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Preservice EAL Teaching as Emotional Experiences: Practicum Experience in an Australian Secondary School

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Abstract: Drawing on activity theory, this qualitative case study examines the emotional experiences of Maria, a preservice teacher of English as an additional language (EAL) during the practicum in an Australian secondary school setting and the factors shaping these emotions. Data included interviews with the preservice teacher before and after the practicum, a stimulated recall session, and her reflections after lessons. Furthermore, an interview was also conducted with Maria's school mentor teacher. The study found that during the practicum, the preservice teacher experienced strong positive and negative emotions as a result of the influence of personal factors and the sociocultural context of preservice teaching, especially the contradictions inherent within the teacher learning context. The findings provide insights that can be useful for developing learning experiences that foster student teachers' growth.

Introduction

There has been a shift towards a sociocultural perspective in the field of second language teacher education (SLTE), which views teacher learning as a complex developmental process originating in participation in the sociocultural practices and contexts related to learning and teaching (Freeman & Johnson, 1998; K. E. Johnson, 2009; K. E. Johnson & Golombek, 2011). In accordance with the shift, there is a substantial body of scholarship on second language teacher cognition (see comprehensive reviews of this literature in Borg, 2003, 2006). This body of research focuses on understanding “what teachers think, know, and believe, and how these relate to what teachers do” (Borg, 2011, p. 218). It has established that teachers' prior experience, knowledge, beliefs, and interpretations of their practices are “extremely influential” (K. E. Johnson, 2006, p. 236) in shaping and explaining the ways teachers do their work (Borg, 2003, 2006, 2011; K. E. Johnson, 2006, 2009). However, what teachers feel and its relationship with what teachers do has not received much attention in this body of literature.

In recent years, research in the field of teacher education has suggested that understanding teacher emotions is important in improving the quality of teacher education (e.g., Poulou, 2007; Sutton & Wheatley, 2003; Timoštšuk & Ugaste, 2012). Occurring in the midst of systems of relations in multidimensional sociocultural settings, student teaching during the school-based practicum can be a highly emotional process that can generate positive and negative emotions (Poulou, 2007). It has been shown that emotions have mixed influence on teacher professional learning. Positive emotions have been found to support teacher learning by stimulating better coping and problem solving skills while negative emotions are powerful in attracting attention and focus (Sutton & Wheatley, 2003) and helping preservice teachers to become more alert and prepared for similar situations in the future (Pillen, Beijaard, & den Brok, 2013). However, past research has also revealed that

negative emotions can have severe consequences for teacher learning. For example, sometimes student teachers fail the practicum because of their anxiety caused when they are observed by the supervisor and mentor teacher (Farrell, 2007). Frustration caused by tensions between preservice teachers and mentor teachers can also cause delays in preservice teachers' learning process as they seek to change their practice school (Pillen et al., 2013). In addition, Pillen et al. (2013) found that a feeling of helplessness resulted from having an authoritarian mentor teacher, who does not allow for autonomy, prevents preservice teachers from applying the theoretical knowledge they have learnt from university in their preservice teaching. Consequent to the great influence of emotions on teacher learning, there is a recently growing body of research that seeks to understand the relationships between emotions and teacher identity development (e.g., Lee, Huang, Law, & Wang, 2013; Lee & Yin, 2011; O'Connor, 2008; Reio Jr, 2005; Timoštšuk & Ugaste, 2012). However, we still know very little about how preservice teachers' emotional experiences are constructed. As the literature suggests, while some emotional processes can motivate more effective teacher learning, others negatively influence it, which results in undesirable outcomes of teacher education. Therefore, understanding what factors contribute to the construction of teachers' emotions has potential to benefit those involved in teacher education.

In the sub-field of SLTE, periodic studies that touch upon preservice language teachers' emotional experiences in the teaching practicum have appeared although this body of research is not characterised by extensive empirical data. Being among these few studies, Johnson (1996) found that the preservice teacher in her study experienced frustrations in the practicum with regards to the lack of meaningful instructional activities, insufficient knowledge about the learners, and time management issues. Similarly, Numrich's (1996) diary studies show frustrations that preservice teachers in the United States experienced during the language teaching practicum, including managing class time, giving clear directions, responding to students' various needs, teaching grammar effectively, assessing students' learning, and focusing on students rather than on self. The participants noted that the biggest struggle in the preservice teaching was conforming to teaching requirements while still effectively responding to the students' individual learning situations. Farrell's (2001) study of a preservice English language teacher's socialisation process in the practicum in Singapore found that preservice teachers "felt out of the process completely from the first time they walked into the classroom" (p. 54). After the practicum, they felt less than enthusiastic about their prospective career as a teacher as a consequence of finding it challenging to become a part of the school community.

A limited number of studies also reveal the challenges in the practicum that contribute to preservice teachers' emotions. One of the central practicum issues is the discrepancy between teacher education course work and classroom realities in the practicum (Premier & Miller, 2010). Premier and Miller's (2010) findings suggest that preservice teacher education, including EAL teacher education, failed to prepare student teachers to address the needs of students in multicultural classrooms in Australia, consequently causing frustrations among preservice teachers. Lack of support for preservice teachers during the practicum is another key issue. Farrell's (2008) findings show that only ten out of 55 preservice teachers in Singapore rated the mentor teachers as helpful and none of them considered the principal of the school helpful. A further factor influencing preservice language teachers' emotions is that the practicum is often "equated with assessment" (Brandt, 2006, p. 358). This puts preservice teachers under pressure to perform against assessment criteria rather than being encouraged to develop the personal and professional qualities necessary to function as effective teachers.

There are some gaps in the above literature on emotions of preservice language teachers during the practicum. Firstly, this literature is scant and periodic. There need to be more studies in this area conducted in different settings so that the field's research base is enriched

and findings across contexts can be compared and aggregated. Secondly, most of the existing studies have not adequately accounted for the complex systems of relations (Poulou, 2007) inherent in each second language teaching practicum setting that influence preservice teachers' emotional processes. This is partly due to the absence of a coherent and systematic underpinning theoretical framework (Borg, 2006; R. Cross, 2010).

In an attempt to probe into the gaps above, the present study, which is part of a larger research project that looks into the practicum experience of preservice EAL teachers in Australian secondary school settings, examines a preservice teacher's emotions during the EAL practicum in an Australian secondary school. It also seeks to reconstruct these emotional experiences from an activity theoretical perspective by systematically examining the complexity of relationships within the teaching practicum setting and how it shapes the preservice teacher's emotions. The study draws largely on the third generation of activity theory (Engeström, 1987, 2001, 2008), which is elaborated on in the following section.

