Preparing International Pre-Service Teachers for Professional Placement: In-School Induction

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Abstract: This paper reports on an Australian University's support program to prepare its first year international pre-service teachers (IPSTs) for professional placement. The aim of the program was to address some of the practicum challenges experienced by the IPSTs. A case study was undertaken to investigate the effectiveness of the program. Ten international students enrolled in the Master of Teaching program were participants of this investigation. Data was collected through a questionnaire administered post-program and non-participant observation. The findings indicated that the program was beneficial towards inducting IPSTs to the Australian school context and contributed towards their confidence, communicative skills, and ability to link theory and practice.

Introduction

International student enrolment has significantly increased globally in the last decade (Institute of International Education, 2011; Universities Australia, 2014; UK Council for International Student Affairs, 2014). International students can be defined as those who have received prior education at their home country and have crossed borders to continue their studies (OECD, 2013). This paper focuses on international students who speak English as a second or additional language. In 2014, there were 589,860 full-paying international students enrolled in Australia. This was a 12 per cent increase from 2013. Approximately 31 percent of these students commenced in a higher education degree program with Chinese and Indian students totalling 36 per cent and 11 per cent of the enrolment (Australian Government Department of Education & Training, 2014). In 2013, nearly 4,991 international students were enrolled in the field of education (Australian Government Department of Education & Training, 2014). The rise in international student numbers brings about significant issues associated with teaching and learning in higher education. These students come from different social, cultural and language backgrounds and may not meet the expectations of the host institutions when commencing in their study programs and could, therefore, possibly continue to experience challenges throughout their studies. There is an added challenge in disciplines such as nursing, social work and education that specify professional placement as a requirement for successful completion of the study program. There is a substantial amount of research identifying the challenges international students face during their placement (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Korthagen & Kessels, 1999; Spooner-Lane, Tangen & Campbell, 2009). Although a majority of international students are able to transition into the host institution's academic culture, there are others who experience significant challenges in meeting particular requirements such as successfully completing the professional placement. Stakeholders in the university need to be aware that these students may have had different life experiences and come from diverse cultural contexts. These differences must be

acknowledged in the curriculum, teaching and learning activities and support resources. When universities agree to play host to international students, they have a duty of care towards them. Universities need to ensure that these students not only have access to quality education and teaching expertise (Hellsten & Prescott, 2004), but are also supported to experience positive learning outcomes throughout their studies. It must be acknowledged that many international students contribute to the local context by eventually becoming "highly successful permanent migrants, creating a more diverse skills base, stronger international links and increasing the diversity of Australian society" (Council of Australian Governments, 2014, p. 5). This paper reports on a pilot study that investigated a support mechanism that was put in place to prepare international pre-service teachers (IPSTs) for professional placement. A review of themes associated with professional placement, the challenges experienced by students undertaking their placement and current methods of scaffolding employed by some universities have been highlighted in this paper to provide a context to the significance of the issue discussed. Although this study was conducted in an Australian context, its findings could be relevant to any setting where teacher education programs are offered to international students. The findings of this pilot study provide an insider perspective of the strengths and limitations of the support initiative.

Professional Placement and its Challenges

Currently there is no standard stipulated period of professional placement that is required of Pre-service teachers (PSTs) in Australia. Teacher Registration Boards in different states or territories specify a length of time that is required of a PST in order to qualify for registration. PSTs are obligated to complete between 30 and 100 days of professional placement (depending on the state and study program) as a requirement for registration. In Australia, the placement forms a significant component of a PST's study program. In principle, it is perceived that professional placement would enable PSTs to apply and test theories and concepts that have been introduced in the university to the classroom context (Farrell, 2001; Touchon & Gwyn-Paquette, 2003). This practice activity is also seen as an avenue for student teachers to develop under the tutelage of senior teachers who mentor them about actual classroom teaching (Reese, 2012). However for many students, both domestic and international, though the placement can be rewarding, it can also be stressful and challenging.

