Chapter 8. Practicum for international students in teacher education programs: An investigation of three university sites through multisocialisation, interculturalisation and reflection

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Abstract

This chapter explores the practicum experience of international students undertaking education programs at three different universities in Australia. International students were interviewed about their practicum experiences with a particular focus on what worked well and what needed improvement. Through a thematic analysis as well as identifying aspects of the interview data related to multisocialisation, interculturalisation and reflection models the authors share findings even though international students may experience difficulties during their practicum they also note that these experiences allow them to learn. When mentor teachers were able to recognise the international students' strengths then placements were successful. Further, unpacking areas that need improvement through a supportive manner enabled students to learn and reconstruct their practice. The rich and informative data on the challenges and successful approaches across the three sites in this study add to the body of literature regarding effective ways to improve work placements for international students.

Introduction

Experience in the workplace is an important component of many study programs in universities across the world, particularly in teacher education programs (Darling-Hammond, 2006a, 2006b; Korthagen, 2001; Korthagen & Kessels, 1999). This experience, often referred to as practicum, professional or field experience, enables students to see firsthand how schools work, specifically where classroom practice is concerned. While experience in educational contexts such as schools is important for all teacher education students, it could be considered more high stakes for international students studying in these programs due to differences in education systems, visa requirements and graduation timelines (Barton, Hartwig, & Cain, 2015). Therefore, it is critical that workplace experiences for international students in teacher education courses are positive and viewed as a space for learning for both student and mentor teacher.

The practicum experience for teacher education students is a critical part of their university study. In many programs in universities across the world, teacher education students partake in a practicum each year of their study. This expectation also applies to international students as practicum is a compulsory component for teacher registration boards and regulatory bodies such as professional organisations. Past research has identified a number of concerns for international students during the teacher education practicum such as difficulty understanding the cultural context and differences in language for students from other linguistic backgrounds (Brown, 2008; Campbell & Uusimaki, 2006), the mismatch between university

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theory and practical classroom applications (Cameron, Campbell, & Sheridan, 2011), and pre-service teacher stress, both before and during the practicum (Cole & Knowles, 1993).

Common reasons, outlined in the literature, as to why the practicum experience may not be successful include poor communication between the student, mentor teacher and the university context; differences in expectations from each party; and suitability of teachers to take on the role of mentor (Allen, 2011; Cole & Knowles, 1993). These concerns may be similar for both domestic and international students.

Much research on international students in teacher education programs tends to focus on students from non-English speaking backgrounds undertaking programs in English speaking universities (Andrade, 2006; Jackson & Heggins, 2003) as well as issues that international students may find challenging including homesickness, not having the regular support systems available through family and friends, difficulty settling into a new environment, and financial and legislative concerns (Brown, 2008; Campbell & Uusimaki, 2006; Spooner-Lane, Tangen, & Campbell, 2009; Walters, 2012). Not only do international students reportedly have a number of issues to deal with while studying in another country, these can be exemplified during work placement experiences (Cruickshank & Westbrook, 2013). What is not reported on as much, however, are the positive ways in which international students, their mentors and university staff can work together to ensure success.

This chapter draws on data from three university sites in a large scale research project that explored the practicum experience for international students in Australia. We identify some of the issues reflected upon in relation to international teacher education students at each site and offer succinct suggestions as to how these concerns can be viewed through a more positive lens. We employ conceptual frameworks of multisocialisation, interculturalisation and reflection to investigate the experiences of international teacher education students, their mentors and other stakeholders including school coordinators and university staff.

Theorising the practicum experience for international students in teacher education contexts

International students do experience the practicum differently as they need to socialise into not only the workplace context but also the cultural environment in which they carry out their practicum. According to Golde (1998), international students undergo a *double socialisation* process but the *Work placement for International Student Programs* (WISP) project further argues that a *multisocialisation* process occurs (see Chapter 2 for example). In order to participate successfully in their practicum, it is vital that both international students and their mentors are able to reflect critically in and on action (Schőn, 1983) as well as consider the ways in which intercultural exchanges between all stakeholders can be effective and positive.