Theoretical Framework

Activity theory is an evolving analytical framework that attempts to understand the sociocultural and historical context of human activity and how it influences the activity. Although this study draws largely on the third generation of activity theory, it is useful to have an overview of its earlier generations that inform the development of the third generation.

One of the foundations of activity theory is Vygotsky's concept of mediation (Vygotsky, 1978, 1981). Vygotsky argues that higher mental functioning and human action are mediated by artefacts, especially psychological tools, or signs and are object-oriented. Vygotsky's concept of mediation, which includes subject, mediating artefacts, and object, is often referred to as the first generation of activity theory (Bakhurst, 2009; Engeström, 1987; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Smidt, 2009). However, according to Engeström and Miettinen (1999), the exclusive focus of the first generation of activity on the individual performing actions rather than the idea of historicity and the collective nature of human activity makes it problematic, especially when it is considered as an attempt to understand the sociocultural context of the action. To address the problem, Engeström (1987), inspired by Leontiev and others, extended the first generation by taking into account rules, community and division of labor in addition to subject, mediating artefacts and object. This version is known as the second generation of activity theory, which uses the activity system in Figure 1 as the unit of analysis.

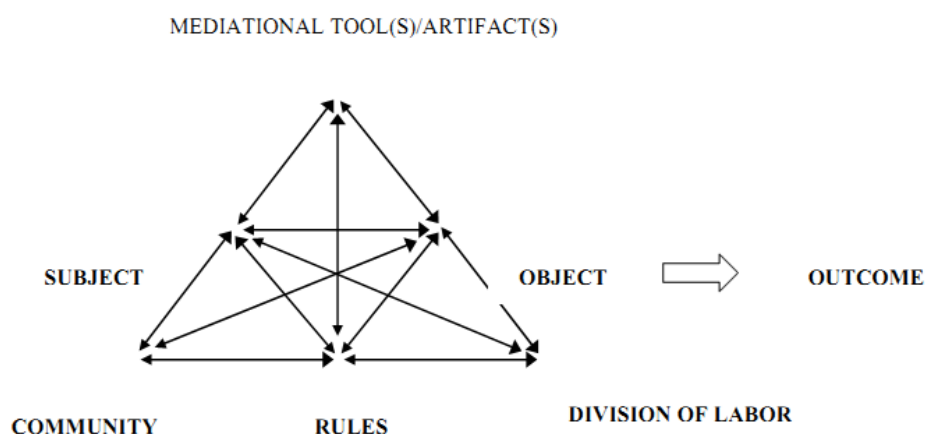


Figure 1: The structure of a human activity system (Engeström, 1987, p. 41)

In his later work, Engeström (2001) advances the third generation of activity theory as a conceptual tool “to understand dialogue, multiple perspectives, and networks of interacting activity systems” (p. 135) which are neglected in the previous versions of the theory. The third generation of activity theory uses a joint activity system, which includes at least two interacting activity systems as the unit of analysis (Figure 2). In Figure 2, each componential activity system includes the subject, tools/artefacts, object, rules, community, and division of labour. The production part of each system includes the subject (the actor(s) engaged in the activity), tools/artefacts (sociocultural cognitive and/or material resources mediating the subject in achieving the object) and the object (the goal of the activity and the subject’s motives for participating in the activity). Subject, tools/artefacts, and object must be seen in relation to the context, which is made up of the community (individuals or groups who participate in an activity), rules (the cultural-historical norms shaping the subject’s participation in an activity), and division of labour (the responsibilities allocated to the community members in relation to the activity) (Leffa, 2005). As Lewis (1997) narrates the activity system, the subject is mediated by tools/artefacts to achieve an object and regulated by rules to work in a community which allocates responsibility to its members through the division of labour in relation to the object; such an activity system produces an outcome.

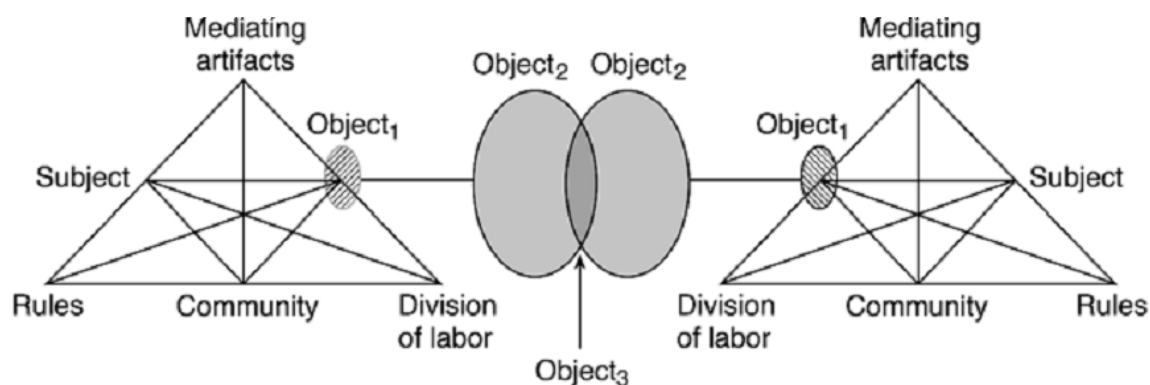


Figure 2. Two interacting activity systems as minimal model for the third generation of activity theory (Engeström, 2001, p. 136)

The third generation of activity theory is suitable for the purpose of the current study. Firstly, it is useful for addressing issues neglected in the literature such as emotion and identity (Bakhurst, 2009, p. 200) and responds to the urge for a broad, coherent theoretical framework underpinning research on teacher learning (Borg, 2006; R. Cross, 2010). Secondly, it allows for analysis of the supportive and contradictory relationships between different components of the activity system, especially identification of inner contradictions within the activity system (Engeström, 1987, 2001; Yamagata-Lynch & Haudenschild, 2009). Research has found that contradictions play a central role in shaping how the subject of activity functions and develops within the activity system; they can cause tensions and inhibit development, but also have the capacity to motivate change and development through innovations in collective contradiction resolution (e.g., Ahn, 2011; Beatty & Feldman, 2012; J. Cross, 2011; Dang, 2013; Yamagata-Lynch & Haudenschild, 2009). In this sense, the model is of great significance in offering a theoretical framework that aims at explaining emotion as an aspect of human consciousness. Furthermore, the EAL practicum experience under research is characterised by the interaction between the preservice teaching activity of the preservice teacher and the mentoring activity of the mentor teacher. The model of the third generation with a joint activity system is useful for understanding these two interacting activity systems. The current study uses this joint activity system as the unit of analysis.