There appears to be a general consensus that PSTs experience high levels of stress during their placement in trying to meet the expectations of the different stakeholders and apply the knowledge that they have learnt in the university (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Korthagen & Kessels, 1999; Spooner-Lane, Tangen & Campbell, 2009). Many PSTs experience a range of illnesses and afflictions before their placement (Campbell, Tangen & Spooner-Lane, 2006). There are also challenges associated with professional placement. The length of time PSTs spend in placement sites, the unavailability of good mentor teachers, shortage of placements and the weak link between theory and practice are often identified as some of the challenges (Bates, 2002; Hartsuyker, 2007; Turner, 2011). Other challenges include behaviour management issues, students' lack of respect for the PSTs, racism, issues with mentor teachers, length of the study program, isolation and financial constraints (Baird, 2010; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Han, 2005; McCluskey, 2012; Rodan, 2009).

These challenges may be augmented for international PSTs (IPSTs) because of their cultural and language backgrounds, educational experiences and unfamiliar teaching and learning styles and the curriculum (Ashman et al., 2013; Barton & Hartwig, 2015; Han, 2005; Ward, Bochner & Furnham, 2001). International PSTs often experience culture shock (Ward,

Bochner & Furnham, 2001) when they commence placements. This can be a result of factors such as disparity between expectations and classroom reality (Spooner-lane et al., 2009) as well as differences in their perception about how teaching should be undertaken (based on their own learning experience) and the actual requirements of the placement context (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Korthagen & Kessels, 1999). Cultural diversity between IPSTs and their placement site can also impact on the success of placement. Holfstede and Holfstede (2005, p. 62) asserted that "cultural diversity may stymie the development of teaching and learning styles". This was reiterated by Ashman et al. (2013) and Slethaug (2007) who argued that undeveloped knowledge about the host country's education system, lack of understanding about the cultural context of the curriculum and segregation from classroom activities can impact on IPST's intercultural competence.

Another key challenge that is identified in literature on teacher education and IPSTs is their communicative ability during professional placement. Generally, Australian universities require an overall score of between 6 and 7 on the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) or 67 on the TOEFL or 50-57 on the Pearson Test of English depending on the level of study. All these tests claim to identify a student's readiness to undertake academic studies in higher education. However, it must be noted that these tests assess a student's general academic competencies in the listening, speaking, reading and writing skills and not discipline-specific content such as teaching, which may require professional proficiencies for the classroom context. International PSTs can also enrol in their study programs via different pathways such as completing an extended period of English language preparatory program or undertaking two or three years of high school education in Australia. Unlike their peers, these students are not required to provide evidence of their level of English language proficiency. Although, a significant number of international students enrol for teaching degrees with an IELTS score of between 6 and 7 depending on the level of study (Craven, 2010), for some students aspects such as vocabulary, grammar and accent continue to impede the communication process in the placement (Yun & Le, 2011). School leaders regularly comment on international PSTs' low level of language proficiency (Dlamini & Martinovic, 2007). Weak language proficiency can also impact on a PST's self-esteem and confidence in the classroom (Han, 2005). This issue is intensified when IPSTs try to obtain teacher registration upon completion of their study program and are not able to demonstrate the language proficiency specified by the teacher registration board of the host country. For instance, in the South Australian context, an overall IELTS score of 7.5 is mandatory for teacher registration, with a score of 8 required for listening and speaking and 7 for reading and writing (Teacher Registration Board of South Australia, 2014). Although most IPSTs are able to successfully obtain the specified scores for registration, there are some who are not able to do so. It has also been identified that some education graduates are not able to demonstrate the language proficiency required by employers (Australian Government, 2010). There is currently an additional challenge for these PSTs with the introduction of the Literacy and Numeracy Test. All PSTs intending to obtain teacher registration in Australia will be required to demonstrate that they have successfully completed the assessment (ACER, 2015).

