Chapter 9
Co-constructing Intercultural Identity in the Work-Integrated Learning: Pre-service TESOL Teachers' Professional Development

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Abstract This chapter focuses on how pre-service novice TESOL teachers developed their intercultural identity while assisting their students of different language and cultural backgrounds in learning ESL and engaging in work-integrated learning in Australia. Based on the theoretical framework of intercultural communication competence, this project used a qualitative method and collected data from ten pre-service novice TESOL teachers who took work placements at English language colleges in Sydney. Data included two types of written documents, including TESOL internship/placement reports each pre-service novice teacher completed and TESOL teacher mentor reports provided by their mentors. Data were coded and analyzed to identify emerging themes. The results showed that the pre-service TESOL teachers constructed their intercultural identity through working collaboratively with their mentors and students, valued online work-integrated learning experience, demonstrated intercultural empathy, and developed their verbal and nonverbal communication skills. The research implications were discussed to inform the current TESOL theories and practices as well as the future research directions.

Keywords Intercultural identity · Pre-service TESOL teacher education · Work-integrated learning (WIL) · Intercultural communication · Professional development

9.1 Introduction

One of the most important parts of TESOL teacher education in Australia is placement experience that pre-service TESOL teachers can gain through work-integrated learning (WIL). WIL is defined as follows.

> Work-integrated learning. . .refers to a range of practical experiences designed to give students valuable exposure to work-related activities relevant to their course of study. To

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> produce the highly skilled workforce that the community and industry needs, universities and employers partner to offer students internships, projects, simulations, fieldwork and other activities. (Universities Australia, 2019, p. 4)

The WIL experience can provide them with in-context knowledge about the teaching syllabi in the workplace, develop practical skills to deliver ESL programs there, and increase their employability (Carter et al., 2017). In the multicultural workplace, as pre-service teachers work with their colleagues and students from diverse language and cultural backgrounds their intercultural communication competence plays a key role in their everyday interaction in and outside of the classroom, thus helping them to develop intercultural verbal and nonverbal communication skills and construct intercultural identity (Yang, 2018). Although students' intercultural identity has been extensively studied and reported (Hu & Dai, 2021; Kislev, 2012; Shardakova, 2013; Tian & Lowe, 2014; Ye, 2018) and that of language teachers has been published (Moloney et al., 2016; Tajeddin & Ghaffaryan, 2020), TESOL teacher intercultural identity development is a less-researched area.

This chapter focuses on how pre-service TESOL teachers develop their intercultural identity while undertaking WIL experience in various English language colleges in Australia. I will first review relevant literature and the theoretical framework of intercultural communication competence, then I will describe the methodology used, analyze the major themes, and discuss the pedagogical implications.

9.2 Literature Review

9.2.1 Intercultural Identity

I start from the concept of cultural identity and then proceed to that of intercultural identity. Cultural identity refers to "collective identifications with specific cultural contents that characterize given values, habits, territories and peoples, homogeneously shared, and effectively fashioned on the model of the nation" (Sassatelli, 2009, p. 29). For example, the cultural values include social norms, religious rituals, and moral standards, and the cultural habits may be represented by the food tradition and communication (verbal and nonverbal) styles, and so on. All these specific cultural identity features are shared by peoples in a country where some cultural differences exist between the sub-cultural groups or ethnicities. Many countries are characterized by their cultural diversity.

Intercultural identity is formed when cultural identity is becoming intercultural. "Just as cultural identity serves as a linkage between a person and a specific cultural group, the emerging identity links a person to more than one cultural group" (Kim, 2001, p. 65). When speakers from one language and cultural background interact with those of other languages and cultural backgrounds regularly, they cross the language and cultural boundaries and develop the languages and cultural identities

of the others. The construction of a new identity is seen as some changes to one's verbal and nonverbal behaviours. This would include intercultural attitudes towards other languages and cultures. This intercultural identity is developed through constant negotiation between different cultural identities and management of potential issues.

