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Emergence of Professional Identities of Novice Emirati Teachers

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Abstract: This article explores the emergence of Emirati novice teachers' professional identity from a socio-cultural viewpoint where influences on identity are sourced internally through beliefs, attitudes, values and dispositions and externally through factors such as roles and responsibilities. Empirical data collected through individual and group interviews and analysed using content analysis, highlights both challenges and emergence of professional identity from point of graduation through to the end of the first year of teaching. The results show that influences on professional identity relate to challenges of raising learner outcomes in relation to delivery of the curriculum, managing the self in multiple contexts, and participating in school-based communities of practice. Teaching science and mathematics in English raises queries of 'self' as a teacher. Novice teachers' emerging professional identity emphasises the ethics of teaching in the UAE.

Introduction

Novice teachers in their first year of teaching may experience a sense of inadequacy, a result of transitioning from learning to become a teacher to learning to teach (Darling-Hammond, 1996). This makes the transition period particularly suitable for examining the development of teachers' professional identities (Schatz-Oppenheimer & Dvir, 2014), from the perspective in which pre-service teachers' academic and pedagogical knowledge is formed by participating in teacher education programmes and the application of this knowledge in classrooms. The first years in the teaching profession have been widely studied (Chong, 2011; Schatz-Oppenheimer & Dvir, 2014) from the viewpoint of understanding difficulties and successes to determining ways to increase retention rates (Clark, 2012; Ingersoll, 2002; Schatz-Oppenheimer & Dvir, 2014). Much is said of feelings of helplessness, loneliness, and insecurity to the point of paralysis (Fenwick, 2011), as well as development of professional identity as fluid, multifaceted, and reflective of a collection of experiences and relationships in context (Chong, 2011). The socio-cultural embedding of professional identity is explained by Olsen (2008):

> *I view identity as a label, really, for the collection of influences and effects from immediate contexts, prior constructs of self, social positioning, and meaning systems (each itself a fluid influence and all together an ever-changing*

> *construct) that become intertwined inside the flow of activity as a teacher simultaneously reacts to and negotiates given contexts and human relationships at given moments (Olsen, 2008, p. 139).*

Professional identity is likened to an individual's perception of 'self' as a teacher and as a future teacher embedded in complexities of situated realities that encompass personal and professional perspectives. This paper examines the emergence of novice Emirati teachers' professional identities through challenges faced in their first year of teaching in Abu Dhabi public schools.

The Abu Dhabi, UAE School Context

As a result of the wide-scale educational reform in Abu Dhabi in 2006, the subjects of English, mathematics, and science are taught using English as the medium of instruction. Prior to 2006, mathematics and science were taught in Arabic and by subject specialists beyond Grade 3. The decision to change the medium of instruction to English meant that such teaching positions were either terminated or staff re-deployed elsewhere. From 2009, Abu Dhabi Education Council's (ADEC) (now known as the Abu Dhabi Department of Education and Knowledge) policy has been to employ English medium teachers (EMTs), mainly from Western countries such as England, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand to teach in Cycle 1 (elementary) schools. Policy reforms initiated conceptualisation and delivery of teacher preparatory courses that were aligned with ADEC's New School Model (NSM) in an attempt to prepare Emirati teachers for the new realities of teaching. The higher education institution which is the context of this research was established to deliver a world class Bachelor of Education teaching degree aimed at developing Emirati graduates to teach English, mathematics and science in English utilizing constructivist, student-centred methodologies. To facilitate this, student teachers participated in English skills development courses as well as courses from the wider teacher education curriculum, all of which were taught in English. The four-year degree consisted of general education and pedagogical content knowledge studies, teaching practice, and research projects taught mostly by Western educators holding doctoral degrees. Students who graduated with an IELTS score of 6.5 or above were expected to teach as EMTs in Cycle 1 schools.

Improving English proficiency in public schools by employing teachers with native-level English language is a priority for ADEC in the educational reform era. Western teachers and newly graduated Emirati teachers were employed to teach side-by-side in schools that were also undergoing rapid curriculum and pedagogical reform. The novice Emirati teachers were entering schools that were aware of their cultural and social heritage and desire to improve the education system of their country. Questions raised by those already in schools were how, as a minority group, the novice teachers would work with Western EMTs delivering the NSM curriculum. Although the new teachers' first language is Arabic, they were expected to teach and deliver English classes as well as science and mathematics in the medium of English. Their perception of self as a teacher and future teacher is of interest within this historical period of wide-scale rapid educational reform. Their narratives suggest that encounters between self and others in managing challenges of context result in a continuous negotiation of the social and cultural attributes, skills, and knowledge they bring as individuals to inform their emerging identities as teachers.

To better understand the interplay between the emergence of professional identity and the social context, this study is embedded in a socio-cultural paradigm where social positioning of self in the development of identity is sourced internally through beliefs, attitudes, values, and dispositions and externally through interaction with others when

confronted with challenges of context. The view purported is that professional identity is formed as a result of dialogical encounters with self-related to management of challenges and the resulting emergence of belief positions hallmarking uniqueness of voice and intention (Akerman & Meijer, 2011). In this paper, beliefs related to emerging professional identity are discussed from positions of being that encompass mindfulness (Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007); resilience (Soloway, Poulin, & Mackenzie, 2010); critical thinking (O'Donnell et al., 2016); participation in learning communities (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002); and social justice advocacy.

Literature Review

In the literature review we highlight matters of importance to novice teachers when they first start teaching. We provide a discussion on the concept of professional identity and consider the relationship between language and identity and end by summarising the case unfolding in the UAE.