The Theory-Practice Divide

As in other disciplines such as nursing and social work (Hatlevik, 2011; Al-Ma'seb, Alkhurinej & Alduwaihi, 2015), students enrolled in education are found to be unable to link theory and practice. PSTs are often expected to transform theory into practice without any guidance or direction (Cochran & Smith, 2004; McDonough, 2012; Smith & Lev-Ari, 2005). Literature widely confirms that there is an existing gap between instruction of knowledge in pre-service education programs and what actually transpires during professional placement (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Valencia, Martin, Place & Grossman, 2009). This gap is often labelled the 'Theory-Practice Divide'. According to Turner (2011), three issues are predominant in the 'Theory-Practice Divide'. Firstly, he highlights that teacher education programs do not specify how theory should be applied in practice. Secondly, the practicum component of the teacher education program is about PSTs having the opportunity to develop their skills and not about using theories in practice (Turner, 2011). Finally, he maintains that there is no clear evidence of how research is integrated into the classroom by school leaders to ensure better outcomes for all stakeholders. It is also argued that although teachers in schools know about effective teaching, they seldom incorporate this into practice (Sparks, 2009) and that there is no cohesion between teacher education programs in universities and placement facilitators (House of Representatives, 2007).

For IPSTs, the 'Theory-Practice Divide' becomes more challenging as they also have to familiarise themselves with the local curriculum as well as the teaching and learning style before their first placement (Slethaug, 2007; Yue & Le, 2011). Besides the curriculum of the host country, international PSTs also have to learn new vocabulary and terminology associated with their discipline in a limited period of time (The Higher Education Academy, 2014). Being unaccustomed to the host context's teaching and learning style can place IPSTs at a disadvantage (Ashman et al., 2013; Spooner-Lane et al., 2009) because unlike their domestic peers, they would not have experienced the local curriculum. International PSTs may find it challenging to simultaneously apply theories introduced in the university and make sense of the new curriculum during placement without proper scaffolding from their mentor teachers. Unfortunately, not all international and domestic PSTs are able to form good relationships with their mentor teachers (McCluskey, 2012). More disturbingly, it was found that teacher education programs across many parts of the world often do not acknowledge the needs of the minority group of students (Au & Blake 2003; Gay, 2005; Hartley, 2003), which many IPSTs belong to, thus further extending the 'Theory-Practice Divide'.

Current Practices Employed to Support International PSTs

Australian universities and schools today represent a very diverse student population and teaching workforce. It is important for educators to acknowledge what this diversity means for their practice. International PSTs can make valuable contributions to the teaching profession as they would not only be able to demonstrate strategies for negotiating cultural differences (Cruickshank, 2004) but also truly understand challenges experienced by migrant students in their classroom. Acknowledging and incorporating teaching frameworks with international perspectives and intercultural competence in the curriculum of teacher education may ultimately be beneficial for all stakeholders, particularly IPSTs (Leask, 2001).

Universities in Australia are continuously devising ways to provide IPSTs support so that they can successfully experience positive outcomes in their placement. In one of the campuses in University of Tasmania (UTAS), IPSTs "were invited to participate in a series of workshops, facilitated by skilled mentors, designed to provide the participants with the

communicative, pedagogical and cultural understandings necessary for the undertaking of a successful professional placement" (Ashman et al., 2013, p. 64). These were complemented with school visits so that IPSTs obtained a deeper understanding about the teaching practices, curriculum, and classroom processes.

In Queensland University of Technology (QUT) a program called 'Patches' was implemented to offer PSTs of Australian and Malaysian origin opportunities to "enhance their intercultural competence through their involvement in a series of reciprocal learning activities. Each learning experience was considered a "patch" that eventually created a "quilt of intercultural learning" (Spooner-Lane et. al, 2013, p.1). These PSTs engaged in interactive tasks and workshops over a length of time to develop their intercultural learning.

In the University of Queensland a support group was set up for PSTs of non-English speaking background. The aim of this support group was to enable PSTs of non-English speaking backgrounds to have open discourses about professional experience without the fear of being judged by their peers. The support group was also established with the objective of developing the PSTs confidence in using the English language for their studies and professional experience (McCluskey, 2012).

A work placement for international students program or WISP led by Barton and Hartwig (2014) was investigated to establish a cross-disciplinary and contextual approach to improving work-placement (e.g. internship, practicum, clinical placement, work integrated learning) for international students and other supporting stakeholders. The aim of this program was to enable international students to practise professional literacies, communication and critical thinking in non-threatening and constructive environments.