9.2.2 Work-Integrated Learning

WIL is meaningful to pre-service teachers as the work experience enables them to observe mentors teaching and practice supervised teaching in the classroom and or online. Walkington (2010, p. 177) states that "professional experience offers opportunities for pre-service teachers to explore theories, ideas and strategies in various contexts, assisting them to formulate their own philosophy and practice". The pre-service teachers can reflect on teaching theories and apply them to a learner group at a particular class level. They learn and practice on the ground concerning the programs and syllabi, learner needs and backgrounds, learner ability and their learning styles, teaching methods and techniques, assessment types, and learner feedback. Although facing challenges in terms of learners' mixed abilities, individual learning needs, and assessment tasks, it is through WIL that they immerse themselves working with the culturally diverse students, scaffolding their learning needs, group or individual, and helping develop language skills and communicative competence. In return, they gain experience testing out teaching techniques, growing confident interacting with students in the classroom and online, and preparing themselves for future employment.

WIL in student internship is meaningful under the collaborative university-industry partnership. Carter et al. (2017) describe how the internship is designed as an academic unit for business and economics students, linking their university coursework with the practical skills learning and building in the workplace, for example, "business etiquette, making good first impressions, networking skills, ethics, and reflective practices" (p. 206). They also describe how the students develop practical business communication and management skills in the real world under the mentorship of experienced business mentors in the Australian workplace. Similarly, teacher education students at Australian universities participate in WIL-related academic units that have school placements. Through these placements they learn WIL knowledge and skills and become ready for teaching at schools upon graduation as part of university-school collaboration and partnership (Manton et al., 2021).

9.2.3 Teacher Professional Development

Teachers can undertake professional development in various ways. Online teaching space has recently emerged as a dominant platform where teachers interact with their

students for language teaching experiences and take it as professional development. Although online communication is not new, they do find it somewhat challenging to fully use its resources for effective teaching and learning. While the technical puzzles can be worked out with more practice and technical support, it needs more work to understand the "social, linguistic and cultural complexity" embedded in online teaching and learning practices (Meskill, 2013).

Teacher professional development is ongoing as teaching contributes to the acquisition of new knowledge, development of new skills in addition to consolidating the existing ones. Teaching as socialization helps acquire new knowledge and develop new skills. While classroom socialization is common in the normal time, online socilization meets the needs of social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic and has been used on a compulsory basis because university campuses were locked down for health reasons. Teachers realize the true value of computer-mediated communication and socialization as professional development (Meskill, 2009). Not only do language teachers need to work out effective online instructional strategies but also become aware of student perception and what strategies they use to respond to their learning needs (Ceglie & Black, 2020). Online teaching and learning centres around authentic language and communication activities supplemented with many culturally appropriate materials and resources. In online social interaction with their students, TESOL teachers understand how culturally diverse the learning environment and the participants are and that they need to develop intercultural communication competence to meet the needs of cultural diversity (Selvi & Peercy, 2016). Through online interaction, teachers and students engage in language activities as intercultural communication and work collaboratively to achieve expected teaching and learning outcomes (Othman & Ruslan, 2020).

9.3 Methodology

9.3.1 Participants

A qualitative method was used in this project. The participants were 20 pre-service TESOL teachers (hereafter mentee(s), 15 females and 5 males ranging from 20 to 50 years old) and as many mentors (15 females and 5 males ranging from 30 to 55 years old) working at MTC (Marrickville Community Training Centre) Australia. The mentees came from diverse language and cultural backgrounds, such as Australian, Arabic, Chinese, Spanish, Korean, and Vietnamese. They were enrolled in a postgraduate TESOL course at an Australian university. They have studied the course for 1 or 2 years. The TESOL Internship unit informed them of the background information about the TESOL industry in Australia and our partnership with the major TESOL employers in Sydney. As they have completed a few other TESOL units, such as English Linguistics for TESOL, TESOL Methodology and Curricula, and Second Language Assessment and Testing, these units provided them with

essential knowledge and skills they needed for effective work-integrated learning and for teaching adult speakers of other languages.