Methodology

Research Design

This study is part of a larger project on preservice EAL teachers' professional learning during the practicum in Australian secondary schools. This project used a qualitative case study design. Although case studies are common among education researchers, there is little consensus in definition (Merriam, 1998). According to Yin (2009), a case study is "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 18). Since the aim of this study is to seek an in-depth understanding of the preservice teacher's emotional experiences in the natural EAL practicum in an Australian secondary school context, Yin's definition is useful for this study since it deals with both the depth of understanding a phenomena and the real-life context involved.

Yin (2009) also acknowledges that there are different kinds of case studies. Sharing a similar perspective, D. M. Johnson (1992) notes that, "a case study is defined in terms of the unit of analysis" (p.75) rather than the data collection methods used. Therefore, defining the units of analysis is important in case studies. Much of the second language case study literature has defined concrete subjects or objects such as learner(s), teacher(s), a classroom, or a program as the case. In addition, R. Cross (2006) also contends that a case can be an "object" or a "process." From a sociocultural activity theoretical perspective, the human activity system is the unit of analysis (Engeström, 1987, 1999). There is a growing body of qualitative research in the field of teacher education that conceptualises the single or joint activity system of the teacher as the unit of analysis (e.g., Ahn, 2011; R. Cross, 2006, 2010; Dang, 2013; Yamagata-Lynch & Haudenschild, 2009). Drawing on this body of literature, the present study conceptualises the joint activity system of learning to teach EAL and mentoring as the unit of analysis. In order to construct the detailed activity system, data were analysed following a procedure described in a subsequent section.

Research Settings

The present study was conducted at Yellowville University and Bluerock Grammar School. Yellowville University offers a one year preservice teacher education program, the Graduate Diploma of Education (Secondary). The program offers a number of specialist streams, one of which is EAL. It is a combination of academic studies on the foundations of education with a combination of two specialist teaching areas, such as EAL–Business Management or Studies of Society and Environment (SOSE)–History. The current study focuses on a preservice teacher who has EAL and SOSE as her two specialist methods. To complete the Graduate Diploma of Education (EAL–SOSE), the preservice teacher did four units in general education, two units related to teaching SOSE, one unit related to second language teaching, one unit related to teaching EAL and two rounds of teaching practicum. The practicum units involve at least 50 days of school-based practicum for both specialisms, which is divided into two five-week teaching rounds. In total, the preservice teacher had five weeks for each specialist method.

The participating preservice teacher completed two EAL practicums during the Graduate Diploma program, including a three week practicum in Semester One and a two week practicum in Semester Two. This study was conducted during the later practicum which lasted two weeks in August and September, 2012. The second practicum was selected as the

time frame for data collection because by this time, the student teachers had completed most of the required course work and a first practicum. They brought this experience and knowledge into their second round of teaching. A focus of this study was to see how educational and professional experience influences student teachers' practice and thinking during subsequent teaching round.

Bluerock Grammar School was the site of the practicum under research. It is a culturally diverse school situated in an affluent area in Melbourne. The school is a private girls' day and boarding school with most EAL students from Chinese, Korean and Japanese backgrounds. The school only has an EAL curriculum for Year 11 and Year 12. It runs an EAL support program for Year 7 to Year 10 without a curriculum document. The participating preservice teacher was assigned to teach EAL support classes to students in Year 8, 9 and 10. Since the students are from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, their English language proficiency levels and needs are varied.

Participants

Permission for research was obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee, the Dean of Education at Yellowville University, and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. After written informed consent was obtained, two voluntary participants were involved in this study, including Maria, the preservice teacher, and Ms Davies, the mentor teacher (both names are pseudonyms). Maria, in her late 20s at the time of research, is a non-native speaker of English from Russia. Before moving to Australia, she had lived in Russia for most of her life and in China for two years. At the time the study was conducted, she had been in Australia for about three years, and that was the first time she had lived in an English speaking country. She began learning English in Russia when she was seven and had learnt the language formally at primary school, secondary school, and university in her home country. Besides her formal English learning experience, Maria had also learnt English through interaction with her Australian friend, who lived in China with her during the two years she was there, and then through her job at a mobile phone shop in Australia. Maria considered her interaction with her Australian friend as an important influence on her language development because English was a language spoken at home between them. Her experience working in a shop after she came to Australia also contributed significantly to her development of English speaking competence. Maria's first university degree was a Bachelor of Arts in teaching Histories, obtained from her Russian university. In her second teacher education program at Yellowville University in Australia, Maria was doing a one-year Graduate Diploma in Education, specialising in teaching SOSE and EAL. Before attending the Australian teacher education program, Maria had done some English language teaching in China. She had also taught SOSE for three weeks and EAL for two weeks on practicum during the first semester before this study took place.

Ms Davies was an EAL teacher at Bluerock Grammar School who mentored Maria during the EAL practicum under research. She has a university qualification in teaching EAL and in teaching mainstream English. She had 15 years of extensive experience in teaching English language to different groups of EFL and ESL learners in a variety of contexts, including high school, university, business, and newly arrival programs. She also had experience mentoring six preservice teachers. Maria described Ms Davies as a "fantastic," "really knowledgeable" and "professional" teacher, who had "a fairly set-up teaching style."

Since the current study is part of a larger research project that focuses on the practicum experience of EAL preservice teachers in Australian secondary schools, the primary sampling criterion for selecting the preservice teachers was that they were EAL preservice teachers placed at Australian secondary schools. As international students form an important source of

revenue, and international recruitment is core business of Australian universities, the number of international preservice teachers continues to increase in Australia (Spooner-Lane, Tangen, & Campbell, 2009). Therefore, an important reason for selecting Maria is that she represents the increasing number of international preservice teachers, whose professional learning deserves greater attention by teacher education researchers and practitioners than previously documented in the literature. School selection and recruitment of the school mentor was contingent on selection of the preservice teacher participant. Once I had selected Maria, I contacted Bluerock Grammar School where she was placed for permission to conduct the research at the school. The school granted permission and assisted me in recruiting the mentor teacher, who voluntarily agreed to participate with written informed consent.

