International students' experience of practicum in teacher education: An exploration through internationalisation and professional socialisation

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Abstract: This paper explores the practicum experience of international students studying in a teacher education course. Much research has investigated the experience of international students during their degree experience but there is limited research that has addressed the practicum; a key component of teacher education. The research that does exist tends to view international students as analogous rather than individual students with distinct needs and experiences. The current paper will draw evidence from fourteen (14) international students gathered via interviews. The themes of learning and teaching contexts and relationships; curriculum, pedagogy and assessment; and personal attributes were identified and the conceptual frameworks of internationalisation and professional socialisation were applied in the data analysis. Findings revealed there are some generalisations can be applied to the understanding of international students' experience during practicum however, each student had individual attributes that impacted on the overall experience. There is potential for this research to inform the development of carefully structured and culturally sensitive work placement programs for international students studying education worldwide.

Keywords: International student, teacher education, practicum, internationalisation, professional socialisation.

Introduction

Every year, many students from other countries choose to study in Australia. The Australian government's Department of Education, Employment and Work Relations (DEEWR) reported that in 2012 over 200,000 international students were enrolled in study. At the authors' university the number of international students enrolled across the institution in 2012 was approximately 11,000 with 220 of these students studying in the School of Education. This paper explores the experiences of 14 international students who were undertaking a one year post-graduate primary teacher education program in 2012 in a university in Queensland, Australia.

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[1] The authors note that practicum may also be referred to as 'prac experience', 'field experience', 'work placement' or 'work integrated learning' (WIL) in the literature. Similarly, 'pre-service teacher' is often referred to as 'student teacher', and 'mentor teacher' as 'supervising teacher'. As such, 'practicum', 'pre-service teacher' or 'international student', and 'mentor teacher' will be used consistently throughout this paper. We also acknowledge that the term 'program' refers to the degree program being undertaken and 'course' refers to a single unit of study – usually one semester in length.

Much research on international students' experiences focuses on students who are from non-English speaking backgrounds (Andrade, 2006; Ngo, Unsworth & Feez, 2012). Andrade (2006) for example, notes that language skills can often affect both the academic and social lives of international students in addition to other critical factors that affect adjustment to higher education, such as the need to build a social network, as well as orientation to, and familiarity with norms, rules, and regulations of the host country experience. Additionally, issues such as homesickness; being away from family, friends, and regular support networks; difficulty settling into a new environment; and financial strain are often highlighted in the literature (Brown, 2008; Campbell & Uusimaki, 2006; Cruickshank, 2004; Facchinetti, 2010; Spooner-Lane et al., 2009). There is limited research however, on students who undertake study in a country that communicates via their home language.

With international students already having to adjust both psychologically and socio-culturally (Coles & Swami, 2012) to a foreign higher education institution, extra challenges such as those encountered in a professional learning context can impact even more detrimentally on an international student's well-being and overall study experience. Further difficulty understanding the nuances of the Australian education and social contexts, and differences in the use of the English language have been highlighted by research on students undertaking practicum in teacher education courses (Brown, 2008; Campbell & Uusimaki, 2006).

Allen (2011, p. 745) for example, presents three areas of concern when considering the relationship between the mentor teacher and pre-service teacher. These are: task authenticity, task expectations, and emotional engagement. Task authenticity refers to whether or not the mentor teacher was satisfied with the types of classroom activities as well as the application of lesson planning assessment tasks prepared by the student teacher. It was noted that the pre-service teachers experience frustration if what they thought was appropriate and effective was seen as unauthentic for the classroom by their mentor teacher. Task expectations may involve student teachers perceiving that their mentor teachers were not sufficiently committed to reading materials sent to them from the university such as practicum handbooks or attending relevant meetings to discuss practicum experience.

International students should be viewed as unique individuals who experience their study, professional experience or practicum, and their time away from home differently. Carroll and Ryan (2005) note that students identified as 'international' are naturally a diverse group and it is essential to consider pedagogic variation, differences in English proficiency, and personal attributes when preparing effective work placements. Understanding that individual international students have distinct needs, in particular during practicum components of study in teacher education, is not present in existing literature. This paper therefore aims to fill this gap in research by investigating 14 individual international students' practicum experience to better understand critical aspects of their unique experiences.