9.3.2 Data Collection

Data were collected from written work by the above 40 participants in Autumn and Spring 2020. Two written documents included Internship Report and Teacher Mentor Report. The former was the assessment in which pre-service TESOL teachers reported their critical reflections on three placement activities, including 20 hours of service learning, 10 hours of supervised teaching, and 10 hours of voluntary tutoring (Yang, 2015). The latter had three features: (1) assessing lesson contents, presentation skills, teaching activities, student learning activities, class management, and use of equipment; (2) assessing teaching methods, classroom interaction, lesson planning and preparation, and communication skills; (3) multiple assessment reports. The mentor reports for each mentee could vary in numbers ranging from three to six or more. When a mentee received 5 mentor reports for teaching 10 hours, an average counted towards their placement marks. Each report had 200 words on average. Each mentor assessed the mentee's teaching according to the university assessment standards and criteria. The advantage of using these documents as a resource of data was that they provided formal information about the placement progress of the mentees. Both Internship Reports and Mentor Reports were carefully prepared before being finalized and submitted. Eventually, 120 copies of documents with roughly 80,000 words were collected (See Table 9.1).

9.3.3 Data Analysis

All the data collected were studied and analyzed through Nvivo (Jackson, 2019). This research tool allowed the researcher to import all documents into the system, build free nodes to develop potential key points based on a high frequency of relevant words and phrases leading to sub-themes, and conduct constant comparative analysis. Eventually, major themes emerged from the sub-themes. The following major points were identified for detailed analysis and discussion and presented to support how the mentees worked with their students and co-constructed their

Table 9.1 Quantified data information

Document name	Copy	Words
TESOL Internship Reports (TIR)	20	20 × 3000 words = 60,000
TESOL Mentor Reports (TMR)	20 × 5 = 100	100 × 200 each = 20,000
Total	120	80,000

intercultural identity through the work-integrated learning leading to transformative education and learning experience through the work placements.

9.4 Constructing Intercultural Identity Through WIL

The mentees engaged in WIL through work placement with English language centres in more than 10 of its 20 locations of MTC Australia in Great Western Sydney. MTC provides work-related education (e.g., literacy and numeracy) and nationally accredited training courses to adult learners in Australia. These courses help many community members to update their skills needed for the jobs and return to the workforce. One of these courses is the Skills for Education and Employment (SEE) program. SEE is funded by the Australian Government and is delivered by MTC to assist adult learners in learning ESL. "It provides eligible job seekers with language, literacy, numeracy, job-search and computer literacy training, to help improve their skills in English for use at work or in their studies" (Skills for Education and Employment, 2021). Although SEE is designed for ESL learners, some native Australian English speakers too take this course to improve their literacy (readings and writing) and numeracy needed for employment.

In the Autumn and Spring semesters of 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, MTC had to switch from face-to-face to online teaching. It was in this challenging context that the mentees undertook their WIL. The online teaching created challenges and opportunities for them to work their way through, developing new skills and co-constructing intercultural identity which was approached through the following three perspectives.

9.4.1 Meeting the Online Teaching and Learning Challenges

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the quick switch from face-to-face to an online mode was challenging to the mentees and even more to the MTC SEE senior-age students who had to learn at home and were generally unfamiliar with online learning environment. However, each mentee worked with an MTC teacher mentor who started training their students how to use a Microsoft Team app for online learning. This app was new to the mentees, but their experience using Zoom and the online learning space at the university gave them much confidence in learning the new app. Supervised by the mentor, they took the opportunity to take on challenges and immersed in the WIL experience. Before teaching online each time, they practised many times and worked out technical issues so that they could scaffold their student learning skills. However, student issues arose, with some students using mobile phones with a small screen. A lot of noise (the shouting and crying of the kids, the siren, etc.) came through. But the mentees understood that

their students put so much effort into their learning despite many setbacks from the pandemic and low technical skills.

Online language learning could be flexible with the home environment. Many students were mature learners with families and children and they were looking after kids learning English with MTC. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, they attended classes at an SEE centre and their kids were usually supervised by the childcare staff therein. Now, when these mums and dads learn at home, their kids were playing around by themselves. As their phone microphone was on, the kid's shouting and crying came through. Similar issues were raised in the mentor report. It stated that as the students were attending lessons from home there were instances where family members might distract the students from the lesson. They appreciated that the mentee demonstrated tolerance and understanding as the student was making great efforts in learning English despite challenges arising from family commitments and online environment constraints. Another mentor report stated that the distraction did not only come from the family members in the household, but also the family pets. The added distraction occurred when animals suddenly appeared during the online lesson. While this could be reasonably considered if it did cause a big issue or occur at a critical moment, as a distractor by some persons, their (cat and dog) appearance could help online students become less anxious and more relaxed, and reduce the potential monotony of online learning. Using a flexible approach to engage students in the online learning environment, the mentee was quick-minded and kind-hearted and used this opportunity to ask the student to introduce the pets. As seen from the facial expressions of those that used video, most of them seemed to be light-hearted as this fun moment did give everybody something different for a change.