Data Sources

Interview

An interpretive research approach holds that social interactions are at the heart of socially constructed meaning (Neuman, 2006). Interviews have long been one of the most useful ways of interacting between researcher and participants to gain an understanding of the participants' activity and their interpretation of it. In this study, two individual semi-structured interviews, each lasting about 60 minutes, were used to collect data from the preservice teacher. The first interview, conducted during the week preceding the practicum, gathered information about Maria's background, beliefs, knowledge, experiences in language learning, prior education, professional experience and expectations about the practicum. The second interview, carried out one week after the practicum, elicited her reflections on the EAL practicum and further interpretations of her practice and thinking based on the recorded lessons and stimulated recalls. Both interviews were conducted in a relaxed atmosphere in an unoccupied meeting room at Yellowville University.

One 45-minute semi-structured interview was conducted with Ms Davies, Maria's mentor teacher. The interview elicited information about the mentor's background, beliefs and perceptions of EAL teaching and learning and the preservice teacher's practicum, and the school's background. I conducted the interviews at the end of the EAL practicum when the mentor had had some time to familiarise herself with the preservice teacher and her mentoring responsibilities. The interview was conducted at an unoccupied meeting room at the school. All of the interviews were conducted in English and audio-recorded. Researcher's note-taking was kept to minimum so that I could maintain natural and effective interaction with the interviewees (Merriam, 2009).

Reflection

Instead of writing reflection entries, Maria chose to use the audio recorder that I provided for recording lessons to record her oral reflections. This method allowed her to record her reflections as soon as she finished her lessons when her memory was still fresh. It also saved her time because it would have taken longer to write than to talk. Maria also sent me an email when she noticed interesting and relevant issues while she was reflecting on her practicum. These materials were used as data for the study and also used as part of the stimulus material for the stimulated recall session that I describe below.

Stimulated Recall

Since teachers' cognitive processes underlying their instructional activity are not observable (Golombek, 2011), the use of stimulated recall has been advocated in second language research (Gass & Mackey, 2000) and particularly SLTE research in order to collect data about teachers' decision making process, beliefs, and knowledge (Ahn, 2009, 2011; Akbari & Dadvand, 2011; Borg, 2003; R. Cross, 2006; Golombek, 2011). This study used one stimulated recall session to elicit Maria's interpretations of her practicum experience.

According to Mackey and Gass (2005), video and audio recordings are the most common types of stimulus material used in stimulated recalls. Although I believe that videos would provide the richest information about teachers' practice, researcher observation and video-recording were not feasible in this study for practical and ethical reasons. Therefore, in this study I used one of Maria's self-audio-recorded lessons together with the associated lesson plan, teaching artefacts, and self-reflection as primary stimuli. The choice of lesson for stimulated recall was made with a principle that the lesson was taught no more than 48 hours before the scheduled stimulated recall to avoid memory issues (Mackey & Gass, 2005).

During my preparation for the stimulated recall session, I listened to the audio-recorded lesson carefully, looked at the lesson plan and its associated teaching materials and self-reflection entry, and made notes on the instances of practice that I wanted the preservice teacher to comment on. I also noted down the time on the recording of each instance of practice so that I could replay these parts easily and efficiently during the recall. I then revised my notes and combined and group similar events to have a loose structure for the stimulated recall. During the stimulated recall, I began by asking Maria to look at the lesson plan and discuss the main events during the course of the lesson and her reasoning of each event. I also asked questions to elicit further comments on lesson events. I drew the participant's attention to the instances of practice that I had made notes on. The participant would comment on these and any related ideas. The stimulated recall was audio-recorded for analysis.

Data Analysis

The audio-recorded interviews, reflections and stimulated recall were transcribed for qualitative content analysis (Merriam, 2009). This analysis approach involves a close line-by-line analysis of transcripts with attention to the content of the data rather than linguistic features. Content analysis approach was adopted because it allowed the study to perform a holistic and comprehensive analysis of complex social phenomena (Kohlbacher, 2006) and to classify large amounts of text into efficient numbers of themes corresponding to the issues under research (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The analysis procedure adopted was a non-linear, recursive one that involved data immersion, open coding, construction of categories, identification of themes and interpretation.

NVivo 10 software was used to support data analysis. It allowed for effective coding, categorisation and management of a large amount of qualitative data. Data from Maria and Ms Davies were analysed separately. During open coding, I coded the data inductively into nodes (Level 3 nodes, Table 1) within the NVivo data inventory, remaining open to anything that was potentially relevant to the research (Merriam, 2009; Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). Construction of categories (Level 2 nodes, Table 1) occurred concurrently with open coding. This required succinct labelling of data, which was driven by the data and informed by past research (e.g., Ahn, 2011; Dang, 2013; Tsui & Law, 2007; Yamagata-Lynch & Haudenschild, 2009). After open coding was complete on all the transcripts and documents, I went through all the initial nodes again, sorted all nodes into the categories, created new categories, and re-

grouped nodes if necessary. This process of category construction is also referred to as “axial coding” (Merriam, 2009; Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). During the process of open coding and construction of categories, I concurrently put the categories into more conceptual or abstract level of grouping called themes (Level 1 nodes, Table 1) within the NVivo data inventory. Merriam (2009) refers to this step of data analysis as “theorizing” (p.188). It is “the cognitive process of discovering and manipulating abstract categories and the relationships among those categories” (LeCompte, Preissle, & Tesch, 1993, p. 239). At this stage, I grouped the categories into themes corresponding to the components of the activity system, including subject, object, tools/artefacts, rules, community, and division of labour (Engeström, 1987, 2001). The coding scheme for data about Maria is shown in Table 1. A similar coding scheme was used in analysing data about Ms Davies.