Theorising Practicum for International Teacher Education Students

The conceptualisation of internationalisation (Nash, 2011; Yarlagadda, 2013) and professional socialisation (including work integrated learning or WIL) (Billett, 2004; Orrell, 2011; Smith, 2011) inform this research. Internationalisation includes the diversity of international student cohorts and the associated policy, practices, and assessment related to international students in higher education, and professional socialisation concerns itself with how international students operate in workplace environments such as practicum in schools.

Previous research on international students, in a number of disciplines, tends to address either internationalisation or socialisation (Smith, Clegg, Lawrence & Todd, 2007;

Welch, Vo-Tran, Pittayachawan & Reynolds, 2012) but we argue that a consistent and systematic approach that acknowledges how both frameworks interrelate is required in order to improve practices generally and assist students, higher education staff, and other stakeholders such as school staff during the practicum for international students.

Internationalisation

The concept of internationalisation has received a much attention over the past few decades (DEEWR, 2005-2009; Jiang & Carpenter, 2011; Kehm & Teichler, 2007; Knight, 2004). The practicum experience for each international student can be potentially complex, given the university study environment, the work place, and respective mentor who may have distinct approaches to the practices and processes associated with the practicum. As international students hail from a wide variety of countries, ethnicities, and cultures they are by nature a diverse group, but are often referred to as a cohesive entity. International student cohorts have distinct individual needs, and differ in their reasons for studying abroad. They bring diverse experiences (particularly in the discipline of their study), unique personal attributes, and a range of support systems to their new context.

Knight's (1999) work presents a strategic view of a number of approaches to internationalisation. The first is an *activity* approach, which focuses on the types of activities that takes place for international students and those around them; a *competency* approach, which explores change in knowledge, skills, interest, values, and attitudes of the various groups involved; an *ethos* approach that assists in the development of an ethical culture and climate which facilitates internationalisation; and finally, a *process* approach that supports international aspects of the organisation including academic and managerial components[2]. An application of these approaches will assist in investigating this paper's data as each student tells their own practicum story.

Professional Socialisation

An alignment of the dimensions mentioned above will be made with a disciplinary theoretical framework known as professional socialisation. Much recent research on work integrated learning (WIL) sees the immersion of higher education students into the professional workplace and disciplinary field for individuals to learn "to adopt the values, skills, attitudes, norms and knowledge needed for membership in a given society, group or organisation" (Gardner & Barnes, 2007, p. 3). Professional socialisation involves the role of both students and their mentors in the work process. For any under-graduate or post-graduate student, negotiating and understanding the workplace, its expectations and organisational structure (including relationships) can be extremely complex, difficult and time consuming. For international students these aspects can be magnified given the differences of their prior life experiences, level of English proficiency, and understanding of the context of the practicum setting. International students are required to socialise on several different levels. Not only do they have to socialise within the university as a whole and their specific course/program and discipline, they must also address cultural competencies to socialise within the work place. For some students this occurs within two-three months of their arrival in a new country. Golde (1998) acknowledges this as a 'double socialisation' process.

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[2] See Knight (2004) for further elaboration on this work.

Billett's (2004) research on workplace participatory practices identifies a number of routine levels that are either afforded or regulated within the professional environment. These are: that learning is seen as a consequence of participation in social practices; the notion that there are procedural goals that impact on workplace pedagogy; and that individuals' own agency and intentionalities come into play. This study investigates all aspects of work integrated learning or the practicum, particularly framed around Billett's (2004) notions of affordances and regulations, for international students. Affordances can be viewed as either positive or negative and involve the opportunities that arise in order for students to exhibit particular work place skills and practices. These are often impacted on by the work place's professional rules and regulations mandated by professional organisations such as Teacher Accreditation boards and additionally, the mentor's role and relationship to the students (Orrell, 2004; Zeichner & Bier, 2012).

Research Design

Background to the Study

The project entitled: *Improving the practicum experience for international pre-service teachers*[3] aimed to identify aspects of the practicum component in a one year teacher education program, at a metropolitan university in Brisbane, Australia, that could lead to a more positive and meaningful experience for future international students. The main aims of the project were to ask international students what specific features of their work placement they found to be successful, what challenges they encountered, and what they felt needed to be improved in terms of both the university's and school's approaches to the practicum experience. These findings will then be used to inform the development of a working model of effective practice for international students' practicum experience and a written guide for university staff, international students, and school staff including mentor teachers and site coordinators, that aims to improve practices surrounding the practicum experience at both the university and school levels.