Despite various challenges to meet in online learning environment, the mentees used many useful resources to increase student learning interest and develop their student capacity to explore on their own. Being aware that the students might have a short span of attention in the online learning space (Zeng et al., 2020), the mentees prepared authentic online materials, such as images and photos. One mentee reported how she googled the image of the Opera House and how students learned the proper nouns associated with the image. Here, the visual potential of multiple intelligence theory (Gardner, 2011) was used to achieve the learning of the specialized word group through establishing an association between images and words. Furthermore, the use of the Opera House was an affect display of the user's cultural identity indicating the country location the mentee was sharing with their students. Another mentee reported how she encouraged students to find an image of the great wonders of other countries than their own. Shortly, one student requested to share his screen with an image of the Great Pyramid in Egypt, another student with an image of the Great Wall in China, and still another student with the image of the Colosseum in Rome. When the mentees reflected on the student feedback on teaching, they understood how effectively the use of visual learning resources could engage students in online learning and how well it could help develop student intercultural identity.

9.4.2 Demonstrating Intercultural Empathy

Empathy means that one can think and feel what another person thinks and feels in the same or similar fashions while engaged in interaction (Segal, 2018) or that one can walk in a student's shoes (Debbie & Roberta, 2016), or that it is the ability to place oneself in another person's position (Maibom, 2020). To build on this, intercultural empathy means that one can think and feel what another person of a different language and cultural background thinks and feels in the same or similar manners. This concept is typical of those that have intercultural identity displayed in intercultural interaction in the classroom setting or in online learning space. When developing intercultural empathy, a person has an appropriate attitude towards different languages and cultures. This is found in a mentee's report. She appreciated her students (some were above 50 years old) using their first language (L1) in learning ESL and saw this in perspectives. On the one hand, the flexible use of L1 can help students learn the second language, for example, when both languages have similar metaphorical expressions (Türker, 2016), thus providing a sense of confidence and security for the learners. The second language learners would automatically use L1 in online processing of the second language idioms (Carrol et al., 2016). Furthermore, it helped save a great deal of time and could quickly clarify difficult words and abstract concepts.

On the other hand, it could be a double-edged sword if L1 dominated the class because its frequent use could limit students' second language exposure and hinder their second language development. The mentees suggested that for nonnative English learners, the limited and judicious use of translation and mother tongue improves the teaching and learning processes, and increases language acquisition. They continued that the best way to go about using it was through making the learners aware of the translation equivalence issues and helping them distinguish the differences between the two languages and understand that what works grammatically in their native language may not work with English. The students appreciated their teachers' advice on how to best use L1 in learning ESL for a clear purpose and they took care to make rational decisions. Such mutual intercultural empathy helped the mentees and students construct their mutual intercultural identity showing respect and understanding to one another and building collaborative student-teacher rapport.

Their intercultural identity demonstrated in the language attitude laid a base on which their intercultural attitude towards other cultures was emerging. One mentee reported that his learning of different cultural contents from the students changed an online learning space into a welcoming platform where the students shared their cultural festivals (e.g., Chinese Moon Festival and Indian Diwali Festival), cultural handicrafts, and cultural calligraphies (e.g., Arabic and Chinese styles). They came to understand one another better and better through interaction and negotiation. This process led to learners' willingness to communicate, use their personal autonomy, and participate in various task-based learning activities designed to increase their employment opportunities (Al-Murtadha, 2019). In addition, one female mentor

reported that the mentee she supervised used the teaching materials in a respectful manner as the students were all adult students from a variety of different backgrounds and cultures. The mentee demonstrated her ability to feel and think what her students who were older than herself felt and thought about appropriate intercultural communication (DeVito, 2016; Lankiewicz, 2014) and the students felt at home in the online learning space.