Hunter, Pearson, and Gutiérrez (2015) explored interculturalisation as the intersection of teacher education and culture through discourse on systems, structures and social context. Interculturalisation has much resonance with the term internationalisation. Internationalisation includes the diversity of international student cohorts and the associated policy, practices, and assessment related to international students in higher education. Knight's (1999, 2004) work presented a strategic view of a number of approaches to internationalisation (for more, see Chapter 1). In order to respect others, a deep understanding of their beliefs, background and experiences is essential; what Hunter et al. (2015) called *transcending* one cultural system for another (for more, see Chapter 1).

Education is a vehicle by which such intercultural exchanges are constant (Byram, Nichols, & Stevens, 2001). This is made possible through interaction with diverse students in classrooms as well as positive engagement with teaching staff who may be from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Further, education can be viewed as "the primary means of cultural transmission and acquisitions through which the current generation builds upon and extends the knowledge, skills, and cultural traditions of the previous generation" (Hunter et al., 2015, p. 2). Therefore, it makes sense that a practicum experience for teacher education students has the potential to be exemplary practice in the area of interculturalisation.

For international students, the practicum experience can provide a positive platform whereby they can learn about effective models of teaching and learning for diverse students as well as partake in positive intercultural exchanges with their mentor teacher. A reciprocal relationship has been noted to be of benefit in the teacher education experience (Healy & Welchert, 1990). Allen (2011) highlighted how the relationship between the student and mentor teacher is crucial for success and presented three issues that are worthy of consideration: task authenticity, task expectations, and emotional engagement. In Allen's (2009) study, discrepancies between stakeholder perceptions of assessment task authenticity, lack of university-school communication and perceived breakdowns in partnership arrangements had a negative impact on emotional engagement of mentors and teacher students. These concerns are heightened when cultural differences influence the student-mentor relationship. In order for positive intercultural exchanges to occur between both student and mentor teacher, it is essential for reflection and reflective practice to take place.

Reflection and reflective practice are increasingly important skills to utilise in many professional contexts, including education. In fact, many professions highlight reflection as a key attribute in appropriate professional standards. The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) lists one's capacity to engage in reflective practices among the key attributes of high-performing principals and school leaders (AITSL, 2014a) and provides tools such as the AITSL Reflection on Practice Tool (RPT) for teachers, which aims to "support teachers to reflect on their professional knowledge, practice and engagement with reference to the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers" (AITSL, 2014b). Being able to reflect on learning and teaching in the role of teacher or leader means that purposeful approaches can be taken in order to improve practice. This is also important for students undertaking study in the field of education.

Research on reflection often emanates from seminal work by researchers such as Dewey (1933) and Schön (1983). Dewey's (1933) research explored the idea that people can reflect on both personal and intellectual levels, while Schön's (1983) work extended the concept of reflection *in* and *on* action. This is important for professionals as they reflect throughout their everyday work but also as they *step back* to evaluate how they are going, how they got there, why their work is important, and where and when to improve next time. Reflection is a critical component of the work placement for pre-service international teacher education students as it allows them to understand the ways in which their own experiences culturally, linguistically and socially impact on how they interact with others in the workplace and how these experiences can help create learning opportunities for their own students in the classroom.

Reflection occurs at various levels and is a cyclic, not linear, process. Bain, Ballantyne, Mills and Lester (2002) noted that in fact there are five levels of reflection which Ryan and Ryan (2013) collapsed to be called the 4Rs model. These levels increase in complexity and move

from description of, and personal response to, an issue or situation to the use of theory and experience to explain, interrogate, and ultimately transform practice (for more, see Chapter 1).

The theoretical approaches described above will be considered in the investigation of the data in this paper.

Background to the case studies: Work Placement for International Students Programs (WISP) project

The data featured in this chapter come from the large scale WISP project that explored the experiences of international students during various work placements across a number of disciplinary areas including Business, Education, Engineering, Nursing, Occupational Therapy, Psychology and Speech Pathology. This chapter reports on international students' experience undertaking study in teacher education programs from three of the university sites involved in the overall project.