Novice Teachers

The first years in the teaching profession have been widely researched (Schatz-Oppenheimer & Dvir, 2014; Chong, 2011) from viewpoints such as difficulties and success factors (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009); rising attrition rates (Clark, 2012; Ingersoll, 2002; Schatz-Oppenheimer & Dvir, 2014); demands of teaching and learning (Clark, 2012); and demonstration of performance capabilities to manage challenges in unfamiliar situations or those outside a range of expertise (Fenwick, 2011). Being a novice teacher is always a challenge (Clark, 2012).

In terms of support for novice teachers, networking, mentoring and working in communities of practice are strongly advocated (Wenger, McDermott, & Synder, 2002). Clark (2012) notes, "budding teachers need encouragement, modelling, and mentoring if they are to remain and succeed in the teaching profession" (p. 198). Smith and Ingersoll (2004) confirm that increases in retention rates occur if novice teachers are allocated time to work with mentors operating at the same grade level and/or subject. They also confirm the need for networking with others in problem solving and collaborative learning situations. Similarly, Darling-Hammond and Rothman (2011) suggest growth in teacher confidence results from engagement in communities of practice and collaboration in, for example, developing curricula. In their study, Patrick, Elliot, Hulme, and McPhee (2010) note that novice teachers working in Scottish schools welcomed collegiality, good communication, and a robust induction process as workplace support mechanisms.

The emotional support novice teachers receive in their first few years can also affect their perception of self as professionals (Hobson, 2009). Al-Mahrooqi and Al-Hashmi's (2012) study of novice Omani teachers highlights the need for work-related emotional support from administrators for novice teachers to succeed. Ibrahim's study (2012) in the UAE suggests that all novice Emirati teachers should participate in a year-long induction program; however, given the rapidity of educational reform in the UAE, this may prove difficult to achieve as much rests on staffing stability and selection of suitable mentors for guidance and support (Al Hashemi & Collins, 2011). Related to measures of support, there are differing views on the value of pre-service teacher preparatory programmes. Clark (2012), for example, claims that teacher preparation programmes have typically provided superficial training with insufficient focus on content. Feiman-Nemser (2001) notes that preparatory programmes need to consider the novice teachers' capacity to teach and learn to teach on the job. Though there are differing views as to the usefulness and relevance of pre-

service programmes for successful teaching practice, Hammond et al. (2009) found that pre-service training exerts a strong influence on building teachers' capacities to cope, particularly where strategies are modelled by college tutors. Similarly, Furlong, Barton, Miles, Whiting, and Whitty (2000) note that most students regard pedagogical theories they learnt in courses as significant to their practice. In their study of novice teachers' perceptions of their training, Ezer, Gilat, and Sagee (2010) determined that many novice teachers feel confident in their abilities and are intrinsically motivated to teach. They also found that the practical aspects of teacher training (practicum and working with mentor teachers, for example) are of greater importance to the professional development of novice teachers than the more theoretical and subject-based components of course work. Although teacher education aims to integrate the theoretical and practical aspects of teaching, novice teachers may experience difficulty applying academic knowledge to the realities of the classroom. Here, Holligan (1997) suggests that the practicalities of teaching are more difficult to deal with than theories of education and that experience gained on practicum matters most. Ezer et al., (2010) found that novice teachers preferred constructivist teaching pedagogy as opposed to traditional methods, but translating constructivist approaches to inform practice remained unclear and difficult given what Melnick and Meister (2008) note as an "inability to deal with aberrant behaviour and diverse needs of some students" (p. 42) and complexities of time management. For example, in Melnick and Meister's study, less than half of the novice teachers agreed or strongly agreed that they felt well prepared to teach reading.

Throughout the literature, the top four aspects of teaching demanding considerable attention from novice teachers were managing the classroom, motivating students to learn, addressing conflict resolution, and interacting with parents. The challenges facing novice teachers in the UAE, both in and out of the classroom, are complex and situational. It is important to analyse and examine their development of professional identity in relation to workplace challenges. In addition, as reported by Stenberg, Karlsson, Pitkäniemi, and Määränen (2014), an examination of the moral and ethical nature of the job is warranted as novice teachers claim this relates directly to student learning.

Professional Identity

Professional identity can be considered a teacher's image of self-linked to demonstration of subject-matter and pedagogical knowledge along with didactic expertise (Beijaard, Verloop, & Vermunt, 2000). Although skills and knowledge competencies are important, capabilities such as applying pedagogy to optimise learning, being reflective and adaptive, and conducting oneself in an ethical manner are also essential. While difficult to measure, a range of dispositions are required for novice teachers to be successful professionals. For example, understanding oneself and one's culture, showing care and concern for self and others, being problem solvers through reflection, being responsive to differences and committed to social justice, and working effectively with others are some dispositional traits needed to meet the demands of teaching. Here, Sachs (2005) notes that novice teachers within the profession need to envisage their place in society. Defining professional identity is about focusing on what teachers perceive as important and meaningful work (Vähäsantanen, Hokka, Eteläpelto, Rasku-Puttonen, & Littleton, 2008). In a changing educational and linguistic landscape such as Abu Dhabi (Clarke, 2007), being professional for the new teacher calls for active processing of prior experiences and knowledge gained while training, applied when in practice. It necessitates understanding the context of teaching while being cognisant of the learning and engagement needs of students. To be professional, Palmer (2007) argues that teachers need to understand that we "teach who we are" (p. 2) and further, that "good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the

identity and integrity of the teacher" (p. 10). In other words, the strength of alignment between the inner and outer being of who one is as a teacher is key.