Effective teachers were able to use learning resources relevant to their students' everyday life experiences so that they were motivated to participate in learning activities (Díaz, 2016; Harmer, 2015). Another male mentor reported that the female mentee he supervised asked the students to name a few cultural and traditional foods that would normally be prepared for the most important festivals in their home culture after she talked about an article on different English foods, such as turkeys, ham, and salad, which are prepared for the Christmas Eve in Australia. Then, a few students either put up their hands or used a raise-hand symbol on their screen. They took turns talking about their unique cultural foods as a special festive celebration in different countries, for example, dumplings as a family get-together for the Chinese Spring Festival. As the foods are available in the shops and restaurants in Sydney, many students had experience with them and felt the beauty and power of these cultural foods that made their everyday life good. They became excited and talkative when foods were used as a topic. Indeed, cultural foods are commonly used as a meaningful communication of folk tales and cultural representation in many cultures (Reinhard et al., 2021) with some of them highlighting food and language communication (e.g., stories and jokes) (Karatsu, 2014; Riley & Paugh, 2019) and others focusing on foods and nonverbal communication and behaviour (e.g., manners of eating foods) (Szatrowski, 2014).

The mentees were also playing the role of an educator with a purpose to build their students' confidence in learning English for employment and socialization. For example, a female mentee learned that some students in their 40s and 50s felt ashamed of speaking English in front of others because their children often mocked them for poor speaking skills. This affected their self-confidence in speaking English. The mentee convinced their students that they were already capable and successful L1 speakers and had thinking and analytical skills that could be deployed in learning English as a second language. As discussed above, the mentees did not completely ban their students from using L1 but encouraged them to use it thoughtfully and flexibly for specific purposes. One pedagogical purpose was to help grow students' confidence and remove their fear of being unable to speak in online space and public. Other measures they took included minimization of correcting students' speaking errors, focusing on speaking fluency, and moving from pair to individual presentation step by step.

One mentee reported how he used the tutoring opportunity to share his own learning experience as part of TESOL teacher education and explained the pedagogies used in Australia. One day soon after the tutoring started, the mentee learned from the female student that she did not want to go to the English college anymore and that she did not like the teacher's methods. When asked why, she complained that the teacher was not teaching English in a formal and structured lesson as in the

textbook but took the students to the bus and train stations and showed them how to buy tickets on a student trip. On another student trip, the teacher took them to the beach and showed them how to book a tour or a canoe. After listening to her complaints, the mentee explained that the teaching approach her teacher used was functional and situational use of English to meet the daily communication needs of the learners (Kakarla, 2019). English in real use can help language learners develop relevant communication skills and survive their everyday life, and effective teachers would use different teaching resources and learning materials, including print textbooks and teacher-developed handouts (Brown, 2015), selectively and for a definite purpose. After this dialogue, the student was happily continuing her English college course. It is evident that the mentee's teaching experience and the student's learning experience were mutually meaningful and educational, and both gained insight into the teaching and learning philosophies through individual reflections and informal conversation.

9.4.3 Collaborative Teaching as Professional Development

The mentees and their mentors worked together to aim at making sense of online interaction, using many handy resources, such as breakout rooms, peer learning groups, and nonverbal communication cues, to achieve online collaborative teaching and learning. This collaboration includes teamwork before, during, and after each teaching session. The mentees consulted their mentors throughout their placement and they worked closely during the supervised teaching. Similar to collaborative teaching of the development process of a research proposal (Khabiri & Marashi, 2016), they had completed some project-based and essay assignments in their TESOL coursework through researching resources, brainstorming, group discussions, drafting and re-drafting, getting feedback, and revising before submission. All these coursework assessments concentrated on the understanding and context-free study of relevant TESOL subjects without combining with practice in a specific teaching setting or student group. As it was the first time for these mentees to teach online, they took it as a form of in-context professional development.