In-school placement is another form of support that is increasingly employed as a component of teacher training programs around the world (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Victoria, 2011; Edwards &Tsui, 2009). It is a program that is very similar to the training undertaken by doctors and nurses in teaching hospitals for a period of time before they complete their degrees. The school-based program can "provide student teachers with classroom teaching practice under the guidance and supervision of experienced teacher trainers" (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Victoria, 2011, p. 5). Students in the program are placed in the school for regular periods of time (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Victoria, 2011, p. 6). Such a program may be beneficial for inducting IPSTs into the host country's educational practices while simultaneously creating intercultural awareness about the different aspects of teaching and learning activities in a new context.

In the University of South Australia where the pilot study was undertaken, a support mechanism was implemented to ensure that IPSTs were ready to undertake their professional placement. The support mechanism was named 'Celebrating Cultural Diversity' (CCD) to acknowledge and celebrate the rich life experiences of IPSTs while simultaneously acculturating them into the local context. The CCD was conceptualised based on the principles of the sociocultural theory. It was premised that relationships and interactions between IPSTs and the host country's culture would contribute to their overall development. It was also anticipated that with proper scaffolding and guidance from those who were more experienced (Vygotsky, 1978) IPSTs would reach their potential level. By placing the PSTs in the Zone of Proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978), "knowledge of and about teaching" in the school (Smith & Lev-Ari, 2005, p. 291) will be advanced. Therefore, the aim of CCD program was to provide IPSTs: 1) cultural awareness about the host country's school context; 2) cognizance about the differences in the education system as well as learning and teaching approaches; 3) opportunities to implement the curriculum in the classroom; 4) develop relationships with senior teachers and learn strategies to link theory and practice; 4) extend communicative abilities; and 5) build confidence.

In the context of the CCD program, it was expected that actual interactions and relationships with senior and experienced teachers in the context of a school without the threat of assessment would enable IPSTs opportunities to work on the challenges that were identified in the earlier section of this paper. Pairing IPSTs with friendly and experienced mentor teachers in a school would allow them to familiarise themselves with the teaching and learning style employed in the host country and develop their knowledge about the education system. Mentor teachers would also scaffold these PSTs towards implementing the theories learnt in the University, in the classroom thus enabling PSTs the ability to link theory and practice. Providing IPSTs the opportunity to engage with the school community for an extended period of time would also allow them to overcome any initial culture shock that they may experience during their placement. Communicating with the different stakeholders in the school would also contribute towards the development of IPSTs' discipline specific communicative ability and their overall confidence.

The CCD unfolded in a primary school near the University. The professional placement coordinator had developed a good relationship with the Principal of the school and its teachers and the support mechanism was endorsed by the school community. Twenty-four IPSTs commencing in their teacher training program in 2013 were invited to participate in the CCD program. The PSTs were from Russia, Mexico, Albania, China, Japan, Korea, Vietnam and Singapore. Each of these 24 IPSTs was paired with a mentor teacher in the school. The PSTs negotiated when they could work with their mentors. These PSTs were afforded opportunities to observe their mentor teachers, implement the curriculum by teaching the content, experiment with different teaching and learning activities, make links between theory and practice, engage in the host country's education system and communicate in discipline specific English. The PSTs were involved in the CCD program for one year (the first year of their study program). The PSTs developed strong relationships with their mentor teachers and were able to raise any queries or anxieties they had about their professional placement or teaching in general without being judged or ridiculed. The PSTs continued to attend lectures in the University while participating in the program.

The Context of the Current Study

The participants of this study had been in Australia for approximately six weeks before they became involved in the CCD program. They had no prior knowledge about the education system of the host country. A pre-program briefing session was held for all the 24 students and the aims of the program were communicated by the placement coordinator. The school and its demographic profile were introduced to the PSTs and a meeting was arranged at the school so that they could be introduced to the Principal and two senior leaders who would facilitate the program. Detailed records such as attendance at the school, all activities undertaken at the school and debriefings with the placement coordinator were maintained. At the end of the program it was identified through attendance records that only 15 IPSTs consistently engaged in the project. Invitation to participate in the pilot study was extended to all the 15 participants but only ten consented. All ethical requirements specified by the institution were strictly followed while undertaking this investigation. Respondents' consent had been obtained prior to participation.