University sites

Site 1 has an enrolment of approximately 45,000 students with over 9,000 international students. The Graduate Diploma of Education Secondary program is a one -year program that leads to registration as a teacher. Students in the program complete eight core courses across two semesters of study and this includes two supervised professional experiences in schools (32 and 33 days).

Site 2 has over 53,000 students and 8000+ international students. The largest education international cohort is located within the Masters of Teaching (Early Childhood) course. This is a two year course and students undertake 12 core units and four electives. In addition, students undertake 70 days of supervised professional experience in early childhood settings.

Site 3 has 70,000 enrolments and over 26,000 international students. The student participants in this project site came from the Master of Teaching Early Years and the Bachelor of Education in Primary and Early Years. The number of days of work placement varied from five to 25 days each semester.

Research design and methods

The data collection for the overall WISP project was both quantitative and qualitative and included a large scale survey for international students and a range of interviews and focus groups with students, academic staff and placement officers at the university, and work placement staff including teacher mentors and site coordinators, as well as a collection of student reports and other artefacts related to the study. For the purpose of this chapter, we have focused on the qualitative interview data at each university site that explored teacher education practices. Table 8.1 outlines how many interviews and/or focus groups were undertaken at each university site.

Table 8.1 Interview/focus data collected at each site

University Site	Number of International student interviews/focus groups	Number of University staff interviews/focus groups	Number of work placement staff interviews
1	7 interviews 3 focus groups	6 individual interviews with academics 1 focus group with placement staff	5
2	3 individual interviews	Individual interviews: 8 with academics 3 with placement officers 3 with international students 4 with administration staff (international student support services, mentoring and support service)	N/A
3	11 individual interviews with 7 students	5 individual interviews and 1 focus group with academics, 2 interviews with placement staff and 1 interview with support staff	6

As mentioned, each site is distinctly different in terms of how many interviews were able to be carried out. For example, more international students were interviewed at Site 1 compared to Sites 2 and 3 while Site 2 had more university staff interviewed. This was due to the fact that ethical considerations at each site impacted on the types of data that was able to be collected, and some international students were not able to be contacted during the practicum. Each site was able to focus on particular aspects of their program.

Data analysis

Each university site collected various data related to teacher education and international students' practicum experiences with each team being responsible for their own data sets. All interviews and focus groups were transcribed and analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) via a coding system that was also influenced by the theoretical frameworks of multisocialisation, interculturalisation and reflection. IPA explores the lifeworlds and perceptions of the interviewees (Allan, Eatough & Ungar, 2016; Brocki & Wearden, 2006; Callary, Rathwell, & Young, 2015). After reading and re-reading the transcripts, the data was thematically grouped into broad overarching themes. Direct quotations are used to illustrate the findings (Tzanidaki & Reynolds, 2011) in this chapter.

According to Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006), a hybrid approach to data analysis, utilising both inductive and deductive coding is possible. An IPA approach enabled the team to allow themes to reveal themselves upon multiple readings of the transcripts. Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) describe the process of thematic analysis as a form of pattern recognition within the data, where emerging themes become the categories for analysis (p.85).

We were then able to code or map points within the data that related to the two frameworks detailed previously. This process ensured rigour by demonstrating integrity and competence within the study (Aroni et al., 1999) via a number of stages. What became apparent as the team worked through the data was that each site was unique and distinct due to the data set that were able to be collected. To ensure that each university site was able to communicate

about a significant issue revealed through their own data sets each is represented in a case study.

Results

University Site 1

The student, teacher and university relationship

The data revealed that the relationship between the international student, their mentor and university staff is critical for practicum success. If this relationship was not positive, then challenges were faced. For example, if the students had experienced some difficulty during the practicum they often *reported* that the relationship with their mentor was diminished. Shen, for example, noted that:

> Everything just went wrong and she had to help me and that made her very angry, even more angry at me because she had to help me set things up. (Shen)

Shen said that her mentor teacher expected her to already display high level *competencies* as a beginning teacher, even though this was her first practicum. Shen *related* and *reasoned* that her mentor should:

> Stand in my shoes and think about my problem, to think about how I feel as an international student and also a new pre-service teacher. (Shen)

On the other hand, Cathy's teacher showed a high level of *ethos* and viewed her more as a teaching colleague:

> I really like my teacher. She's very warm and kind and she's helped me out just being in Australia too. She's invited us for dinner. She makes me feel comfortable in class and she shows what I've done in prac and kind of goes over what she did in her own prac (Cathy).