In the UAE, the changing educational linguistic landscape for the novice Emirati teacher means working alongside Western EMTs and Arab Islamic studies teachers (Arabic medium teachers, or AMTs) delivering the NSM curriculum. It also means teaching English classes as well as mathematics and science in the medium of English. In such a context, the novice Emirati teacher needs to be responsive to what the present and the future holds. Self-knowledge may be the starting point for building professional identity, self-efficacy, and agency to develop authentic professional relationships with colleagues and students. To teach with integrity, Clarke (2007) recommends novice teachers increase their awareness of socio-political issues connected with policy development and curriculum delivery. Aligned with this, regular reflection on philosophy, positioning oneself in the centre of change, and negotiating linguistic and cultural identity allows what Trueit and Doll (2010) believe to be an embrace of the complexity perspective, seeing "possibilities yet unseen in the policies, practices and politics of schooling and education" (p. 136).

Research within a post-modern paradigm views teacher identity as an ongoing process that forms through dialogue in context and within relationships; teacher professional identity is therefore fluid, constantly changing in formation (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). Novice teachers need to be not only open to these changes but also resilient. Resilience suggests a proactive ability to maintain well-being while attending to the challenges of context (Robertson & Cooper, 2013). The complexity of challenges facing novice teachers generally is continuous, so much so that they may lose their passion, suffer burnout, and even leave the profession (Gu & Day, 2006) if they are not sufficiently supported.

Language and Identity

Part of the development of an individual's identity is their linguistic behaviour. With respect to non-native English speaking teachers (NNEST), Lee (2010) identifies the need for more research into the relationship between NNESTs' pedagogical choices in teaching L2 and their own experiences. Her study of five novice ESL teachers in adult and higher education contexts in the USA suggests that "participants' pedagogical approaches are heavily impacted by their linguistic, educational, and cultural experiences" (Lee, 2010, p. 26). In their study of Iranian high school English teachers, Eslami and Fatahi (2008) compare teachers' self-perceived efficacy in various aspects of teaching to their language proficiency and use of communicative language teaching principles. They found that a higher level of self-reported language proficiency correlated with both a higher sense of efficacy and greater use of communicative methods, as opposed to more grammar-oriented ones.

Pedagogical consideration must be given to the use of other language(s) in the classroom besides the target language. Grim's (2010) study examined high school and university French as a Foreign Language teachers' use of the first language (L1, in this case, English) in the classroom to identify the functions for which the L1 is most used, as well as to compare high school and university teachers' use of L1. The study found that L1 can be successfully incorporated into the foreign language classroom, even as a communicative strategy, but that teachers should have training to determine when and how to most appropriately use L1. Understanding teacher professional identity from a language use position is becoming increasingly important in teacher education (Chong, 2011).

Liu (2009) examines the questions and problems relating to native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) and NNESTs. He frames his discussion in his own personal narrative of professional and linguistic identity formation (see Ricento, 2005). Liu evaluates phases of the

limited research on NNESTs which has moved from self-perception, to credibility, to perception by others, concluding with recommendations for more empirical research, less polarisation and more collaboration between the NEST/NNEST, and better training for NNESTs. Ricento (2005) discusses and evaluates various methodologies for analysing identity as it relates to L2 language learning and teaching. Primary among his conclusions is that teacher identity is constantly changing and must be studied over time, and that the personal narrative is a methodology well-suited to the exploration of linguistic identity in teaching.

Summary

Professional identity is likened to an individual's perceptions of self as a teacher and as the teacher they wish to become (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). In the UAE, policies in support of Emiratisation have led to prioritisation of employment for Emirati citizens in both public and private sectors (Dickson, Riddlebarger, Stringer, Tennant, & Kennetz, 2014). Emiratisation as a driver for change is responsible for the development of pre-service teacher preparatory programs in which Emirati nationals are trained to fulfil the demands of ADEC's NSM based on constructivist, student-centred methodologies and with English as the medium of instruction for mathematics and science. For novice Emirati teachers, the changing linguistic scene poses challenges in addition to the difficulties of finding their feet amid the turmoil resulting from mass reform, along with working in communities of Western teachers from different nationalities and cultures. Another potential challenge is that the Western teachers are often new to the school and to the UAE environment. They themselves are grappling with their own teaching in a foreign environment with Arabic (which few of them speak) being used by parents, students, and other teachers and administrators in the school. As such, these more experienced teachers may not be able to provide the kinds of mentoring and support novice teachers need. Ways of coping with all these challenges of context can be used as a lens to discuss the emerging professional identities of novice Emirati teachers.

Methodology

This paper presents findings related to challenges and emergence of professional identity. It is part of a larger study on novice Emirati teachers, the aims of which are to determine the challenges faced by novice Emirati teachers during their first year of employment as English medium teachers; identify the effectiveness of teacher preparation and its relevance to novice teachers in their practice; investigate the use of English as a medium of instruction by non-native speakers of English; and investigate the emergence of professional identities based on challenges faced in the first year of teaching. The findings reported here align with two research questions: What challenges do novice teachers face in their first year of teaching, and what does management of these challenges reveal about teachers' emerging professional identities?