The qualitative framework was used to collect data in this pilot study. A case study was undertaken to "describe, predict and understand the phenomenon" (Woodside, 2010) under investigation. This method was employed in the current study as it enabled the "investigation of real life events in their natural setting" (Yin, 2003, p. xii). Participants' insights about the CCD program were obtained through a questionnaire administered upon

completion of the program and non-participant observation. Besides their demographic profile, the participants were asked four questions, namely, 1) What do you consider to be the skills or insights gained from the CCD program? 2) How has the CCD program impacted on your development as a PST? 3) What skills do you consider need further development? and 4) How could the CCD program be improved in order to help your development as a PST? The responses from the questionnaire were reduced, displayed using matrixes, coded and analysed for emerging themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Data from non-participant observation was analysed from field notes.

Participants' responses to the above questions helped the facilitators evaluate the effectiveness of the program and identify its contribution towards preparing IPSTs for their professional placement. The CCD program was expected to be rolled out to a larger scale in the University and made compulsory for all IPSTs if it was found to have positively contributed to the PSTs' overall development. Successful completion of the first and second professional placement would be used to benchmark this. The ten participants are profiled in Table 1 and pseudonyms have been used to maintain confidentiality.

Findings and Discussion

The demographic profile of the participants enabled the researcher to identify the context from where the IPSTs originated. A majority of the participants came from Asia and a small number from Europe. English is generally learnt as a second, additional or foreign language in these contexts (Kachru, 1992). Only one participant demonstrated an entry level English language proficiency band of 8 on the IELTS which is equivalent to 'very good user'. The others appeared to fall between the 5.5 and 7 bands. These bands are described as ranging from 'modest users' to 'good users' (IELTS, n.d.) and the IELTS Academic, which most international students sit for to meet the requirements of the host institution's ELP requirement, purports to "measure the English language proficiency needed for academic, higher education environment" (IELTS, n.d.). The researcher has found from experience that even though students meet the entry level English language proficiency specified by the University which appears to be a minimum band of 6 for undergraduate and 6.5 for postgraduate studies (with particular programs requiring higher levels), some students continue to struggle in their study programs and while on placement because of their communicative abilities (McCluskey, 2012; Reese, 2012).

Name	Origin	Overall IELTS score	Specialisation	Teaching experience (years)
AN	Russia	8	LOTE, ESL	2
DG	Mexico	6.5	Arts, Spanish	5
EK	Russia	6	History	6
JZ	China	7	Chemistry, Chinese	7
WSH	Taiwan	5.5	Early childhood	4
WG	China	6.5	Mathematics, Design Technology	5
YZ	China	7	Chinese, ESL	6
VC	Albania	7	Early childhood	5
TNN	Vietnam	6.5	Early childhood	Nil
PCH	Taiwan	6.5	Early childhood	Nil

Table 1 Participants' Profile

Students enrolled in the Bachelor or Master of Teaching would be required to demonstrate their communicative abilities (verbal and written) during their professional placement. Some international and domestic PSTs with English as an additional language do not successfully complete their placements because they are not able to communicate effectively (Campbell, Tangen & Spooner-Lane, 2006). Analysis of the participants' profiles highlighted that all but two of the IPSTs had some level of teaching experience. It must be acknowledged that teaching styles may differ in different contexts. In some educational contexts, students are expected to demonstrate critical thinking and engage in discussions about what they learn. In many parts of Asia and other parts of the world, a more conservative approach is practised in that students are encouraged to rote learn and memorise information (Tweed, 2000). International PSTs who are not familiar with an education system that encourages critical and analytical thinking, may struggle to implement teaching and learning activities in the classroom in line with the requirements of their mentor teachers or fail to understand why things are undertaken in a particular way in school. These PSTs are already disadvantaged compared to their domestic peers because of their cultural and language backgrounds, educational experiences and their inexperience of the host context's teaching and learning styles and the curriculum (Ashman et al., 2013; Han, 2005; Ward, Bochner & Furnham, 2001).