The ways in which students reflected about their mentors showed how their relationship with them impacted on the practicum's progress—either positively or negatively.

This was also evident in terms of communication and input by university staff. For instance, there was evidence that the expectations from schools differed to what the university had planned. The importance of effective communication between all stakeholders before, during and after the practicum experience was highlighted. This was particularly evident for the students who had done more than one prac:

> I felt like my teacher didn't really know what to do with me the first couple of days. He never had a prac teacher before, so I had to explain to him why I'm here and go over my outline of the handbook (Angela).

> My first prac teacher was a little disorganised…but this time it just fits like a glove. My mentor teacher is mentoring me and she's letting me take risks. She's made me feel safe and that's giving me the confidence that I need, so it's been a wonderful experience. She's someone I want to stay in touch with (Mark).

Further, in the interview data one student said that her mentor teacher did not expect written lesson plans for every lesson whereas other students spoke about the fact that they were awake until 2:00am every night planning and preparing for their classes. This inconsistency is mentioned in the literature (Brown, 2008) and at this university site it was confirmed that

unless a positive relationship is established between the student and mentor up front then a number of concerns can arise throughout the practicum.

One solution for this positive relationship to occur was offered by a school coordinator for the international students:

> With an international student, I need a teacher with some experience and a bit of maturity about themselves as well, because they are likely going to have to handle some language barriers, they're going to have to explain to parents about if in the classroom there's going to [be a] change the teaching pedagogy. (School coordinator).

While it is important for schools to consider the challenges international students might face, it does ultimately position the students in deficit discourse as highlighted above in a phrase "they are likely to have to handle some language barriers". Not all international students are English as a Second Language learners, in fact, many of the students at this university site were from English speaking countries or English as an Additional Language students.

The triadic relationship between international student, university staff and school staff is critical for practicum success.

> If we don't have good support from the university, from the university supervisors to bounce ideas off when they come out here, because then we feel like it's all, it's all sitting on our shoulders. (Teacher mentor).

Being effective pre-service teachers and learners

In terms of competencies, it was important that international students were able to reflect on their progress and start to be able to *reconstruct* their practice by: implementing feedback from their mentors; *reasoning* as to why some strategies were more effective than others; and *relating* this to theory learnt at university.

Issues arose when mentor teachers provided limited feedback or were not open and honest with the student in relation to areas of weakness or in need of improvement. Wendy, for example, was provided limited feedback from her mentor teacher and was requested to teach in an area that she knew nothing about. This would undoubtedly impact on her competency to teach in this area:

> For my prac two I haven't done any study for English which is my other teaching area…But I have been told to do SOSE [Studies of Society and Environment] as well. It's a really great pressure for me, especially for me as an international student (Wendy).

On the other hand, a mentor teacher noted that students need to be more agentic in asking for feedback as well as having the capacity to enact this in practice.

> The students need to be a bit more forthcoming to advice given when they're out on practicums…They've got to remember that they come here, that they are a learner, and the fact is that this is all about experience. (Teacher mentor)

The notion of intercultural agency (ethos)

International students face challenges that domestic students often do not. This includes being away from family and friends, often not having transport, and having to socialise into a new cultural context. It is therefore critical for their mentors to have an understanding of the challenging situations that international students may face.

> It's just harder—financial reasons. It costs a lot of money when you're an international student…and during the prac I needed to earn some money. So it's really hard because you have to plan the lessons for the day after, but you also have to work (John).

Being able to identify these challenges and thinking of ways to best support the students is crucial for success and to sustain future positive practices. This site found that each international student faced different challenges and that their own individual personal attributes largely contributed to whether or not they completed their practicum successfully.

> I learn from my mistakes. I'm trying to be a reflective teacher…just trying to be the best teacher I can (Penny).

> With international students…that come to our school have some maturity about them, have already got a degree behind them in the first place anyway and I think that that information is probably critical about me matching them with the most appropriate mentor on staff to have the most successful practicum (Teacher mentor).