Participants

In terms of the larger study, the sample population selected were graduates of a Bachelor of Education degree; part of the first graduating cohort from a newly established educational teacher training institution; and employed as EMTs in ADEC Cycle 1 (grades 1-5) schools and kindergartens during the time of the research. It is a representative participant

sample because out of the forty students who were employed as EMTs, thirty provided informed consent to participate in the research study. The study took place towards the end of their first year of teaching. Thirty participants completed a questionnaire; 13 also participated in a letter-box focus group discussion and semi-structured interviews. All participants were UAE nationals. While participants' first language is Arabic, all had achieved an IELTS score of 6.0 or above; as teachers in schools where English was the medium of instruction, they were considered to be comfortable and fluent in English. Therefore, the survey, focus groups, and interviews were all conducted in English.

Of the 30 participants, 27 were female and 3 were male. Participants ranged in ages from 21-30 years. Of the thirteen participants involved in semi-structured interviews and the letter-box focus group discussion, the responses of six (5 female and 1 male) Cycle 1 teachers constitute the qualitative findings for this paper. Non-Cycle 1 (i.e., Kindergarten) teachers were excluded from this paper because their environment and the dynamics in which they worked were quite different.

Data Collection

The overarching study employed both quantitative and qualitative tools for data collection. A questionnaire was constructed and used to determine variables such as academic program preparation, field experiences in schools, use of English and Arabic within class and school contexts, perceptions of roles and responsibilities as related to the delivery of NSM, and relationships within school communities. The questionnaire consisted of Likert-scale items, multiple choice, and open questions. It was emailed to the students as a web link to maintain participant confidentiality and anonymity.

Face-to-face semi-structured interviews and the letter-box focus group discussion were qualitative tools used to probe deeper into the questionnaire responses. Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with those participants who had, on their questionnaire form, indicated a willingness to be interviewed. On site individual, semi-structured interviews were guided by an interview protocol developed from an analysis of questionnaire responses. Examples of interview questions that pertained to professional identity were: Do you feel that you have been accepted as part of the school community? How do you see your role as an Emirati EMT working with Western EMTs? Interviews lasted an hour, were digitally recorded, transcribed verbatim and checked to establish authenticity.

Participants who wished to engage further in the letter-box focus group discussion were contacted following the interviews. The discussion was held at the teacher training campus. As individual voices can be lost or not heard when conducting a focus group interview (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995; Madriz, 2003; Wilkinson, 1998), the research team introduced the letter-box approach to assist in the recording of individual voices. Themes related to identity were formed as questions that were displayed around the room on A3 sheets of paper. Below each question, a response box and note pads were made available for the participants to write and post their responses aligned with that question. Participants were allowed 30 minutes to write their individual responses; this was followed immediately by a facilitated discussion with the participants based on the posted group questions. Participants were given the opportunity to share their responses and discuss them with each other in small groups. No names were recorded, thus ensuring the approach was non-threatening but participative. Anonymity was upheld in the data reporting; however, the researchers, who were facilitating the activity, were aware of participants' identities. The discussions were audio-recorded, transcribed, and checked for authenticity.

Data Analysis

Data from the questionnaire to both open and closed questions was entered on a spreadsheet, and eSurveys Pro software was used to collate descriptive statistics. Survey data responses related to certain categories (e.g., reasons for being a teacher, how they implemented the curriculum, and challenges they faced) were calculated with findings presented graphically. A coding frame for responses to open-ended questions was organised and data analysed in relation to the overall aims of the study.

Transcripts from interviews and the letter-box focus group discussion were read several times for a general understanding of emerging themes. The data analysis process then proceeded in phases. First, researchers individually coded all transcripts and collaborated on common codes to determine themes and sub-themes. Codes were used to construct matrix displays based on occurrence of themes and sub-themes linked to sections of the text. The matrices facilitated comparative cross-case analysis of data (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

In terms of this paper, the next phase involved further referrals to the questionnaire's main findings and matrix displays of codes to determine aspects pertaining to teacher identity and belief positions in managing challenges of context. If a position was unclear, the real-life example was re-examined to establish the correct teacher identity belief position.

Challenges identified in all data sources were reconsidered and classified into challenge types by asking the following questions: What factors allow or compel a challenge to surface? What is the novice teacher's conception of their role and responsibility in managing and addressing these challenges? What actions are taken in response to the challenges? Challenges of context were identified and reported in the findings as those relating to time management, behaviour management, implementation of the curriculum, challenges of context, and English as the medium of instruction for mathematics and science.

Finally, in relation to each real-life challenge, belief positions were coded into types, for example being resilient, reflecting, listening to learn, participating in the school community, being adaptive and responsive, and exercising agency to overcome barriers. By way of an example and in response to the challenge of being an Emirati, working as an EMT alongside Western EMTs and AMTs and feeling accepted, one teacher's belief position when confronted by the challenge of non-collaboration and separation between the EMTs and AMTs depicted self-awareness of the context and reflection of his role as a member in this school: "*AMTs and EMTs should work together but they don't when they are assigning marks…well they have their roles and responsibilities"*; being responsive*, "I have a suggestion to teach Arabic classes to the EMTs"*; and exercising agency, "*I go and visit the* [AMTs] *and sit with them even though I'm not working with them."*

Limitations

Although what is reported in this paper is a small section of what has been revealed in terms of the larger study, we feel the need to acknowledge underpinning methodological limitations. First, our findings are drawn from a small sample in one tertiary institution thus limiting conclusions to one site. We acknowledge that to validate these findings, the use of a larger sample is desirable. The time covered by this study is also a limitation; while the first year of teaching is fraught with challenges, the ensuing year or two can also be demanding (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009). A longitudinal study covering the first two to three years of practice could provide useful insight into the ongoing identity development of this cohort as they continue their professional careers. We also acknowledge that no causality may be implied from our findings.