Methodology and Method

This research was qualitative and aimed to investigate the opinions and experience of international students via interviews about their second six week block practicum in an Australian school. The research design aligns with Thomas' (2011) typology of case study method where he defines case study as a thorough exploration of a particular research study in 'real life' from multiple perspectives. Neuman (2003) states that in case-study research the participants can be viewed in a specific context and this context can be "examined in terms of how its parts are configured" (p. 33). This helps the researcher connect actions of individual people to large-scale social structures and processes (Vaughan, 1992 as cited in Neuman, 2003, p. 33). In relation to this project a case-study allows for an interpretive comparison between each of our participants.

Fourteen of our international students who had just completed their second practicum[4] (that is their second and final semester of the one year program) participated in this study. Table 1 presents information on each of the international student participants in this study.

	Pseudonym	Home Country and/or birth country	English as a second language
1	Mary	Mainland China	Yes
2	Penny	Hong Kong, China	Yes
3	Wendy	China	Yes
4	William	Hong Kong, China	Yes
5	Harry	Hong Kong, China	Yes
6	Mark	Canada	No
7	Nathan	United States	No
8	Chen	Mainland China	Yes
9	Fereshta	Brunei	Yes
10	Cathy	Canada	No
11	Angela	Canada	No
12	James	Taiwan	Yes
13	Liam	United Kingdom	No
14	John	France	Yes

Table 1: International student participants/pre-service teachers

Out of the fourteen participants, 10 attended an individual interview and there were two focus groups each with two student participants. Students were completing a practicum in either a primary or secondary school. Each interview or focus group took approximately one hour and took place at a convenient time and place for the participants. Nine of the students came from a non-English speaking background (all ESL students) and five had English as their first language. Pseudonyms have been used when referring to each of the students to assist with confidentiality and de-identification. Where the Chinese speaking students had English names we have chosen to allocate them an English name also.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed when investigating the interview and focus group data allowing an iterative and relatively flexible and rich research tool (Braun & Clarke, 2006). According to Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic analysis assists in identifying patterns in the data and as such an initial thematic analysis of the transcripts was undertaken by each of the authors. After rigorous cross-checking the following themes were agreed upon: learning and teaching contexts and relationships (both university and school); curriculum, pedagogy and assessment; and personal attributes. Following the identification of the themes, the theoretical frameworks of internationalisation and professional socialisation were utilised to indicate parts of the discussion by the participants that aligned with key concepts under each of the themes. We used Knight's (1999) approaches to internationalisation for example, by highlighting competencies, processes, ethos, and activities (p. 6) within each of the themes. We also applied Billet's (2004, 2009) notions of affordances – "the invitational qualities of the immediate social setting" (2009, p. 3); regulations which includes professional and organisational rules and policies; and personal agencies and intentionalities

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[4] Note – this funded project began after these students' first prac experience.

that were detected within professional settings. This approach revealed a number of important insights that could assist in the improvement of overall practices associated with the practicum component in teacher education programs for international students.

Table 2 shows how each of the interview transcripts were mapped in the analysis phase. We identified where, throughout the interview data, these concepts and ideas featured in order to make sense of the students' responses.

Knight's model of internationalisation	Activity	Process	Competency	Ethos
Professional socialisation	The factual events that occur in the work place and the university in relation to work place experience	Regulations, policies and procedures – both university and work place context e.g. professional governing boards and associations	Personal agencies, dispositions and professional abilities of both students and mentors	Affordances and opportunities within the work place – both positive and negative

Table 2: Mapping tool for data analysis

Results and Discussion

The following section presents the results from the interview and focus group data by addressing the identified themes of learning contexts and relationships; curriculum, pedagogy and assessment; and personal attributes. The theoretical frameworks of internationalisation and professional socialisation will also inform this discussion.

Learning and Teaching Contexts and Relationships

Throughout the interview and focus group data much discussion focussed on learning in both the school and university context and the nature of relationships within these contexts. For example, the international students were able to compare their previous and first experience with the practicum they had just completed. It seemed each practicum experience was different depending on the school and their mentor teacher.