Results from the interview and focus group data showed that students generally enjoyed their practicum experience regardless of whether or not they faced certain challenges. For international students, it was clear that what made the difference was the ways in which their mentor teachers supported and scaffolded them through the practicum via an intercultural and reflective understanding. Equally important was how the international students rose to the occasion and were able to reflect effectively on how to improve their practice and take on board their mentor teachers' feedback.

University Site 2

Most of the international students at this site come from various countries across Asia. The overarching themes of social and linguistic issues and concerns are explored in this storyline.

Social issues and concerns

Issues surrounding social isolation and exclusion, cultural misunderstandings and linguistic concerns were apparent. Interviewees *reasoned* that many students experienced feelings of homesickness and needed to feel welcomed and assimilated into Australia and university life, as this would help their overall wellbeing, which would positively impact on their studies. One academic said "they get quite a lot of intensive support from us, and I play a role as 'den mother'. Because as I said these young kids, they are homesick, they are lonely and they're deer in the headlights". This was similar to the international student advisor who remarked they find themselves "acting like social workers". She stated "we visit hospitals, call students families, help them to get medical visas… we ensure their visas aren't cancelled". These day-to-day personal encounters significantly impact on students learning as many do not necessary have the skills to be pro-active and act independently. One placement officer found "perhaps some of the Asian students are more reserved than others". A senior administration officer said "the students just don't want to do anything wrong" even when asked to join staff at lunchtime on placement they "did not want to intrude".

The university provides activities to help students assimilate into Australian and university life. The placement officer found small group settings "really suit, such as the trivia night, they are socialising in small groups, while they certainly get amongst the action they're not particularly leading it". An academic, formerly from another country, recognised "they are away from their families and need a variety of social experiences". Hence, the social activities may assist international students to gain a better understanding of Australia in terms of culture and language:

> We talk about the features of an Australian workplace and the particular importance of networking and social interaction. In our manuals we provide ideas for initiating conversations, and Australian slang terms they might encounter such as 'grab a cuppa'. (International careers and employment officer).

Though support resources (academic skills workshops offered online and face to face, student writing mentor drop in services, Language and Learning Advisors, Email advice service and Division of Student Life offers online resources) are offered, it is not possible to cover every aspect as one student pointed out:

> I was confused by terms commonly used in Australian schools that I didn't know such as *calling the roll* and *put your hands up*…I really needed to work on learning these terms. My supervisor was very helpful, she understood I was a student [teacher] and didn't know everything.

Terminology, codes of conduct, workplace/university expectations and language were often unfamiliar to international students. In some cultures, students see teachers as authority figures and therefore were unfamiliar or uncomfortable with a more collaborative and informal Australian workplace setting. One student placement officer found "international students can struggle with the local *collaborative* style of teaching". She further added:

> Students from places like Japan, where the culture is one of obedience and the teacher is in control, find it confronting to be in a noisy classroom where the teacher is called by her/his first name. In another example a Sri Lankan student told students they were "naughty" compared with students from her country.

Linguistic issues and concerns

As English often is not the students' first language, one academic who provides support to international students *reasoned* they:

> …find it very difficult to understand local students because of the locals' use of colloquial language. When the locals use text language [for arranging group work etc.], this is even more difficult for the international students.

This was similar for a student who when on placement *related* that:

> The main difficulty I experienced in the placements was with language. But I think they understood I was an international student and I had only been in Australia for five months.

This student *related* and *reasoned* that though she was not fluent in English she:

> …was able to talk to the new Chinese students who didn't speak English, so I felt I could make a contribution to the classroom. The students appreciated this and so did the teacher.

In contrast, another student found her mentor helped her improve her spoken voice by *reasoning* they needed to be more firm, to use a stronger tone and to be more assertive. This cultural difference was evident in other situations where one student reported that they:

> …didn't understand what the students or teacher said. I couldn't always understand the children's expressions for things like toilet requests. And I couldn't remember the children's names because they were so unfamiliar.