As a final note, we would like to point out that the relationship between participants and researchers was close: most of the researchers had taught and/or mentored most of the participants. This closeness and the nature of the teacher-student relationship may have led to some responses being less than candid, particularly in the focus group and face-to-face interviews, where anonymity was not possible. The reality of the situation, with a small cohort of both novice teachers and faculty at their teacher training institution, made this unavoidable. Despite this possible limitation, we feel the results of this study offer needed insight into the emergence of these novice teachers' professional identities.

Results

The results section begins with a brief description of reasons for becoming a teacher. Next, we identify and deconstruct the challenges novice teachers face in terms of beliefs that emerge connected with professional identity.

Reasons for Becoming a Teacher

The questionnaire results from the initial 30 participants who were asked for their motivation to become a teacher reveal that 35% always wanted to be a teacher, 17% chose to be a teacher due to family expectations and approval, and 27% of female participants mentioned that the teaching profession would allow them opportunities to work in a women-only school environment (most public schools in Abu Dhabi are gender-segregated). Finally, approximately 10% believed a teaching career would benefit them with teaching their own children and contributing to the family finances.

Time Management

A time management stressor all novice teachers face is balancing school and personal commitments (Bristol-Rhys, 2010). The novice Emirati teachers found trying to achieve work/life balance a major challenge. Emirati culture is family-oriented with women shouldering many responsibilities involved in running the home. One teacher answered the question of balancing work and home commitments by saying: "*If you want me to lie to you I would say that work doesn't affect my life at home at all! As a teacher, the amount of work that I have to do is huge and I have to take some work home with me."*

Challenges pertaining to time management also concern curriculum implementation, including not having enough time to successfully deliver lessons during class periods. For example, one teacher noted that, "*The science*, [contained a lot of] *information you have to know. I want to spend the whole day with them to finish today's lesson.*" Another used a very effective metaphor to describe how she felt: *"At this moment I feel that I don't have balance, and sometimes I feel that I'm not able to accomplish what's required from me, like for example marking... sometimes I just catch the beginning of this train but sometimes I feel that I'm lost."* It was noted with concern that after the first year, they would likely get extra teaching loads which caused concern. *"Maybe for the next year they will give me 30 periods. How am I going to teach this? I see that all EMTs are struggling. They are so tired."* It could well be that concerns such as this could contribute to higher attrition rates (Clark, 2012; Ingersoll, 2002; Schatz-Oppenheimer & Dvir, 2014).

Behaviour Management

In common with many first-year teachers, most participants talked of struggling with student behaviour. One of the teachers explained*: "There are some students they don't pay attention they are playing all the time. So, I asked for a parents' meeting to discuss their students' academic and behaviour issues. ...sometimes I let them sit in front of me so I am sure that they will not do anything."* This excerpt notes the use of personal initiative to manage behavioural challenges. Even though the novice teachers described classroom management as a challenge, there is a growing sense of confidence as they experiment and adapt with management strategies to cope with challenges of behaviour: *"The most challenging part is to keep the positive reinforcement consistent. So, because they are familiar with my positive reinforcement, I felt that they are misusing that. I am trying now to add some consequences."* A natural part of being responsive and adaptive in practice indicates buy-in to reflection as a precursor to changing practice. A study by Ünal and Ünal (2012) sheds light on differences in classroom management perceptions and beliefs of elementary school teachers based on years of teaching experiences. Ünal and Ünal found that pre-service teachers initially favour a non-interventionist approach which changes to shared control during their early career years and ends with greater teacher control as they became more experienced. The novice teachers in our study start out wanting students to exercise choice in terms of monitoring their own behaviour but default to being traditional and controlling as they continue teaching. Changes perceived in practice result from being reflective, adaptive, and responsive. In terms of growing professionalism, all teachers showed determination to succeed in aspects of behaviour management.

When one of the teachers was asked what they found most challenging about managing behaviour, they responded, *"mainly some naughty students"* and *"the high-level students are also so noisy but they do their work so I could not punish them as they are doing very well."* This excerpt suggests that the novice teacher would like to be in more control of the noise, and possibly her sense of unease with escalating noise levels is the tension felt with the need for traditionally accepted low overall class noise juxtaposed with higher noise levels common with constructivist pedagogies where discussion is part of cooperative learning. Some teachers exhibit coping strategies to deal with such situations: "*Okay, I will talk later or send some girls who finish earlier to the reading centre which I created or I let them to play on the computer"* and *"I changed their seating."* Others send the student "*to the social worker",* suggesting they were not yet confident or knowledgeable of constructivist methods to adapt behaviour management strategies accordingly. One teacher spoke of classroom management as being shocking: "*how to manage my classroom is a challenge, because I have a violent student who hurt broke her friend's hand."*

The conflicting positional stances related to behaviour management can be viewed as a struggle of identity. The dilemma of choice, that is, being egalitarian, authoritative, and/or kind and caring is summed up: *"It's really hard if you appear to the students that you can't manage your class, you are not in control, or the students will get bossy more than before ... if they see me weak in the first three weeks or month, and think they are able to talk when I'm talk, they will be happy, they won't listen to me anymore."* Although this state of uncertainty exists, the search for strategy aligned to belief and philosophical stance to achieve best fit with self in situ continues.