Before teaching each session, the mentees prepared teaching plans in consultation with their mentors, such as studying the course syllabus, meeting with their mentors, getting to know student profiles, and preparing lesson plans. The plans include teaching aims and objectives, learning materials, teaching techniques (e.g., role plays and game-based learning activities), online assessments (e.g., oral and written), and time allocation, etc. (Brown, 2015; Harmer, 2015). Mentors made critical and constructive comments on the lesson plans and the mentees clarified for additional information, researched further resources, and revised their plans before teaching online. One of them wrote that the mentor was always willing to give advice or share their own experience in teaching practice. Another recalled in her report that when she was observing her mentor teaching online she could see that the mentor was very

passionate about helping her students learn English and other matters as well. The mentor inspired the mentee who wanted to follow her as a model person.

While the mentee herself was teaching online, she was also collaborating with her mentor who was observing and assisting her as a team member when needed. For example, she used breakout rooms to facilitate student group discussion so that each group could participate and practise their communication skills. Breakout rooms create space to increase student learning engagement and peer collaboration (Paterson & Maxfield, 2016). She was able to have a special breakout room in which to help individual students who needed additional assistance. Meanwhile, her mentor was working with another group of students in a different breakout room. Sometimes, before the mentee chose to take care of a few different breakout rooms one after another, she first gave clear instructions that each breakout room would be headed by one student as a team leader who managed student peer learning and reported the group discussion to the class later. Then, the mentee was visiting each breakout room and assisted the student learning. Saltz and Heckman (2020) think that such online learning can accommodate structured pair activities so that peer learning is possible to support each other. It also has a flexible combination of student-teacher and student-student interactive collaboration in purpose-designed breakout rooms which students find accommodating and scaffolding.

The mentees met with the mentors for after-teaching feedback as part of the interactive collaboration to gain feedback. They wanted to hear some advice on what to improve for professional development. Research shows that pre-service teachers can get helpful feedback from an experienced mentor no matter whether it is provided through implicit hints or explicit prompts (Nassaji, 2017; Nassaji & Kartchava, 2020). When the mentees had inquires about the feedback, they would have a collaborative talk with their mentors, discussing it and asking for more information. For example, after receiving the feedback one mentee sought further advice on how to slow down his pace. The mentor explained that he could try repeating words and phrases while observing students' nonverbal response, such as facial expressions. Another two mentees also had to manage their speech pace as they were advised to speak multiple times and at a slower pace sometimes due to poor audio or unstable Internet connection. One mentor noted that it made sense for mentees to use non-verbal resources such as eye contact for attention, appropriate facial expression (smiling) for positive emotions, posture to project confidence, appropriate movement to show enthusiasm to project energy, and culture-appropriate gestures to enhance verbal communication effect. TESOL teachers can deploy intercultural nonverbal communication resources and cues to demonstrate their intercultural literacy and facilitate their teaching and achieving collaborative learning and interaction with their culture-diverse students (Yang, 2020). It is through collaborative teamwork in teaching that they experience professional development in terms of effective combination of TESOL theories and practices, and co-construct intercultural identity.

9.5 Conclusion

This chapter has focused on how pre-service TESOL teachers developed their intercultural identity through online WIL in the Australian context. The discussion has highlighted three key themes, including how the mentees, mentors, and students worked together to meet the challenges of online teaching and learning environment, how they demonstrated intercultural empathy and understanding of one another, appreciated different languages and cultures, and achieved successful intercultural communication in online interaction, and how they collaborated with one another for effective teaching and learning as a team.

This discussion has two implications for pre-service TESOL teacher professional development through co-constructing intercultural identity with online WIL experience. First, the WIL-based reflective practice has the potential to prompt TESOL practitioners to reflect on teaching philosophy and principles, thus bridging the gaps between practice and theory about TESOL teacher intercultural identity. Further reflection is needed on two key factors, including interactional teaching and learning as intercultural verbal communication and intercultural nonverbal communication need (Yang, 2018), and intercultural interaction in online space. Second, the mentees' online WIL experience helps make job-ready graduates. The online mode of WIL has validated their willingness and success in learning new apps and emerging technologies and techniques, and has increased their confidence in online collaboration with mentors and students (Nami et al., 2018).

As the discussion in this chapter focuses on qualitative data only, future research can employ a quantitative method or mixed methods. They provide opportunities for researchers and readers to understand the complexities of intercultural identity construction of pre-service TESOL teachers and to what extent the collaboration of each major stakeholder, the use of various resources, and different delivery modes (online and face-to-face) could contribute to the further success of WIL.

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