what this idea of Orientalism instigates; ‘a certain kind of self-consciousness about cultural artifacts that had been considered impervious to this kind of analysis’ (in Viswanathan, 2002, p.116). The ability to engage effectively with cultural education and studies of Asia demands then a certain level of self-awareness on the part of the teacher and the curriculum, especially if the teacher, as figures would suggest, is Anglo-Australian. As Henderson recommends, ‘the ability to understand cultures different from our own is challenging and dependent upon our capacity for reciprocity and self reflection’ (2004, p.5).

Put in this context, it is significant that the Australian teaching profession is overwhelmingly Anglo-Australian and characteristically white and middle class (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Education, 2007). Logically, it would follow that if the essential population of teachers is ‘overwhelmingly Anglo-Australian’ then perhaps curriculum discourse, despite the best of intentions, may reflect this phenomenon too. The Department of Education and Training in Australia (2007) stated that the *National Statement for Engaging Young Australians with Asia in Australian Schools* was endorsed by all state and territory education ministers in 2005 and now informing curriculum reform across the country. In May this year the Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard maintained that “it is impossible to conceive of a future Australian education system that does not take the study of Asia seriously” (AEF Advisory Board, 2008). And yet, despite the proliferation of many quality curriculum support documents, a large majority of which come from the Australian Education Foundation in conjunction with Curriculum Corporation<sup>1</sup>, the ‘Call to Action: Asia literacy for every young Australian’ document circulated in 2008 states that ‘no education system explicitly requires schools to teach about the Asian region’ (AEF Advisory Board, 2008).

In light of this paradigm, a closer critique of the curriculum is needed to explore if vestiges of more traditional Eurocentric approaches are resisting the call to be ‘Asia literate’. Additionally, attempts to ‘Asianise’ the curriculum may cause tensions with existing measures to ‘Indigenise’ curriculum, making the crossing of cultural borders in the curriculum increasingly challenging. For example, the Queensland Studies Authority (QSA), the governing body for curriculum in Queensland which develops, approves and revises syllabuses and curriculum materials for the Preparatory Year to Year 12, has an Indigenous Perspective initiative. This initiative is designed to “provide a balanced representation of cultural, social, spiritual and political beliefs, respectful of the diversity of Indigenous histories and peoples” (QSA, 2008), yet there is no parallel initiative for Asian perspectives or even a link on the QSA website to benchmark initiatives such as the *National Statement for Engaging Young Australians with Asia in Australian Schools*. This suggests that while there are some explicit references to aspects of Asian studies in the Queensland curriculum of the obvious choices; Languages other than English, Studies of Society and the Environment,

English and Arts areas, references outside these key learning areas are, at best, implicit and will not be rising to the forefront of QSA dialogue in the near future.

It seems that in future national curriculum moves too, the ‘Asian renaissance’ is slow to take shape. In *The Shape of the National Curriculum: A Proposal for Discussion* (2008, p.3) reference to Asia is explicit, yet brief in the educational goals for young Australians; ‘[students] are able to relate and communicate across cultures, especially in relation to cultures and countries of the Asia-Pacific’. However, while the statement is explicitly highlighted in the *National History Curriculum: Initial advice* (2008, p.15), reference to the intent of the statement in the *National English Curriculum: Initial advice* is implicit at best. Some of these tension points have already been highlighted in the *Shape Paper Consultation Report* (2009) which presents feedback on the 2008 document *The Shape of the National Curriculum: A Proposal for Discussion*. Feedback suggested Asian languages and cultures need to be a focus in content of all learning areas and that Asia literacy be included as a principle to underpin curriculum and specifications for curriculum development. Despite the rhetoric, curriculum requiring teachers to ‘do Asia’ is still not necessarily overt *or* comprehensive, as the above feedback has so clearly noted.

### **Crossing cultural borders in teacher education**

The gaps between theory and practice could be considered a self-perpetuating cycle that can be traced back to the approaches regarding the teaching of culture – it seems logical that if teachers do not have self-efficacy in cultural education then they will be reluctant to embrace and find a place for studies of Asia in the curriculum, studies that hinge on a solid knowledge base of cultural awareness. It is a reasonable concern that if teacher educators are not addressing Asia literacy in tertiary settings then there is limited hope that pre-service teachers will be able to impart effectual ‘Asia literacy’ on their students.