Implementing the Curriculum

The NSM curriculum focuses on constructivist, student-centred pedagogy which is a deliberate break away from the more traditional style of teaching that was previously typical

in UAE classrooms. The role of the teacher is likened to that of a facilitator scaffolding learning. Students are considered active participants in control of their own learning. Aligned with constructivist theory and a student-focused perspective, the NSM curriculum is less prescriptive and more experiential, a complete turnaround to what was traditionally highly prescriptive with lesson plans written by a group of teachers and supervisors and distributed to all schools to implement directly. This shift has resulted in movement away from textbooks to activity-based, differentiated planning and teaching. In this context, the implementation of the NSM curriculum is accompanied by challenges related to a different conceptualisation of the role of teacher and learner. Teaching and learning challenges also include lack of resources to engage students in learning. Some novice teachers describe their frustrations at having to create resources to sustain modern teaching methods: *"Another thing was dealing with a lack of resources ... until now I am still suffering because you know our teaching is not depending on books and notebooks now, it is depending on like toys, and different kinds of resources."*

As part of the overall drive for monitoring aggregated data, ADEC introduced the Electronic Student Information System (ESIS) for scheduled collection and dispersal of grade results to government authorities. One teacher spoke of the challenges faced with this system, including linking assessment data to learning outcomes that may not have been covered by the time of assessment and reporting. She noted, *"There are some problems,* [which will] *never be solved, you know the outcomes like in Science in the first trimester. When you put the grading, system like for these outcomes, "mastered, mastered" and there are many outcomes that are not taught, the overall grade is C. That's the problem for the first trimester, we can't change anything, just put the outcomes."* Comments such as this raise interesting insights on the nature of critique emerging from the teachers related to ESIS. Although the teachers were introduced to ESIS and continuous assessment as part of their pre-service training, in practice they considered ESIS to be time and labour intensive and questioned its alignment to teaching and learning. Systematic evidence gathering and entry in terms of portfolio preparation proved challenging: "*Everything was new to me and it still shocks me is that for each single thing I do I have to have an evidence for it, and actually some teachers take pictures with parents to prove that they communicate with parents!!!"* For this teacher, the ESIS system, prioritising assessment, and creating a trail of evidence are seen as assuming more importance than teaching which made her question what she was doing and why. In the schools, there is also the accompanying issue of the nature and extent of assistance given to helping the novice teacher understand the basic functions of ESIS. One teacher reported that "*Nobody sat with us and told us how to do it."* However, teachers who were part of a school community where the Heads of Faculty (HoF) were familiar with systems of aggregated school-wide assessment and reporting in their own countries meant assistance was provided when required: "*The Head of Faculty in the school is very helpful, I ask her many questions about ESIS*."

Although the participants were taught the theory and pedagogy aligned with differentiated planning in their preparatory courses, implementing this in practice surfaced as a challenge: "*I have some girls who are at grade 3 level, and some are like grade 2 level,"* and *"Over half of my students who came from grade 1 and 2 cannot count to one hundred, they don't know the alphabet, so when I'm teaching, it's like teaching grade 1, 2, 3 not only 3."* The novice teachers struggle to cope with different levels: *"Before I was thinking that there are only like 2 or 3 levels in the classroom, but I discovered that there are like 4. There are students whose level is KG and they are in grade 5."* In their courses, teachers learnt ways to plan so that individual and group needs were met. However, this theory/practice nexus in practice proves challenging and necessitates getting to know learners' prior knowledge and planning for targeted teaching. In terms of exercising agency, deliberate acts

of teaching are starting to emerge for some but are not universally addressed by all who position blame on context: "*When I was in other schools, the level of some students were low and some high. Here my whole class are low and only 4 or 5 can manage the work.*"

The NSM has been rolled out on a yearly basis, and in the year of data collection this included the introduction of the grade 5 syllabus. Some teachers felt they were unprepared to teach that grade especially as resources and curriculum were not readily available, and they themselves were unfamiliar with content expectations at that level. It was noted that the Western EMTs felt the same. One Emirati teacher commented: "*In my college I was learning about grades 1 to 3, and grade 4, so grade 5 was not a focus."* Here, again, the novice teachers are forced to learn in situ. Their success rests on drawing on their academic competencies and capabilities to be reflective, responsive, and adaptive.

Multi-faceted challenges of implementing the curriculum form part of the novice teachers' daily life. Although they are aware of their knowledge gaps and frustration levels, their commitment to doing their best for the students is commendable. They show resilience as they adapt and respond to delivering the curriculum to address student needs. The plight of the novice teacher is one of "sink or swim" (Lawson, 1992; Lortie, 1975) and "baptism of fire" (Hall, 1982) as the realities of reporting requirements, differentiated planning, and continuous assessment become more pronounced in everyday activity. Teachers react to solving problems of context by networking with others and herein face additional challenges.