Some schools, according to the students, were well prepared and organised in receiving the pre-service teachers into their schools whereas others were not. One student commented that their mentor teacher told them that they did not even know that they were coming until their first day of the practicum. This indicated that the *process* approach, concerning the placement and organisation of pre-service teachers, was determined by, and differed greatly from school to school.

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, there was evidence that expectations varied across the schools and often did not align with university expectations. At the beginning of James' practicum for example, the expectation was for him to teach a number of classes without his mentor teacher present. This was due to the fact that his mentor teacher was away on the school's Chinese tour.

> My supervisor had organised a China tour with her Chinese students. For the first two weeks in the prac term I had to take all her missed lessons. But we met before and she made unit and lesson plans. The only thing I needed to do was to implement [them], and I found it a little bit difficult to teach without observation at first. But when I look back, it's not a bad thing… (James).

James tried to make the best of this situation and showed agency in the work place despite the fact that the university's guidelines require one week of observations before teaching an actual class as well as the need to be supervised at all times. However, schools as a professional workplace may have other impacting factors, such as school tours, on the socialisation process for pre-service teachers. Without another Chinese teacher to be James' mentor the school felt James could teach without supervision. The university states that students are not to be left alone under any circumstance. If James had been a student that needed direct support during those first few weeks or an accident had occurred in the classroom the situation could have had a very different outcome.

School contexts that were said to be supportive or have a strong *ethos* approach were those that held regular meetings and professional development sessions for pre-service teachers. Often these are taken by a school staff member designated as the prac teacher or site coordinator.

> My second school could have run sessions [for prac teachers], like have different topics each week because that is what [my last school] did. The first week was behaviour management and the second was how to deal with adolescents (Mary).

Mary's first school therefore worked towards creating a rich practicum experience for pre-service teachers. John also commented on how supportive his school's site coordinator was, as they often checked on how the students were going throughout their practicum.

> Her job is just to organise the prac student and just see how they do. She's really supportive. She's always asking how you're going, is everything fine for you, do you want me to talk to your teacher. She's perfect (John).

Similarly, others students commented positively on the effectiveness of their mentor teachers by reflecting on the way that their teachers were supportive, empathetic and were above-all able to provide extensive and quality feedback.

> We've definitely forged a personal as well as a professional relationship. I do feel comfortable in talking to her just about anything, because I trust her and I know that she has the experience. My two [previous] mentor teachers were completely different. The reason I feel like we've made that relationship is because she's just very approachable and non-invasive. She just lets me make the mistakes that I need to make. It's not threatening (Mark).

As described by Mark, a number of attributes of, and *affordances* provided by his mentor teacher were listed as keys to the success of the international students' experience in general. Being able to trust their teacher as well as feel safe to make mistakes and take risks was listed as important learning opportunities by the students. There were a number of the students who commented on how the 'good' mentor teachers were very warm or showed empathy towards them or supported a strong *ethos* approach.

> 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 interviews confirmed that effective mentors: give the pre-service teachers the opportunity to practise skills before entering the classroom; provide more opportunities to observe not only their mentor teacher but other classes; provide critical and helpful feedback regularly and opportunities to teach innovatively or explore different content and pedagogical strategies; and model effective teaching strategies including behaviour and classroom management. These mentor teachers were described as 'supportive', 'strong teachers', or 'experts'.

Conversely, the mentor teachers that were discussed as not so effective were those who did not communicate clearly about concerns or issues they may have had with the international students' competencies. For example, one of the Chinese international students stated that they were not given any feedback on their teaching practice until the fourth week of their practicum and it was a shock to the student as they were told that they were 'at-risk[5]' when they thought that they were doing well. The only feedback that the student had received up until this point was that they needed to provide more positive feedback to the students in the class as well as pronounce words more clearly. University information provided to mentor teachers stated that students were to be given at a minimum, weekly verbal and written feedback. The interim report is to be completed and discussed with the student by the end of week three. When regular and effective feedback is not provided it limits the opportunities for students to improve their practice.

Another related aspect that impacted on the students' experience was the extent to which they understood the context in which they were engaging in their practicum. Not only do students have to 'socialise' into a school context, they need to 'socialise' into the Australian context (including the university) more generally.