Advantages Gained from the CCD Program

Seven participants indicated that their confidence grew as a result of being involved in a real teaching and learning environment as well as interacting and forming relationships with the school community[1]. Others specified that their communicative ability improved because of the CCD program. These participants identified that they were able to communicate efficiently with the different stakeholders in the school. In this aspect, the CCD appears to have contributed to the IPSTs' development. Communicative ability is often one of the factors contributing to IPSTs' challenges during placement (Dlamini & Martinovic, 2007; Han, 2005; Yun & Le, 2011). Failure to communicate effectively during placement because of their English language proficiency often impacts on IPSTs' confidence and self-esteem (Han, 2005). International PSTs are observed to be quiet and disengaged by their mentor teachers (Placement Coordinator, personal communication, January 10, 2013). Conversely, it is possible that IPSTs may be afraid to communicate because of their own perceived weakness in the language. As was expected in the conceptualisation of the CCD program, relationships and interactions between IPSTs and the host country's culture (the school setting in this instance), had contributed to their development.

Five participants also suggested that their knowledge about linking theory and practice improved as a result of their involvement in the CCD program. These participants highlighted that they were clearer about organising teaching and learning activities, managing behaviours in the classroom and using students' prior knowledge to build on the teaching and learning activities. For example, VC highlighted that she knew "how to organise and maintain the classroom management, how to build on students' home language and background knowledge (sic)" to complement teaching and learning activities. TNN stated that feedback and scaffolding from her mentor teacher enabled her to "understand individual students' strengths, weaknesses and interests". PCH reiterated this when she indicated that the CCD program helped her learn "how to organise teaching activity and [classroom]

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[1] Some respondents listed more than one factor for each of the research questions.

management, have more confidence in teaching, get familiar with Australian curriculum and education system (sic)".

Another benefit that four of the participants identified as resulting from their involvement in the CCD program was the opportunity to get acquainted with the Australian curriculum and education system. YZ succinctly identified the benefit she gained from the CCD program when she suggested, "coming from a different background, I have no experience of students' early schooling. This project [program] has offered me an opportunity to see the Australian education system as a whole (sic)". Often IPSTs are expected to undertake their professional placement on the onset of their study program. Coming from a different context, these PSTs do not have much time to familiarise themselves with the curriculum or the education system in order to successfully implement the teaching and learning activities expected by the stakeholders in the school (Ashman et al.,2013; Slethaug, 2007). This unfamiliarity frequently impacts on the outcome of their placement. Being involved in a program like the CCD affords IPSTs opportunities to learn about the local educational context in a non-threatening environment.

The participants' involvement in the CCD program had established that with proper scaffolding and guidance from senior teachers and by placing the PSTs in the Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978), IPSTs are able to build on their confidence, improve on their communicate ability, link theory and practice and get accustomed to the Australian curriculum and education system. Incorporating a support mechanism like the CCD program in teacher education could overcome the lack of cohesion that is often identified in the literature between education programs in universities and placement facilitators (House of Representatives, 2007).

The Impact of the CCD Program on International PSTs Development

Three themes consistently emerged from the analysis namely, mentoring, scaffolding and cultural differences. Mentoring is defined as the process where an expert mediates knowledge for beginners in order to make it more explicit (Dennen & Burner, 2007.). Scaffolding is defined as "structure that is put in place to help learners reach their goals and is removed bit by bit as it is no longer needed" (Dennen & Burner, 2007, p. 815).

Mentoring

A majority of the participants indicated that being supported and mentored by friendly and approachable teachers, resulted in the participants effectively becoming more aware of implementing teaching strategies in the classroom. This is reflected in TNN's response when she stated, "my mentor teacher has shown me important resources she has been using in her classroom. By discussing with her about the students' learning, I have learned how to observe them and help with their learning" and EK's response, "my mentor teacher help me see my skills and expectations in new perspective, what need to improve and what I am doing well (sic)". Most of the participants shared similar responses and reiterated that the Principal and mentor teachers in the school were friendly and scaffolded the PSTs' development as teachers. The researcher observed that the participants of this study confidently approached their mentor teachers and the Principal to discuss issues or obtain guidance. The findings of the current study has highlighted that IPSTs could significantly benefit from fostering good relationships with their mentor teachers. However, since not all PSTs, both international and domestic are able to forge such relationships (McCluskey, 2012), it is important for teacher

education programs to address this issue as poor relationships with the mentor teacher can impact on the mentoring and scaffolding process. Mentor teachers ought to be made aware that supervising PSTs "through the lens of cultural and linguistic difference" (Nuttall & Ortlipp, 2012, p. 58) can be detrimental to the PSTs' development as teachers. Lee (2013) argues that mentor teachers ought to be better prepared for the mentoring process so that they are able to provide their mentees sufficient support and a positive environment in order to develop their teacher identity.