In 2001 the National Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools (NALSAS) Strategy released results of a scan of studies of Asia activities in pre-service primary and secondary teacher education in the year 2000. The summary of this scan is disquieting. Overall:

- the vast majority of the subjects taught devoted 5% or less of the class time to content on Asia, and the inclusion of additional Asia-related content was a low priority for faculties and departments
- both Deans of Education and teacher educators suggested that specialised staff would be needed and that professional development in some form would be required to shift the emphasis [a response which implies expertise in this area is limited]
- and finally, findings were increasingly alarming when considering that the sample was self-selecting and considerably biased towards those already teaching about Asia and highlights that Asia-related content does not occupy a central role in pre-service teacher education programs.

(NALSAS, 2001)

An implication inherent in these results is that courses designed by teacher educators are designed to empower pre-service teachers to engage effectively with curriculum demands and as has already been established, the current situation in school curriculum militates against targeting studies of Asia in pre-service education because, put quite simply, it is generally not demanded by, nor explicit in, the current curriculum.

A review of a sample of pre-service primary and secondary teacher education at two Queensland universities is similarly problematic. A closer look at a regional institution and metropolitan institution reveals that in 2009 teacher education programs, emphasis on studies of Asia is also generally implicit at best. While it is clear that there are obvious limitations by only looking at the

subject outline, the purpose of this assessment is to identify the extent in which ‘Asia’ is represented in the subjects as a comparative starting point for investigating further the place of ‘Asia literacy’ in teacher education, not to criticise or discomfit these institutions and as such they are not identified in this paper. The subject outline also tends to represent the official and consistent aspects of the course as well as a ‘snapshot’ of the theoretical framework of the course. While the absence of ‘Asia’ in the subject outline suggests that it might be incidentally considered or subsumed in the broad notion of ‘culture’, it also indicates explicitly, that it is not given specific emphasis.

At the regional institution both the primary and secondary teacher education had the same core subjects. One of its subjects, *Education for Cultural Diversity*, makes more explicit reference to ‘cultural diversity...identities, identity...culturally inclusive classroom practices’ and explicitly outlines understandings of culture in several of the learning outcomes and *Studies in Sociocultural Understanding* at the metropolitan university appears to operate in a similar way and was the only subject that made any explicit mention of culture. While the latter did offer a number of electives that encompass studies of Asia and/or aspects of it, it was not clear if both primary and secondary education students were exposed to engagement with concepts of culture.

From this comparison, it appears that Asia-related content still does not occupy a central role in pre-service teacher education programs in Queensland institutions, which requires further consideration of the place of ‘Asia literacy’ in teacher education. While studies of Asia are evident in elective courses available at the metropolitan university, the subject outlines of core subjects, as a representative sample of subjects and their priorities, are consistent with AEF Queensland’s findings and still have some way to travel to ensure meaningful representation and circulation of ‘Asia literate’ knowledge in tertiary settings. This confirms the AEF Advisory Board’s statement that ‘the majority of our teachers have had no opportunity to learn about Asia in their own education’ (AEF Advisory Board, 2008).

The problematics of inserting ‘Asia literacy’, incorporating Asian cultural education, into teacher education is further highlighted by analysis of multicultural teacher education coursework syllabi in the United States (2008), which found that ‘what passes for multicultural teacher education in most cases is not multicultural at all...[and tends] to focus on celebrating diversity or understanding the cultural ‘other’ (Gorski, 2008, p.309). These results can be used as a point of comparison to discuss what should and what does constitute multicultural teacher education in Australia, as well as confirming the need for social inquiry in studying cultures, especially if, as previously noted, Australia’s colonial legacy is realised in popular culture discourses of ‘dominant’ and ‘other’ cultures. Furthermore, in the United States discourses on culture are also found to be more effective in challenging dominant viewpoints in teacher educator courses when incorporating critical consciousness ( Gorski 2009, DePalma 2008, Haviland 2008, Mazzei 2007).

While multicultural education seems an obvious place to initiate discourse on ‘Asia literacy’, there is a key difference between multicultural education, which is generally defined as a study of cultures ‘within country’ and ‘Asia literacy’, which extends further to include a study of cultures that are also beyond national geographic borders. Mills (2008) suggests that merely adding a course or two on multicultural education, but leaving the rest of the curriculum largely intact does not go far enough in multicultural curriculum reform. ‘Multicultural education’ encompasses a broad range of scholarship and while the task of inserting an ‘Asian voice’ in the multi-cultural dialogue of Australian educators is not a new idea, a major ideological and curriculum shift may be needed to consider how studies of Asia are integral to multicultural education and whether this integration is a paradigm in which diversity, and potentially cultural boundaries are celebrated by conservative discourses of the cultural ‘other’, or whether ‘Asia literacy’ is approached with a more critical and globalised pedagogy. In light of calls for ‘Asia literacy’ it is essential to question the placement of

‘Asia literacy’ discourse in teacher education: should it be part of multicultural education, embedded throughout all teacher education courses and subjects or stand alone?