These linguistic and cultural differences can at times prove challenging for the international student. Language issues and concerns are paramount when placing students as one placement officer found "the IELTS test does not always seem to be effective". Though they

pass the test, this does not necessarily aid them as she further said "some students have an 'awkward' accent" which can be hard to understand. The language issue can create problems when finding a placement as one placement officer reported that they:

> …might make seven to eight calls before I can find a placement. The reasons for refusing student placements include the teacher having too many students that year.

It is sometimes also difficult for the workplace centres to help student with their language problems, as one placement officer identified "they don't have time to help international students with their language and general understanding, or I haven't had great experiences with international students so I don't want another one". It was apparent that mentors can find it difficult to have international students and some put up barriers as one academic *reasoned*:

> …some will tell you that they are not having any more international students unless they can speak English properly because I'm sick to death of them and they take too much work.

She thought this was being culturally insensitive to the students and found it to be "astonishing" as these organisational work placements "are caring for young children and building young children to be culturally sensitive adults".

In sum, the above results indicate some of the social, cultural and linguistic issues international students experience in a new place and space. It also highlighted aspects of the university and workplace expectations in Australia. Though students, academics and professional staff commented on the various support systems there is always room for improvement to make the experience a fulfilling one for all stakeholders

University Site 3

A recurring theme in the data storyline at Site 3 was that of time and timing. Staff and students discussed their suggestions for what they saw as desired placement duration and feedback timing. They talked about lack of time as an issue impacting effective reflection and competency development. The results also identified characteristics of successful placement experiences.

Placement duration

Time was mentioned by students, workplace and university staff as a positive factor in terms of longer placement duration. By that the participants often meant an introductory less-intensive observation period of one day per week over several weeks, followed by a full-time block of two to four weeks. The study participants thought that longer engagement with placement settings allowed for improved socialisation and confidence development opportunities:

> I feel like an outsider because I'm not [on prac] long. Not because I'm international. (Student)

> And it's so quick. Everything is shifting, moving and they are quite overwhelmed by it. (Early Childhood Education (ECE) mentor)

> Time is a big factor. If I had more time I would organise more gatherings. But the students are time poor as well. […] If the students were there for longer periods, it might be possible to encourage more socialisation. (ECE coordinator)

> Time! More time. Placement almost on day one once a week over a period of time for the first semester and then blocks after that. You have time to get to know people. (University staff)

This seemed to be especially true with regards to demonstrating initiative:

> The more time they have, the more initiative they can demonstrate. Or they can be more proactive because they know routines, they know children, they know expectations of families, of management, of their mentor, and they respond much more professionally (ECE mentor).

Longer periods of engagement with educational settings could also provide possibilities for competency development and richer planning experiences. Both students and mentors in Early Childhood Education (ECE) settings felt that students lacked opportunities for developing their curriculum design skills during shorter placements.

The themes of providing opportunities for reflection, skill development and professionalism as mentors and educators were further linked to that of time, or rather, lack of it.

(Lack of) time and (inappropriate) time and timing

Lack of time was found to be the most detrimental factor in fostering relationships and reflective practices in workplaces. Both workplace and university staff stressed the importance of reflection in educational settings and urged students to become reflective learners and practitioners. Mentors talked about time for communication, reflection and feedback provision:

> Probably more time on conversations. More talking with each other, not being in the room. This time is very difficult to find. […] Not on my way from one crying child to another, or the parents who really would like to talk, and [Student 4] asking something, when will you have time? When can I talk to you? It's a very busy environment so there [needs to be] some allocated time when we can sit and talk. We can do it every day after practice. Reflection. [It's better] to react immediately, not save it for the last day. (ECE mentor)

The process of finalising the placement report was often used by mentors as a means to trigger reflection and provide feedback. This often happened towards the end of placement and such timing was considered problematic.:

Lack of allocated mentoring time resulted in conflicting professional priorities and affected mentors' ability to provide appropriate support to their mentees:

> Programming time that educators have—you can't sacrifice that. Even though we are trying to write these reports for students but, unfortunately, it's not our first priority. (ECE mentor)

This issue of insufficient time for mentoring was exacerbated when students had additional needs:

I guess if I was told by the University that we were having international students, I would approach it differently and assign them an experienced teacher because they are more time consuming. This is an additional responsibility. (Primary school coordinator)