> I didn't know enough with Australian culture, because it is so sports oriented. So sometimes I found the difficulty during the conversation, when we talked about rugby [for example] - other than that, I think it's okay (James).
>
> In terms of culture, in you also want to joke around this is really hard for international students because we have a different culture. Sometimes I think my supervisor jokes are… very funny, but it's really hard for me to tell a joke in English (Chen).
>
> I want to suggest that for international students, maybe could we have a lesson about how to give instruction to Australian student? To get to know the characteristics and the personality of students. So it would be good if there is one lesson about how you talk to them as a teacher, to show your respect (Penny).

Penny offered a good suggestion for international students to be given the opportunity to learn about the Australian culture before they go into schools for their practicum such as through role play scenarios.
Understanding the Australian context was highlighted as a challenge but in a reciprocal way the mentor teachers that showed a strong *ethos* approach to the students made a concerted effort to accept them and respect their cultural background.

> I guess just how welcoming she was to me. She knows that I'm Canadian so I don't always know exactly what they're talking about. I don't know anything about the history of Australia, so she teaches me things too along the way. She sings Australian songs and she teaches me different animals of Australia. I think she's a great person (Cathy).
>
> Okay since I'm a Muslim I need a place to pray. So far I just ask that to my supervising teacher and he was like yeah, oh we've got a room. Then even in the previous school because it was a community they have a…room anyway. So in that

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[5] At the author's university 'at-risk' students are those students who have been assessed as below standard to at least 2 of the criteria on their interim report.

sense I was actually quite happy so I don't have to neglect my obligation…they're quite accepting actually (Fereshta).

There were some mentor teachers however, who did not show inclusive practices and this was said to largely result from the reason that they had not supervised many pre-service teachers before, especially international students. Here, both Mary and Harry show how they felt uncomfortable and lacked confidence to socialise with other staff in their schools. They felt that this issue was another considerable challenge in addition to teaching practice in the classroom.

I was only Asian in the staff room so maybe you can imagine that in all female and I was only Asian. So I feel like I was excluded from the conversation but I would still feel welcomed if they asked for my opinion. Yeah, that was the thing, being an Asian and being a non-native English speaker so that was hard, just to fit in (Mary).

It's really hard for me and you know, the way they talk to each other and also because it's not just the language problem. Instead of planning lessons, giving lessons, teaching strategies, you need to also know things outside around school (Harry).

For many international students a successful socialisation into the teacher profession is not only about what happens in the classroom but also outside of it, such as in staff rooms. This aligns with Billet's (2009) notion of certain consequences of social and workplace practices. It is therefore important for both the university and school contexts to put into place strategies that support students through this 'double socialisation' process (Golde, 1998)

In terms of the university context there was a significant agreement amongst the students that they be *afforded* more lead-in or observation days within their school before their official practicum block. This, they said, would enable them to become more familiar with the school's policy, processes, teaching environment as well as the class that they would be expected to teach.

Maybe instead of having just three lead-in days, having like a week where we're just observing. Because all the classes that I've taught, they are not the classes that I've observed. So I didn't know at all the students (John)

More lead-in days would be awesome, because this times I know that is quite rush for the prac office to prepare everything. My supervise teacher didn't have my document, my profile. She said she didn't actually receive anything from [my university]. So this is a big problem (Penny).

Although the students felt they needed more time to observe, the university requirements do include, for the first practicum – two lead-in days and a whole week of observations, and for the second practicum - three lead-in days and a whole week of observations. This highlights the need for better communication and understanding of the process by both the school and university contexts.

In relation to the practicum *activity* schedule the students agreed that the timing of the practicum experience was problematic for reasons including: being just prior to and during the National Assessment Program: Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) testing, heavy assessment periods (particularly in secondary schools), and during times when other impacting activities were taking place (such as tours or excursions). The students' desire to observe the beginning of a school year or term was significant. This, they felt, would better prepare them for setting up and teaching their own classes once employed. This relates to the *process* management and organisation of teaching practice. One student suggested that the practicums be timed at different stages during the term, for example one at the beginning of a term and one at the end so that they would be able to learn about both stages of learning.