### Reflections on the role of teacher education

In light of professional standards this is even more problematic. The Queensland College of Teachers (QCT), the statutory body responsible for registering teachers in Queensland, has identified, as part of its professional standards, knowledge that teachers should have in regards to cultural understanding:

- Factors such as socio-economic circumstances, location, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, culture, language, religious beliefs and individual needs and their impact on the world of students ...
- The negative impact of bias, prejudice and discrimination on students, families and communities.
- Cross-cultural sensitivities and perspectives. (QCT, 2007, p.10)

Not only is the lack of import placed on studies of Asia inhibiting the effective address of ‘Asia literacy’ but it could also potentially limit graduates abilities to become registered professionals – a core priority and responsibility of teacher educator programs. While there is consideration to culture, where studies of Asia fit is not clear. Therefore, when considering teachers’ likely understandings of Asia, making ‘Asia literate’ discourse more explicit is perhaps necessary to reposition the importance of ‘Asia literacy’ in teachers’ selection of content and perspectives.

Clearly, there are challenges ahead for ensuring ‘Asia literacy’ is addressed by teacher educators in tertiary settings. Substantial work has been done with respect to multicultural education however the specific challenges posed to teacher education in the context of Australia’s unique and often conflicting heritage in regards to perspectives of Asia are largely underdeveloped. Although the body of research in this area is emerging, it remains relatively under explored, particularly with respect to the role and responsibility of teacher education programs. Some significant findings have been initiated however and literature reviewed suggests that there are three leading factors in effective cultural discourse, both in general application and with specific reference to studies of Asia;

1. *Key Understandings*. Hoffman advocates multicultural teacher education that addresses teaching and learning about culture that provides a ‘solid grounding in anthropological understandings of culture, based on extensive use of ethnographies and case study material’ (1996, p.564). It can also be further argued that critical consciousness is necessary to effective understandings of culture. Key understandings are crucial to ensure that teachers have the knowledge base to ensure cultural awareness development of students immersed in ‘Asia literate’ curriculum.
2. *Key Educators*. Findings of an investigation of sites of best or innovative practice identified ‘passionate people in the field of Asia education’ (Buchanan, 2005) as key factors in ensuring the promotion of studies of Asia in teacher education. The NALSAS strategy scan (2001) findings further support the notion of key educators as a driving force on placing import on the studies of Asia.
3. *Key Experiences*. Finally, many teacher educator sites have fostered effective engagement with the studies of Asia through cultural immersion and travel through study tours and pre-service placements in Asian countries (Halse 1999, Hill & Thomas 2002, Mills 2008). Not only did such programs enhance teacher awareness of other cultures but many participants noted that the experience forced them to be more self-aware and critical of their own pre-existing assumptions. A participant in a study tour to China noted that she had engaged in a learning process that had radically altered her view of both the study tour country and the world; “[the tour] changed the way I see the world...it was just amazing. I would never

have thought that it would...change my view of things so much” (Halse, 1999, p.69). This however, is not a ‘magic bullet’ as cost is often cited as an inhibiting factor.

Further exploration of these three key factors will be useful in ensuring that being ‘Asia literate’ is not just a key priority of the current government, but emerging curriculum and teachers as well. Regardless of tensions surrounding conceptualisations of culture and the task of challenging dominant cultural epistemologies that have seen a negative cultural positioning of Asia due to an Anglo-Australian colonial legacy, the realisation of an ‘Asia literate’ Australia is still within reach. There is a clear and paramount need for educational experiences that encourage pre-service teachers to engage meaningfully with the studies of Asia and question the taken-for-granted beliefs that they hold about themselves and ‘others’, particularly as many students are located within Anglo-Australian culture. To ensure this, teacher education programs will need revision to reposition the place of Asia in a way that transforms worldviews towards a more ‘Asia literate’ reality.

### Notes:

1. Curriculum support documents from Curriculum Corporation and the Australian Education Foundation: *Global Perspectives, Now more than ever we live in one world, National Statement for Engaging Young Australians with Asia in Australian Schools, A guide to implementing the National Statement for Engaging Young Australians with Asia in Australian Schools: Teacher and School Resource, Asia Scope and Sequence for English/SOSE/Arts.*

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