Level 1 nodes (Themes)	Level 2 nodes (Categories)	Level 3 nodes (Initial nodes)
Subject₁ (Maria)	Personal background	Russian, non-native English speaker background Strengths as a non-native English speaking teacher
	Language learning experience	Formal language learning at school and university Other language learning experiences Influence of language learning experience on teaching
	English proficiency	I'm better at English than Chinese I am conscious about my limited English proficiency
	Prior education	First degree experience Education experience in China Influence of prior education experiences on teaching EAL
	Experience within the Graduate Diploma of Education program	Theories and strategies but not EAL subject matter knowledge ^[1] and resources What I learnt from the program New teaching and learning approach
	Previous teaching experience	Experience teaching EAL in China Lack of experience teaching at high school Previous practicum experience
	Expectations	Expectations of a curriculum document I want more structured resources on EAL subject matter knowledge Wish for more constructive feedback from mentors Expectations of students Expected support from university tutor Expected support from school
	Beliefs	Belief that groupwork is the best way to do the teaching Belief about what an ideal teacher should do Belief about grammar learning Belief about language learning Belief about a successful moment in EAL teaching Belief in constant learning to improve my English Belief about the importance of EAL subject matter knowledge
Tools/Artefacts	Pedagogical tools	Teaching resources Teaching activities Curriculum and guidelines Knowledge and skills learnt from teacher education program
	Physical and technological tools	Teaching space The Internet Photocopier at school

[1] According to Richards (1998), subject matter knowledge includes knowledge second language teachers need to know about their subject, including specialised conceptual, theoretical and disciplinary knowledge that constitutes the theoretical basis for second language teaching. Subjects within this domain typically include phonetics and phonology, syntax, sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, curriculum and syllabus design. Another dimension within subject matter knowledge is the specialized discourse or register that second language teachers use to talk about their discipline.

Object_{1a,b}	Learn to teach EAL during the practicum	To gain teaching experience To develop knowledge and understanding of EAL teaching To learn and practice teaching strategies To satisfy mentor's requirements and get a good report
Rules	Cultural rules	Not befriending with the students Not speaking Chinese to them
	University rules	Following the practicum manual
	Pedagogical rules	Following the curriculum Following mentor in the same role Being organised Having the ability to teach grammar well Having a good knowledge of grammar
	Preservice teaching rules	Teaching correctly Submitting lesson plans to mentor Sticking to the lesson plan Checking everything before teaching
Community	EAL students	EAL students' relationship with PST EAL students' first language use EAL students' engagement EAL students' proficiency levels EAL students' backgrounds
	Organiser of teaching practice	Expectations of preservice teachers Role in organising the practicum Support provided Perceptions of preservice teachers' weaknesses
Division of labour	Lesson planning	Lesson planning process Finding teaching materials Mentor's role in planning lessons
	Teaching EAL	Teaching Year 8 Teaching Year 9 Teaching Year 10 Supporting EAL students with other subjects
	Doing university assignments	Doing assignments related to practicum Suggestion for assignments related to practicum

Table 1: Coding scheme for construction of Maria's individual activity system

Using the coding schemes for Maria and Ms Davies, I constructed a joint activity system for Maria and Ms Davies (Figure 3), with Level 1 nodes and Level 2 nodes from the coding schemes incorporated into the joint activity system. The activity system served as the unit of analysis in this study. There are strong justifications for using activity systems as units of analysis in researching teachers' practice, including its usefulness in understanding contextualised teacher practice and identifying systematic contradictions that influence teachers' teaching experience (R. Cross, 2010; Dang, 2013; Yamagata-Lynch, 2010; Yamagata-Lynch & Haudenschild, 2009). The analysis for this study focuses primarily on Maria's emotions, which were coded as an aspect of her preservice teaching experience, and considers Ms Davies' activity system as a neighbouring system. Analysis of the joint activity system revealed a range of systematic contradictions between several of its components and the influence of these contradictions and other factors within the system on Maria's emotional experiences. The following section discusses these findings in detail. Sources of data were noted at the end of data excerpts by using codes including M.IN.1 (Maria's Interview 1), M.IN.2 (Maria's Interview 2), M.SR (Maria's Stimulated Recall), M.R (Maria's Reflection), and D.IN.1 (Ms Davies' Interview 1).

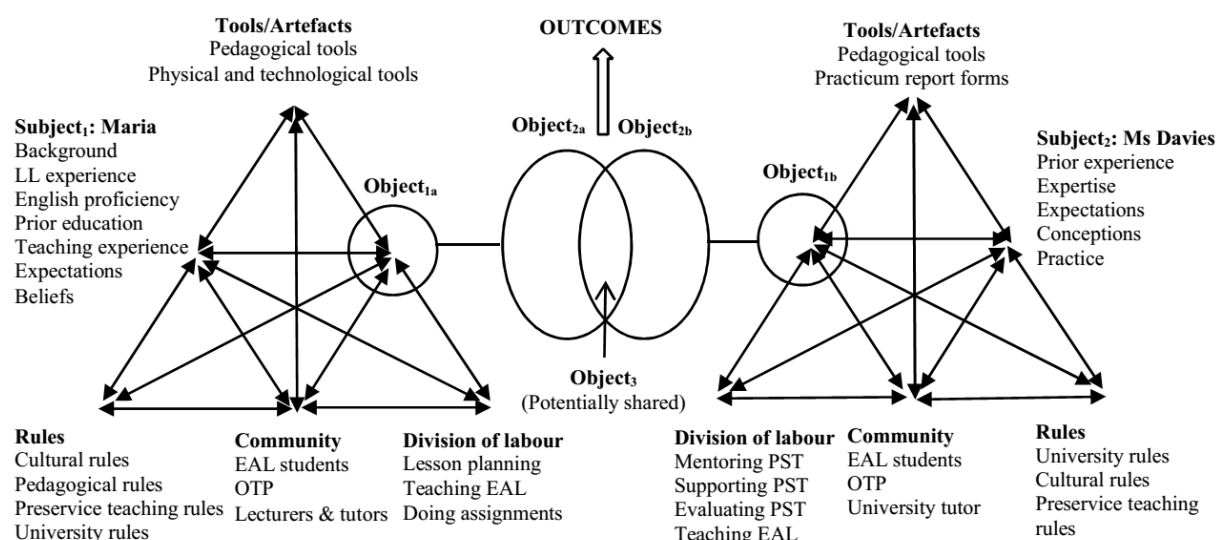


Figure 3. The joint practicum activity system of Maria and Ms Davies (adapted from Engeström, 2001)

Findings

Negative Emotions

Maria’s EAL practicum experience was largely characterised by a range of negative emotions as a result of the multiple contradictions within the joint practicum activity system. These negative emotions include disappointment, frustration, anxiety, and intimidation. The contradictions and their related negative emotions are summarised in Table 2.