Generally, there appeared to be a recognised disconnect and lack of communication between the university context and school settings. One student for example, stated that her mentor teacher did not expect her to write a lesson plan for every lesson once they had

already seen her first lesson plan. Conversely, other students spoke about the fact that they were awake until 2:00am every night planning and preparing for their classes. The literature points to the mismatch between university and school contexts' expectations (Brown, 2008) and this study confirms that unless the relationship established between the student and mentor is positive then a number of concerns can arise throughout the practicum.

Curriculum, Pedagogy and Assessment

In relation to areas of teaching some of the respondents commented on the difficulty in keeping on top of all of the subject areas they were required to teach. Although this could be a common problem for all students the international students found this particularly difficult, especially if the topic was related to the Australian context. Some of the students who were undertaking a high school practicum were also expected to teach subjects that were not their specialisation areas. This is of great concern given that these students do not study these areas in their undergraduate degrees. Wendy, who was given limited feedback from her mentor teacher, 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 one, I'm doing only Chinese. Then with prac two, which is term two, I haven't done any study for English, because I have another teaching area, which is English…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).

One of the main pedagogical issues that the students identified as an area that needed improvement in their teaching practice was behaviour and classroom management, with the students often commenting on how they were not used to behaviour present in Australian classrooms.

> It's quite difficult for me because the students, they are not well behaved. So I usually spend much time with the behaviour management, and especially for my –language difficulties, I can't actually give very clear instruction. Or when the students they try to negotiate, I feel really hard to negotiate with them (Penny).

Similarly, John said in his first school that his teaching practice was more like policing due to the behaviour in the classroom whereas at his second school he could focus more on the content as the students were very well behaved. Similarly, Fereshta noticed the cultural difference in the classroom by commenting on how in her home country students would have more respect for teachers.

> My first prac…was completely different. I was just doing the police thing. Here it's just teaching content and teaching strategies (John).

> Maybe back at home it's more like you've got the respect for teachers and older students. You see a lot of behavioural problems [here]. Because of that it was harder (Fereshta).

Although the students may have misbehaved more than Fereshta was used to, she noted that as they were also from different cultural backgrounds they accepted her difference in language.

> I would stumble on my words from time to time but they don't really mind that and I think they understood that in some ways. Some of my students are international as well so even though they're not from my country or have the same background as me somehow I can react with me better (Fereshta).

Even though the international students had some difficulty with behaviour management in the classroom there was not a lot of evidence to suggest that they had

challenges with the assessment procedures within the school context. Fereshta did, however, speak about how she needed to familiarise herself with the criteria-based approach to assessment.

> Well when I first came to my first prac I didn't know how the assessment bits worked or some of the terms I didn't know how they give grades…instead of giving them As, Bs…now they have the 'highest achiever', that's something new to me. I'm not used to having criteria sheets and all that, so that was a problem (Fereshta).

Another concern was the fact that students had assessment to complete for their university studies during the practicum observation days. Given these students also have a 'cultural socialisation' experience having to focus on assessment in addition to this made it challenging.

> I was literally studying in the classroom with the children when I'm supposed to be taking notes…I was reading my notes and trying to study for the exam (Angela).

Personal Attributes

The data pointed strongly to the fact that the personal attributes or individual *agencies* and *dispositions* of the students played a large role as to whether or not the student had a positive practicum experience. When the students faced challenges it was how they dealt with these that made all the difference. For some students, not knowing who to talk to, how to fix any concerns, how to understand and implement their mentor teacher's expectations, or understand the Australian cultural context, were skills they needed to learn or be *afforded* by others in the professional context. Some of the international students however, were able to problematise, find solutions, and therefore work successfully with what was provided to them during the practicum.

For the international students who had a generally positive time it was evident that they were able to negotiate successfully through any challenges that they faced. Regularly keeping in touch with family and friends, understanding that there may be some difficulties but knowing how to deal with them, and prior experiences all impacted on the strategies employed by the students when working through challenges.

> I was really confused and I was feeling very anxious about it. I was able to go to the deputy principal and talk to her and she was very forthcoming and she put me at ease. So in that instance, I did feel I had somewhere to go. But I also think that the onus is on the student. We should try to take the matter into our own hands and exercise a little bit of diplomacy and figure things out for ourselves (Mark).
>
> I learn from my mistakes. I'm trying to be a reflective teacher…just trying to be the best teacher I can (Penny).
>
> I feel like the worst part for me was just coming in there and not knowing anybody and being stuck with the teacher the next six weeks. You had to make it work. You might not always get along with them or you might not always see their views…I ended up talking it out with my teacher and figuring it out myself before I got the prac office involved, because I wanted to see if I could handle it first, and I ended up doing that (Angela).