Additional demands also triggered feelings of dissatisfaction and made mentors question the fairness of the situation where they found themselves:

> […] and I'm doing the hands on to gear this person up to get her degree and I'm getting not even 20$ a day and I'm planning lessons painstakingly and the poor girl is stressed out […]. Then I got the next girl in and she grew up in Hong Kong and her English was good but the amount of guidance and work you have to weigh up… I'm expected to reach goals and expectations within my own class but I've got this one student teacher that is draining me… (Primary school mentor)

Respect, enrichment and success

Although mentors and university staff certainly recognised existing challenges for international students, workplace staff participants repeatedly stressed the importance of inclusion and advantages that international students bring with them, including program enrichment in terms of multiculturalism:

> They can promote their culture and I'm heavily using this opportunity to ask them to sing in their language, to give any experiences or games from their childhood, so our children can learn to respect different cultures and that English is not the only language in the world. So it's a great opportunity, it's like having a multicultural program non-stop, different cultures. (ECE mentor)

For students, results were important but did not determine success of placement. The student participants wanted to learn and felt they learnt something in each placement, more so when they developed productive relationships with their mentors. The students did engage in extensive reflective practices within their peer support networks and seemed to be aware of the need to be reflective practitioners. However, they made comments about their insufficient engagement in proper reflection practices because their university and workplaces allowed them to 'get away with it'. The student participants felt that they raised to the challenge when required, especially when expectations were made clear. The students also felt that not all placement settings provided opportunities for rich practicum experiences due to low quality, minimal workplace staff engagement and at times indifference. Supplying such information to universities seemed important to the students at this university site as they believed the next cohort of students would benefit from supportive placement environments and high quality educational experiences.

Despite the challenges described above, the data at Site 3 demonstrated that the students in this study used skills developed during their work and life experiences that helped them cope in unfamiliar Australian educational contexts. The mentors and workplace coordinators were proud to be mentoring a new generation of educators and felt responsible for their mentees; university staff also expressed feelings of care and deep concern for students' wellbeing and professional development.

Discussion and Conclusion

Findings from the data across the three sites echo very similar sentiments: relationships and social issues, linguistic issues and time constraints. Breakdowns in the relationship between students, work placement and university staff seem to influence perceived success of placement for students, independent on their actual grade for that practicum. Some staff remembered being in students' 'shoes' and did not expect perfection. At the same time, students' strengths were acknowledged and students themselves expressed their desire to be professionally challenged and wanted to be treated with respect. Mentors' and students' personalities will always present challenges as well as socialisation processes in work placement settings. Many of such issues can be resolved through effective communication and respectful relationship development among all stakeholders.

Placement outcomes can also be affected by students' English language proficiency levels. Although Australian classrooms today are often multicultural and cater for all students, many with different accents, many schools are hesitant to host international students with concerns that the student teacher accents or language inaccuracies will be an issue in school classrooms. Therefore, having a preservice teacher from another country can provide the opportunity to build on the ethos of creating culturally sensitive students and adults of the future.

Time constraints will probably always be an issue as universities and schools navigate the challenges of curriculum, assessment and teaching time. The findings of this study indicated that longer periods for school placements would provide time for the development of the preservice teacher. Perhaps universities need to be very clear on the goals of these placements and the expectations of what can be achieved not only in one placement but across all placements in the full delivery of the program/course for the student. This would then also allow individual mentors to focus on the goals and objectives for students in each particular placement.

This chapter has discussed the data collected from teacher education sectors across three university sites. Using the conceptual frameworks of multisocialisation, interculturalisation and reflection, the experiences of international teacher education students, their mentors and other stakeholders (school coordinators and university staff) have been presented through three case studies. Although difficulties and issues arise, the students indicated that they have learnt from their experiences. It seemed that treating students as individuals with their own strengths and weaknesses was conducive to successful placement experiences. The data indicated that respectful relationships contribute to professional and personal development of all stakeholders during a work placement. The rich and informative data on the challenges and successful approaches across the three sites in this study add to the body of literature regarding effective ways to improve work placements for international students.

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