Contradiction	Instance of contradiction	Related emotion
Within Subject ₁	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multiple conflicting identities of non-native English speaker, student, and novice teacher 	Anxiety
Tools – Division of labour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contradictions between pedagogical tool - EAL subject matter knowledge and EAL teaching demands 	Frustration
Subject ₁ – Subject ₂	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contradictions between Maria and Ms Davies in terms of support Contradictions between Ms Davies and Maria’s conceptions and practices of teaching 	Anxiety Disappointment Frustration Intimidation

Table 2: Contradictions and related negative emotions

Disappointment

Maria mentioned her feeling of disappointment most frequently in the data, and there were different factors influencing it. Firstly, Maria was disappointed at her own performance during the practicum, which she did not consider as a success. When asked if she thought she achieved the goals she set before the practicum, she responded, “No, I don’t feel that I did. Doesn’t feel like that at all” (M.IN.2). With regards to teaching in particular, Maria admitted, “as for actual teaching, I feel that I did not perform the way I wanted to, so it was a bit disappointing” (M.IN.2). The second excerpt hinted that Maria’s disappointment at her performance was rooted in her and Ms Davies’ contradictory conceptions and practices of teaching. Maria elaborated:

I felt that it is too much teacher-centred lessons. While I like students to do a bit of guess work and independent thinking, she would [...] just tell the answer, wouldn’t

make students think. So she said, like, ‘Oh we don’t have time, just tell them the answer.’ So, I didn’t quite feel comfortable with that. (M.SR)

Secondly, Maria’s disappointment also came from some of her EAL students’ unsatisfactory performance. She said, “They were just quite disappointing me in terms of they just didn’t perform as well as I thought” (M.SR). Further elicitation revealed Maria’s attempt to understand the reasons why her students were not performing well, as in the following excerpt:

Researcher: Why do you think it happened that the higher level students did not do as well as expected?

Maria: Oh, I don’t know. Maybe they thought it was too easy. I don’t know if they had a bit of too much of confidence in them because my mentor teacher told me that they were like, ‘Oh we’re so much better than the rest of the class.’ And yeah they didn’t perform at all. So I was disappointed with them, and I told them that because I think they sometimes show off and think that they are so much smarter than everyone else. (M.SR)

Maria also admitted that she was not sure about the causes of her students’ under-performance and needed to find them out:

And some girls who I thought worked quite good and they have a higher level of English according to VELS levels. So they didn’t do such a good job. I don’t know why, even after their explanations they explained to my mentor they didn’t get it. So I need to work on that. (M.R)

Some of Maria’s students did not submit their writing assignment to her, and that was another major contribution to her disappointment. As Maria explained,

R: Okay, Lesson 2 for Year 10. Why do you think some of the students didn’t hand in their writing as instructed?

M: I’m not sure. I was quite disappointed. And my mentor she said that they should have done that. While maybe some students can always find you, some students just didn’t bother because I was a student teacher so they think it’s not important because they know they will not get assessed with that. So they’re just like why would I have to do it. [...] (M.SR)

Maria here revealed another cause of her disappointment – her lack of power as a preservice teacher. It is essential to note that she was in the midst of complex power relations with her mentor teacher and students which caused contradictions between her multiple identities. Maria explained, for example, that some students did not submit the assignment because she was not their official teacher and they knew it would not be marked.

Frustration

The data suggest that frustration was also a core feature of the emotional experiences that Maria had, and there were a number of contextual factors that contributed to this. These factors included the lack of a curriculum document, the contradictory teaching approaches of Maria and Ms Davies, the power relationship between the preservice teachers and the mentor teacher, and Maria’s lack of EAL subject matter knowledge. Across all these issues, Maria repeatedly showed her frustration through a range of highly emotive expressions, such as “really really frustrating,” “frustrated,” “totally misguided,” and “really bad falling through.”

Many of the frustrated emotions expressed by Maria are related to the fact that there was no curriculum for her to refer to. This is illustrated in the following extract:

M: [...] I felt totally misguided in the beginning [...] There were no strict criteria. Basically there were no guidelines that I could follow and I asked about their VELS levels, [my mentor] was like, ‘Oh yeah approximately this and this.’ So

there was no actual assessment of students as such. [...] So I found it really really frustrating because I didn't know where to start, and I had to, like, fill in and start it from the beginning.

R: So how do you think it influenced your practicum experience with EAL?

M: Oh yeah, I felt frustrated for the first week. I just didn't know what is required from me. And not only I was not familiar with the content, my mentor teacher kept saying that I need to focus on learning outcome that I had no idea where I should get them from. I didn't have any documents, and I didn't get the definition of learning outcomes. (M.SR)

The data – and the extract above – apparently showed that the contradictions between Maria and Ms Davies in terms of support at the beginning of the practicum produced frustration in Maria's emotional responses. She repeatedly mentioned the fact that she did not receive enough guidance, either through a curriculum document, criteria, requirements, guidelines, or though information about students' proficiency levels and learning outcome, revealing her strong feeling about this. Her response, "I didn't know where to start," provides a clue to Maria's confusion that led to her frustration. The extract also offers insights into the current state of EAL at Bluerock Grammar School, where EAL was offered through a support program and there was no curriculum or guideline. This aspect of EAL teaching at the school was outlined by Ms Davies as follows:

Every every week is different because [...] the support requires you to be speaking to what their other teachers are doing as well because those kids need support in history or geography, so [...], you know, the other teachers will come to me and say, 'Look, this is what they are doing, can you help them with that?' So there's that. And also there isn't a guideline, there isn't a document. OK, there isn't something for me to say, 'This is what we're doing week by week,' because I run a support program. (D.IN.1)

In another scenario, Maria revealed that her frustration related to the contradictory teaching approaches that she and her mentor had and her power relationship with her mentor. In the following excerpt, Maria recalled her frustrating experiences:

[...] I had to adjust to her teaching style. [...] I think we were just talking in different languages and I just had to give up all my sort of ideas and themes that I wanted to do and to adjust to my mentor teacher because I needed to get a good report. So in that sense like yeah it was a bit frustrating because I had hoped that I would get a chance to do, like, experiments. [...] I felt ..., I don't know, just really bad falling through whatever I'm doing. Like, she was watching me very closely and giving me a lot of feedback. (M.SR)

Having interviewed Maria before the practicum, I was aware that from her coursework and previous teaching in preservice program Maria had learned many communicative teaching ideas that she had wanted to try out during the practicum. However, as she entered the teaching round, she felt frustrated as a result of the contradiction between her own teaching approach and that of her mentor teacher and the fact that she had to give up all her teaching ideas to conform to her mentor's preferred teaching style in hopes of getting a good practicum report.