Scaffolding

Some of the participants also highlighted that their mentor teachers scaffolded their development through various ways. AN indicated that her mentor teacher "helped her apply the knowledge gained at University" and JZ pointed out that she was assisted to reflect on her performance and work towards improving. AN specified that her mentor teacher contributed towards her development by scaffolding her to teach in different learning contexts. It is possible that AN was referring to the opportunity her mentor provided her when she was allowed to teach different levels and classes to practise her specialisation. It was also found that the scaffolding her mentor teacher provided, gave WG the opportunity to observe "how professionals work in Australian schools".

Cultural Differences

Another theme that emerged from this study was that the participants gained awareness about the cultural differences between their lived experiences and the host context. Literature on IPSTs often identifies culture shock as one of the factors that impacts on their professional placement experience (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Korthagen & Kessels, 1999; Spooner-lane et al., 2009; Ward, Bochner & Furnham, 2001). It was found that Asian students did not integrate into the host institution as well as their European and South American peers because of factors such as cultural distance, prejudice and discrimination (Zhou, Jindal-Snape, Topping & Todman, 2008). However, for a majority of the Asian participants of the current study, being immersed in the local culture for an extended period of time appeared to have contributed to their cultural knowledge of the host context's school system. AN, for instance indicated that her participation in the CCD program had taught her about different cultures. Another participant, EK stated that her engagement with the school had made her aware that she needed to adapt to the Australian school culture. Two other participants also reiterated this sentiment when they suggested that their involvement in the program allowed them to experience the diverse school culture. It is possible that IPSTs would experience more positive outcomes if given the opportunities to experience the school culture before undertaking their actual professional placement. Currently, these PSTs are often expected to do their placement soon after their arrival and without any induction of the host context's school culture. Education programs should ensure that both mentor teachers and PSTs are acculturated into each other's "academic culture, cultures of communication and cultures of learning" (Cortazzi & Jin, 1997, p. 88).

Participants' Reflections about their Learning

Three themes were identified from the analysis of the data associated with reflections about skills the participants perceived as needing further development and they are

communicative ability, ability to link theory and practice and culture. When the participants were asked to reflect on aspects that they perceived needed further development, the PSTs indicated that they needed to improve on their communicative ability in order to communicate with their students, teach the content, build relationships with the school community and communicate in writing with the various stakeholders. Engagement in the CCD program had afforded the participants the opportunity to reflect on their learning needs and skills that required further development by themselves rather than being told by their mentor teachers that they were not successful in their professional placement because of their communicative ability. Often IPSTs perceive that they have met the language requirement specified by the University when they demonstrate particular scores on the IELTS, TOEFL or other similar tests. When these students are unable to successfully complete their professional placement because of their communicative ability, they may not understand that meeting the entry level language proficiency does not necessarily guarantee that they would be able to effectively communicate in the way a proficient speaker would (McCluskey, 2012). The 'apprenticeship' that the participants of this study experienced through their involvement in the CCD program gave them the awareness of the different kinds of communication they would need to undertake in the school (Reese, 2012). In the current study, the participants were able to identify for themselves, the importance of effective communication for their professional placement and their future profession, especially if the PSTs intended to remain in Australia. It is possible that these PSTs may endeavour to further develop this skill to meet the requirements.