Challenges of the School Context

Teaching can be an isolating job, particularly for primary school teachers with one class and where large amounts of time are spent in classrooms with little peer interaction or feedback (McCormack & Gore, 2008). The need to build positive collegial relationships is essential for novice Emirati teachers who face challenges related to the educational reforms and who are even more dependent on advice, induction, and emotional support (Sabar, 2004). A 2012 study by Ibrahim in the emirate of Abu Dhabi discussed the need for mentoring novice teachers to avoid high attrition rates. There are numerous studies which show the benefits of a formalised, well-organised mentoring system (Ponticell & Zepeda, 1996) in which teachers provide each other with advice and peer support (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). In Abu Dhabi, working alongside teachers of different nationalities and cultures can be trying. For example, Emirati bilingual teachers' access to support and dialogue with Western EMTs varies from acceptance to non-acceptance: "*EMT teachers have 30 classes per week so it is difficult to sit with them and learn",* or *"I feel I am not one of them."* In the case of non-acceptance, the novice teachers tend to gravitate towards the AMT staff because of cultural and language commonalities: *"During the break-time the Arabic teachers always invite me to have food and sit together. You prefer to sit with the person with your language, your customs and traditions"*, and *"I discovered that the same students who do troubles in my class, do troubles there."* Another reiterated, *"I discuss with them the content*, [and] *behaviour. I benefited from their experience because they have like 20 years of experience."*

Building relationships is vital to well-being and feeling emotionally supported (Hobson, 2009). Depending on a novice teacher to independently 'come and talk' to administrators in a culture where saving face is of extreme importance may not be appropriate, especially for the less confident teachers. In our study, some feared being a 'nuisance' by asking questions. One said that she did have support from her HoF but was uncertain over how much help to request. She felt she lacked clarity in protocols for seeking assistance: "*I get support, for example from my HOF...* [but] *I don't know if it's part of her*

job or not." Again, the lack of formal mentoring structures seems to compound the difficulties faced during the first year of teaching*:* "*Sometimes I am afraid of asking my Head of Faculty, because we are like 22 English teachers and she is one."*

Some Emirati teachers within the school community spoke of feeling pressured to be translators in terms of the additional administrative workload created and feelings of not being able to refuse: "*For example they are sending me parents' letter to send to the students every Thursday. My HoF told me that please translate these letters. That's not my job!"* This teacher went on to ask rhetorically, "*Did they do* [that] *before I came? How did they complete these things*?" The teacher felt she was new and being tested to see how far she could be pushed. From the findings, it is possible to get a sense of dissonance regarding translation which leads to teachers raising critical questions of their roles, responsibilities, and 'fit' in a culture that is so different to what they had experienced when they were at school or expected to face when they entered the profession. Some novice teachers felt that the school culture was not collaborative: "*They* [Western EMTs] *gave the students amazing worksheets and things but they did not share with me and they are not caring if I'm fine or not. I don't know is that normal, or they should just exchange what they have?"* The experience resulted in the teacher feeling "*surprised, shocked, and alone*."

One of the teachers in this study thought that, although she felt accepted, she was considered to get preferential treatment over the Western EMTs (presumably by the school administration): "*Yes, I think by now they accept me pretty well except sometimes some of the EMT teachers think that I get more special treatment than them, which is wrong of course*!" It illustrates the unique and at times awkward position which the Emirati graduates find themselves in with having a foot in both worlds. One spoke of feeling part of the EMT team when there was something other teachers needed from her, for example, preparing for National Day, which is a large cultural celebration. She concluded that *"It showed me that they will always feel that I am not part of them.*" Another teacher commented that *"At the beginning of the year I felt they were not happy with me. I don't know why… it's just I don't understand their facial expressions, I don't know what's going on…some of them are tough with me, cold…so I'm trying to be good with them and show them that you are welcome in our country."* From the data gathered in this study, it appears that misunderstandings are common, and building professional relationships is challenging and may generate discomfort.

The novice teachers in our study acknowledged the potential for disharmony and separation if groups did not mix amicably for social or work reasons. They also acknowledged that in their capacity as Emirati EMTs, they were able to bridge gaps, and being bilingual allowed them to communicate with different groups within the scope of teaching: *"Sometimes* [there are] *communication problems between Arabic medium teachers and English medium teachers. And the problem is that these teachers don't want to learn each other's language. They should learn enough language to help each other communicate."* The Emirati teachers' ability to understand the situation makes them meaning makers, able to exercise agency to achieve change: "*I have a suggestion to teach Arabic classes to the EMTs – we are sitting the schools until July so maybe I will teach Arabic to some of the teachers."*

The insertion of this group of teachers in schools is exciting for the foreseeable future as they will be able to fill the language and cultural gap between groups of teachers. One teacher describes the ideal culture as learning from each other. The big picture outlook described by her is that *"I am benefitting from their* [the EMTs'] *experience as teachers, and they are benefiting from me like the ADEC and the NSM. And we are working together and everything is fine. And for the school, I think I am the most important one there for translation. Yeah, I am feeling I'm very important there."*

Challenges of context also extend to parents in terms of mismatch between the

parent's idea of their child's academic ability and the reality in the classroom. One teacher wished she could *"invite her* [parent] *to watch her child inside the classroom, so she knows that she* [child] *can't read."* Another noted, "*They come and ask about their children, like about their progress report, and their grades - "Why 'C'? And when they see the grade, they* [are] *convinced."* A growing sense of confidence in how the Emirati teachers manage parental issues is starting to become evident as this statement exemplifies: "*Sometimes the parents want my number but I don't give it. I want to keep my privacy and I didn't want to talk to them on the weekends or my holiday so I let the social worker do the work.*" Another teacher described being severely reprimanded by one parent of a child in her class whom she accidentally forgot to give a sticker and was shocked by the parent's response, which she described as "*yelling through writing*" in the school communication book. She took the assertive step of responding in writing that the parent needed to speak to her in person: "*I am a normal person who can forget and skip students accidentally, and I have tonnes of work to do."* Another challenge for the novice teachers in our study concerns parents whom they really wished to have contact with but were unable to do so. Some talked of parental apathy to get involved and wished that this was not the case as ***"****it was useful to communicate with parents to improve the kids in Math and Science."*