A further source of Maria's frustration was her lack of EAL subject matter knowledge and her inability to articulate and overcome her struggles. She recalled the experience:

I mean Susan was our tutor, but like I didn't even thought that I could write to her because I couldn't even formulate what was my issue. [...] I just felt too frustrated and I didn't know how to say anything about what was going on. I just sort of know something was going on with me, and I just couldn't tell exactly. And like I know that

the knowledge that I was lacking was huge so I don't know if [contacting my tutor] would fix it. (M.IN.2)

The data reveal that Maria was feeling powerless in dealing with the challenges of her practicum. The emotion was closely linked to the contradiction between the pedagogical tool of EAL subject matter knowledge learnt from university and the EAL teaching demands at school. In both the stimulated recall session and the post practicum interview, I felt her frustration when she repeatedly acknowledged her lack of EAL subject matter knowledge and thus lack of confidence to apply the teaching strategies she had learnt at university in her EAL classroom. This feeling of inadequacy, together with the lack of guidance and support, made Maria feel lost and frustrated as she struggled through her practicum.

Anxiety

Maria frequently described her anxiety when recalling her EAL practicum experience. The most anxious experiences seemed to relate to her perceived lack of EAL subject matter knowledge including English competence. She described her anxious feelings:

I guess with EAL I felt more conscious about my knowledge and my skills and that my English is not good enough and that I would not..., like, it was a constant fear. (M.SR)

As Maria perceived that she lacked some of the knowledge and skills needed to perform her EAL teaching, she felt a sense of inadequacy, and that led to her fear of failure. Maria further explained how her feeling of inadequacy led to her anxiety:

I don't have issues with my confidence and presence. I never had an issue with that in my other lessons for SOSE. But because I didn't feel confident, I could feel constant sort of pressure and that I'm not a native speaker, that I could make mistakes obviously and my mentor is assessing me on that as well. So I can't make any mistakes, so that was the constant sort of fear of failure. And that's why I didn't feel confident. I would need to get her constant approval whatever I've done. And I didn't feel relaxed at all. (M.SR)

The excerpt shows that Maria's negative feelings about her inadequacy tied to her background as a non-native English speaker and her teacher education experiences. With regards to her teacher education experiences, before the Graduate Diploma of Education program Maria had done a four-year degree in Oriental Histories, which equipped her with some subject matter knowledge needed to teach SOSE, and that knowledge was further developed during the Graduate Diploma. However, other data showed that neither her first degree nor the Graduate Diploma of Education offered opportunity for Maria to develop her EAL subject matter knowledge, especially knowledge for teaching EAL through literary texts (in this case, *Jane Eyre*). As a result, Maria entered the EAL practicum with a lack of EAL subject matter knowledge that she needed to perform her teaching.

An additional source of Maria's anxiety was the mentor's constant surveillance that she perceived. Lacking confidence in her competence and at the same time having someone who was watching and assessing everything she did was really a stressful experience, as Maria narrated:

I feel that I was just not confident in my strengths, so I felt that I should stick to the safer ground and pass. [...] I also had a person watching me so I didn't want to lose my confidence totally that I already felt that I didn't have. (M.IN.2)

Intimidation

Maria's intimidation was found to be related to different sources as in the following excerpts:

When speaking to my mentor I felt that I just like my English is not good enough. Oh my God, because she's [...] really passionate about English and I'm not that passionate about English in that sense. [...] In that way, I was intimidated, I would say. I felt rich vocabulary and everything and I felt that oh I'm not nearly good.

(M.IN.2)

And you feel that they are in the position of power. [...] I don't know how you can modify that (laugh) so you feel less intimidated by the power of your mentor.

(M.IN.2)

Firstly, Maria felt intimidated by her mentor teacher's passion for English and rich knowledge of the language. This aspect of Maria's intimidation appeared to relate to her self-perceived inefficacy in English proficiency and EAL teaching. Secondly, Maria was also intimidated by the mentor's position of power. Throughout the practicum Maria was constantly under pressure to negotiate the power relations between herself and her mentor. Feeling inferior to her mentor in terms of both competence and power, Maria reportedly had to follow what the mentor wanted her to do, such as not befriending with students, teaching in traditional teacher-centred approach, and seeking the mentor's approval in everything she did.

Positive Emotions

Apart from the negative emotional experiences, Maria developed some positive emotions during the EAL practicum. It is interesting to notice that the positive emotions were not directly influenced by the contradictions identified within the joint activity system, but largely related to her EAL students and teaching.

Some satisfaction came as an important element in Maria's practicum experience. As mentioned earlier, there were strict limitations on what and how she taught Year 10s, resulting in contradictions between Ms Davies and Maria's conceptions and practices of teaching. However, with Year 8s, she had more freedom to try out her preferred teaching activities such as pair work and group work.

I enjoyed my Year 8 lessons much more than Year 10, to tell honestly, because I had more sort of freedom to do whatever I wanted, not to make it strict to curriculum *Jane Eyre*. *Jane Eyre* was pretty boring for myself (laugh). So yeah like you know if something goes wrong with Year 10, you always have Year 8 where you can have some sort of fun and feel a bit relaxed. (M.SR)

Maria here implied that the freedom, in contrast to the restrictions she had with Year 10s, was a highlighted source of satisfaction, fun and relaxation for her. As discussed, Maria could not teach Year 10s the way she wanted due to restrictions on content and teaching approach and due to her lack of interest and inadequate English proficiency. An additional challenge was that Maria lacked EAL subject matter knowledge in the area of literature studies. As a result, she felt a lack of success with this group of students. "I didn't see a lot of engagement like that on the teaching round" (M.IN.2), said Maria. She further explained:

I guess content was not quite relevant and interesting for them, and I just couldn't make it interesting for them (M.IN.2).

I don't feel any problems with teaching beginners or intermediate level. I guess just with advanced level I need to build up my content knowledge later on so I can feel confident. But as for beginners and intermediate I think I should be fine. (M.IN.2)

Considering her experience with Year 10s as not successful, when Maria saw evidence of student engagement among Year 8s she felt a sense of fulfilment.