The participants of this study also identified that they needed to further develop their ability to link theory and practice. The participants highlighted that they needed to improve on the following, namely, classroom management, implementing the curriculum and employing appropriate teaching strategies to meet the needs of the diverse student cohort in the Australian classroom. Coming from contexts where teacher-centred approaches are common and having experienced "particular organisational, disciplinary and pedagogical forms" (Slethaug, 2007, p. 79), these PSTs would essentially require significantly more scaffolding and mentoring towards implementing the Australian curriculum and student-centred teaching and learning approaches. The findings suggest that programs such as the CCD are vital to IPSTs' teacher education so that they can be socialised into the 'expected' way of doing things in the local context. However, the analysis of responses indicated that the participants would have benefitted more from the CCD program if they had been involved throughout their studies and not just the first year. Furthermore, as any senior teacher would endorse, teaching competency is developed from many years of experience, knowledge and conscious efforts to improve (Ericsson & Charness, 1994). For these participants, not only would they need to learn how to become better teachers, they would also have to do so in a new context.

Some of the participants identified that they needed to improve on their intercultural knowledge. Both JZ and TNN, especially, indicated that "cultural gap" and "cultural differences" significantly influenced their experience. PSTs are often expected to assimilate into the school culture and this appeared to be one of their biggest challenges as mentor teachers in professional placements often assess them based on their own culturally socialised ways of how teaching should be undertaken in Australia (Lee, 2013; Reese, 2012). It is important that teacher education programs address this by integrating some form of intercultural competence training for both pre-service and mentor teachers. International PSTs would be unfairly marginalised if they were expected to assimilate into the local culture without any intercultural preparation.

Limitations of the Program

Six of the participants specified that they had greatly benefitted from the program. Two participants did not provide a response. Two others specified that the CCD program could be improved by adding a networking element where the PSTs could regularly meet as a group to discuss their individual experiences and develop their communicative ability. The participants also indicated that they needed to be informed and be made aware of the expectations of the professional placement by the University well before they embarked on this activity. The CCD program was also limited in that it did not motivate the consistent engagement of all 24 IPSTs in the cohort. It is possible that some of the participants saw this program as an add-on to their already busy schedules. This investigation would have been more insightful if the non-participants had been interviewed to identify reasons for their disengagement.

Conclusion

The deficit approach is often employed when discussing international students in the literature. International students are regularly identified as not being able to engage in their study programs because of their communicative ability, integrate into the host country's culture or meet the expectations of the academic ethos. Very few studies acknowledge the differences between lived experiences of these students in their home country and that of the host context into which they are expected to integrate. Given that internationalisation will become a future norm in universities, support mechanisms need to be put in place from the onset of degree programs such as education so that successful outcomes are experienced by international students or those with English as an additional language. It must be acknowledged that these students experience challenges in their study programs because of their language and cultural backgrounds, educational experience and unfamiliarity of the host context's teaching and learning approaches. Australian universities and schools will continue to represent a very diverse student population and teaching workforce. This diversity needs to be acknowledged in the curriculum and the resources.

Although the findings of the pilot study reported in this paper cannot be generalised due to its sample size, they are an initial step towards offering an insider perspective about the effectiveness of a support mechanism that was implemented in the University of South Australia to prepare IPSTs for professional placement. The findings indicate that IPSTs have the potential to develop as effective teachers if they are mentored and scaffolded in an authentic environment without the threat of assessment. Often these PSTs are expected to undertake their professional placement very early in their study program without any induction of the Australian school context. These PSTs are also led to believe that having met the entry level language requirements of the University, they would have the communicative ability to successfully engage in their placement. Consequently, some IPSTs struggle through their placements and experience many challenges. The CCD program afforded commencing IPSTs the opportunity to assimilate into the school culture under the mentorship of friendly, senior teachers in a non-threatening environment. The PSTs involvement in the program not only facilitated their development as teachers but also provided them with opportunities to reflect on skills that needed further improvement. Many of the PSTs who were involved in the program gained awareness that they needed to improve on their discipline specific communicative ability. All the PSTs who were involved in the CCD program successfully undertook all their placements and graduated with a postgraduate degree in teaching. The success of the first program resulted in the program being rolled out to all commencing

international students the following year. The program was made compulsory and more schools were invited to participate in the CCD program. The program also successfully won an OLT Extension grant three years into its inception. This pilot study is limited in that only the PSTs' evaluation of the program was investigated. It would have been more comprehensive if the mentor teachers and the school leaders who were involved in the program had also been interviewed to gain their insights about the effectiveness of support programs like the CCD.

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