For Mary, even though her mentor teacher, she felt, was not the most effective for her, she was able to accept any differences. This shows that the international students who displayed *agency* in the professional workplace were more able to cope in times of difficulty or challenge.

There were other personal factors that impacted on the international students' practicum; most notably their financial circumstances.

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).

Having an awareness of, and understanding the issues that international students face during their practicum is crucial in informing ways in which both the university and school processes can support and sustain future practices. For each international student there were different challenges that they faced and their own individual personal attributes largely contributed to whether or not they completed their practicum successfully.

Results from the interview and focus group data show that students generally enjoyed their practicum experience regardless of whether or not they faced some challenges. Many of the respondents were still determined to become a teacher irrespective of whether or not they had a positive experience.

Conclusion and Implications

Being socialised into the teaching profession is clearly a complex process. Although both the school and university context may have particular processes in place, it is evident from our data that a 'one size fits all' approach may not necessarily be the most effective way to conceptualise and organise the practicum for international students. Further, for each of our participants their practicum experience was distinct and unique as they depended on the school environment as well as their individual mentor teachers. Aspects such as the context, curriculum and assessment, pedagogical strengths and weaknesses, and personal attributes all contributed to their overall practicum experience.

While there can be some generalisations made about the socialisation process into the teacher profession for international students, there are equally a number of differences evident. Both similarities and differences can be related to Knight's (1999) proposed aspects of internationalisation. If we consider both the university and school contexts involved in the practicum component of study we can see that both the activity and process approaches differ. Some schools may have a number of students attending from diverse cultural backgrounds; others may not. The mentor teacher may be committed to an ethos approach to working with pre-service teachers by offering constructive and critical advice and feedback, welcoming them into a new country and new school, and be supportive in a personal way. However, there are some other mentor teachers who do not have this ethical approach to mentoring but rather focus in on the competencies or teaching skills needed to pass the practicum and also have a negative attitude to mentoring international students.

Similarly, each of the international students clearly held different *competencies* and these impacted on the ways in which they could function within the school context. For a significant number of the students, behaviour management was the one skill that they highlighted as needing further improvement. Another common acknowledgement from each of the students was the fact that they had limited knowledge of the Australian culture and the ways in which Australian schools and students work. It would be important to consider providing more guidance to international students as a whole, on typical Australian cultural traits, curriculum and processes.

In order for any significant change or improvement to occur for international students who undertake a practicum in teacher education programs, it is recommended that information particularly pertaining to mentoring international students be provided to schools and their mentor teachers in a timely manner prior to the practicum as well as be read by all parties. It is also suggested that a workshop or other support materials be provided so that when an issue arises those involved will know where to find the relevant information. In

addition, lead up sessions for students in which they can be exposed to cultural and colloquial considerations they may experience in the instructional environment would increase their confidence. International students come to study in other countries with the possibility of undertaking an exciting and positive experience. Therefore all stakeholders need effective communication in an effort to effectively support and provide a positive and successful practicum experience for future international students.

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Appendix A

Interview questions for international students after their practicum

1.   Tell me about your prac experience
2.   What was the best thing about prac?
3.   What was your number one challenge?
4.   Tell me about your mentor teacher.
5.   What was good about their approach? What would you have liked to see improved?
6.   What would you recommend to the university to improve your prac experience?
7.   What would you recommend to schools to improve your prac experience?

Extra questions for students who did not complete prac successfully or who experienced a number of challenges.

We would like to talk to you about your prac and why it did not go so well.

1.   What do you think was the biggest challenge you had on prac?
2.   What did you do when you experienced this challenge?
3.   Who did you talk to when things went wrong?
4.   Tell me about your mentor teacher.
5.   Were you satisfied with how he/she performs his/her role?
6.   How did you feel the university was in supporting you through your prac?
7.   Tell me about your liaison officer. Do you think they did a good job?
8.   If you could go back and do your prac experience all over again, what would you do differently?
9.   What would you recommend to the university to improve your prac experience?
10.   What would you recommend to your school to improve your prac experience?