I think I really enjoyed doing the Year 8 story writing with girls because they were really engaged, and they really liked it [...]. One of the students used to write stories in Chinese and [...] she was really excited about it. She had a chance to write it in English even though her grammar was like all sort of wrong, but yeah she was writing a lot [...], so she got really excited. (M.IN2)

Maria was not only satisfied with the Year 8s' level of engagement, but also happy with their performance on a writing task and felt that they had "learnt some useful skills." She described her happy feeling in a reflection entry:

I was really impressed with girls' nice work and it's a pity we didn't get the chance to put all the stories together and write it down, but other than that I think they learnt some useful skills and they seemed pretty engaged [...]. They all wrote really good pieces of work so I'm fairly happy with what they've done. (M.R)

In sum, while Maria mostly experienced negative emotions, some positive experiences played a very important role in maintaining her motivation to continue with the practicum. The positive experiences she had with Year 8s were the source of fun and excitement that could motivate and keep her optimistic to cope with her negative feelings.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study set out to investigate the emotional experiences of Maria, a non-native preservice teacher, during her EAL practicum in Bluerock Grammar School and examine the personal and contextual factors influencing her emotions. The study used the third generation of activity theory as a theoretical framework to support analysis of the complex emotional experiences. The findings revealed a range of emotions and how these were constructed within the multidimensional practicum activity system. Negative emotions were more representative of Maria's practicum experience and related to a wide range of personal and contextual factors, especially contradictions within the joint activity system of learning to teach EAL and mentoring. The negative emotions triggered changes within Maria's activity to satisfy the requirements of the activity system. However, they caused distress, discouraged application of theoretical knowledge, and hindered creativity in the preservice teacher's practicum activity. On the other hand, positive emotions, though limited, served as an important counterbalance to help Maria cope with the negative experiences of the practicum. The findings about the role of positive emotions lend support to Sutton and Wheatley (2003).

The findings of this study support and extend the scant literature on preservice language teachers' emotions during the practicum (e.g., Farrell, 2001, 2007, 2008; K. E. Johnson, 1996; Numrich, 1996). From a sociocultural perspective and with the support of an activity theoretical framework, the present study is one of the first studies in the field of language teacher education to take a systematic explanatory approach to examining teacher emotions in a preservice teaching round. By using the activity system as a broad conceptual framework to conceptualise the context of preservice teaching and its role in shaping the practicum experience, the study was able to reconstruct Maria's emotional experiences within their complex context and explain why her emotions emerged and evolved through the course of the practicum. However, as this study focuses on the emotional experiences of a single case, any generalisations of its findings to other contexts should be made with cautions. More research into preservice teachers' emotions during the language teaching practicum in various contexts is encouraged to extend the field's research base and enable synthesis and comparison of findings across different settings.

This study offers several important implications for second language teacher education in general and the EAL practicum in particular. Firstly, its findings suggest that Maria's lack of confidence in her EAL subject matter knowledge and a mismatch between EAL teacher education course work and the teaching demands at secondary school are major factors contributing to the preservice teacher's negative emotions. As the description of the research settings shows, the Graduate Diploma offers only one unit specifically related to EAL teaching and another unit addressing second language pedagogy. These two units, however, prepare preservice teachers for second language and EAL teaching theories and skills, but not subject matter knowledge that forms the theoretical basis for EAL teaching such as English phonetics and phonology, syntax, sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, EAL curriculum and syllabus design (Richards, 1998) and studies of literary texts as outlined in the English/English as a Second Language VCE Study Design (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2006). This is in line with findings of M. H. Nguyen (2013) that there is a gap in EAL teacher education curriculum in terms of EAL subject matter knowledge. It is essential that this gap be filled, especially in a double-specialism Graduate Diploma of Education (Secondary EAL) where preservice teachers may have a first degree related to their other specialism rather than EAL. The study, therefore, suggests that university course work pay due attention to developing this core domain of knowledge, which constitutes what second language teachers need to know about the subject they teach (Richards, 1998). In doing so, teacher education institutions should also take into account the actual EAL teaching demands at partnership schools. In addition, it is recommended that preservice teachers who are non-native English speakers receive further support in relation to English language and reasonable expectations with regards to English proficiency.

Secondly, Maria's negative emotions were partly influenced by her unfamiliarity with the school's EAL program and the mentor teacher's expectations in terms of EAL teaching. As the EAL population in Victorian schools come from very diverse cultural, linguistic and educational backgrounds (DEECD, 2012b), EAL provision in Victoria varies in duration and delivery mode, depending on the needs of the EAL cohort in specific schools. Accordingly, programs range from New Arrivals Program (DEECD, 2012a), a targeted specialist EAL program (i.e., one offered by an EAL specialist targeting at EAL students), to EAL support program in an EAL-informed mainstream classroom (i.e., support for EAL students in the mainstream classroom by all educators including non-specialists) (DEECD, 2013; Department of Education, 2007). Therefore, the study recommends that more attention be given to developing preservice teachers' contextual knowledge (Richards, 1998), especially the kinds of EAL programs being implemented at schools. This is particularly important for international preservice teachers, who are not familiar with EAL learning and teaching in Australian schools. It is also recommended that mentor teachers and preservice teachers work together during the practicum induction period to make sure that preservice teachers receive an overview of the EAL program they are assigned to teach and the guidance they need in order to perform their job.

Moreover, this study further suggests that most of the negative emotions that Maria experienced originated from the tensions between her and the mentor teacher with regards to conceptions and practices of EAL teaching. These tensions, together with the mentor's unwillingness to let the preservice teacher experiment with her theoretical knowledge and practical skills in teaching, were a major source of anxiety, frustration and disappointment that Maria had. On the other hand, an important factor contributing to Maria's positive emotions was the level of freedom she had in teaching Year 8s. These positive emotions appeared to help Maria cope with the negative emotions. The study, therefore, recommends that mentor teachers give preservice teachers opportunity to test out what they have learnt at university and be ready to step in and provide guidance when they need it. The findings also

lend support to Pillen et al. (2013) and their recommendation that teacher educators and school mentors recognise preservice teachers' emotions and provide them with support in coping with these emotional tensions.

Finally, Maria appeared to be struggling by herself on the practicum. Although she was entitled to contact her university lecturers and tutor to ask for assistance, she reportedly found it difficult to articulate her concerns to the university staff. As a result, apart from the mentor teacher, who Maria did not find adequately supportive, she did not have any other source of support. Tensions between desired and provided support have been reported in the literature as an important factor causing negative experiences during the practicum (Farrell, 2001, 2008; Premier & Miller, 2010). Therefore, it is recommended that more effective support systems from both university staff and school mentors should be implemented and university-school partnership be consolidated to support preservice teachers' socialisation into the context of teaching practice (Gan, 2014). Preservice teachers are also advised to be more proactive in reaching out for support when it is needed. In addition, findings of H. T. M. Nguyen (2013) show that formal peer mentoring creates favourable learning conditions where preservice teachers provide mutual emotional support during the practicum. This study supports H. T. M. Nguyen's recommendation that there be provision of opportunities and procedures for peer support during the practicum to enhance their positive emotional experiences during the preservice teaching period.

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