English as the Medium of Instruction for Mathematics and Science

The NSM requires the delivery of mathematics and science through the medium of English, which creates inevitable challenges. The novice teachers have the unique advantage of being bilingual; however, EMTs' use of Arabic to ease delivery of concepts appears controversial, with some reporting that their principals had specifically forbidden them to use Arabic in the classroom. This was often a challenge due to students' differences in language ability and because novice teachers felt that using some occasional Arabic to explain underlying concepts was acceptable: "*I don't know what ADEC are thinking of when they are saying bilingual environment. Do they think just for KG when the Arabic teacher is explaining the English teacher's doing the same? I think bilingual environment is also in the same class."* Another teacher explained how she saw supplementing her teaching with some Arabic as necessary: *"The first two weeks I used English and nobody listened. Then I used Arabic and everyone tried to follow the rules and instructions. So, English isn't suitable all the time. Also, when I give them worksheets they are in English but I read it and explain it to them first in Arabic ...their English is too low and they won't learn anything."* Additionally, using English to teach meant that sometimes they had to seek support for their own use of English: "*Sometimes for me to use new vocabulary I have to check the dictionary or translation."* One teacher described the conflict she felt speaking in English to young students who, knowing she was Emirati (due to her wearing national dress), wanted to know why they were using English. She said that this decreased as the year went on and students accepted their Emirati teacher's use of English.

Discussion: The Emergence of Professional Identity

The novice teachers in our study faced many contextual challenges. The responsibilities that came with the job challenged their personal philosophies of who they were as teachers. In common with other beginning teachers, the novice Emirati teachers experienced frustrations with uncertainty and messiness of school and classroom life. They questioned their effectiveness to adapt the curriculum to meet the varied needs of students in

their classes. Their insertion into school communities and expectation to work alongside Western EMTs made them query the degree of acceptance they felt as bilingual teachers. The sometimes fractious power relationships between EMTs and AMTs made them critique issues such as separatism exhibited by groups and their subsequent positioning as bridge builders in establishing harmonious working relationships. Despite some feeling like outsiders, afraid of not being able to fulfil expectations, they began to find their feet and adapt to what Palmer (2007) notes is a complexity perspective and teach from positions of 'who they are'. Data indicates they engaged in practice within the frame of self as meaning maker, and their professional identities that emerged made sense in terms of the beliefs they held.

Their narratives highlight their ability to reflect on challenges in ways best described as being adaptive, flexible, and responsive in practice. For example, they identified the varied academic needs of students in their classes and were proactive in drawing on self-knowledge to plan and deliver the curriculum while being cognisant of differentiation. Another example of adaptation was their ability to teach in English while choosing to use Arabic to deconstruct key vocabulary and concepts: *"I started to use Arabic just for Science. You know the main concepts. Sometimes, not all the time."*

Some of the novice Emirati teachers felt comfortable planning and integrating aspects of their cultural heritage in their teaching. They included traditional stories and themes from Emirati culture into their practice. Exposure to challenges in context made them aware of their identity as an Emirati, and, as their confidence grew, so did a sense of pride relating to their achievements: *I am the only Emirati EMT here. I heard that they* [parents] *are glad to have somebody who is Emirati to share their identity, their culture here"* and "*they are proud because I'm an English teacher and at the same time Emirati. I fight to be an EMT."*

Being part of a team is important to the novice teachers as they acknowledge their social, cultural, and linguistic ways of knowing can help them bridge the cultural and linguistic divide between groups. At times, they felt that being the only Emirati EMT made them appear somewhat of a novelty, but this feeling was accepted with pride: *"They* [other teachers] *feel that I am special so they show me to visitors"* and "*The Emirati teachers are honoured to have Emirati teachers who can teach Maths, Science and English, and they wished more teachers are coming to work like me."* When asked how others in the school perceived their role as Emirati EMTs, the feeling expressed was that they were accepted despite occasional incidents of feeling alienated by their Western counterparts: "*They are like dealing with me like I am any teacher, like they don't like let me feel like I am a new teacher or something.*" While some questioned their being asked to be translators from an add-on role perspective, others claimed it provided opportunities to showcase their leadership qualities, that is, contributing to effective school functioning. They are also able to cross the cultural and linguistic divide when communicating with parents: *"The parents are so careful on the cultural side. So, they think that as I am an Emirati I will teach him the right culture."* The novice Emirati teachers are critical thinkers and not afraid to ask the hard questions of practice if this means providing exceptional service.

Conclusion

Most novice teachers are reflective practitioners. Those in this study are also passionate and committed to contributing to school improvement in the UAE. Having undergone four years of teacher preparation in constructivist, student-centred methodologies, they enter the profession with preparedness to teach from positions of 'who they are'. These novice Emirati teachers were entering their public schools identifying their own cultural and

social heritage and desire to improve the education system of their country. They show resilience as they adapt and respond to delivering the curriculum through the medium of English to address diverse student needs. They display optimism, enthusiasm, and an 'I/we can do it' attitude. Schools which recognise the long-term benefits of this group and ensure structures of support exist stand to gain from the benefits they bring as change agents. Nurturing the novice teacher means promoting transformational practice inclusive of the UAE's rich cultural heritage and its use of both Arabic and English for teaching and learning. The catalyst to direct these complex and meaningful systemic changes requires the fresh perspectives these novice Emirati teachers possess. Initial teacher institutions should consider teachers' sense of identity in their mission to develop a generation of future teachers to serve their own Emirati communities with capabilities to improve education as change agents.

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