Chapter 12
Learning from Leading: A Teacher Educator's Perspective of Learning Through Leading an International Professional Experience

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Prologue

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Here I am again—flying towards that beautiful 'jewel' in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, the Cook Islands. Around me is an assortment of 25 excited pre-service teachers and my equally excited although slightly nervous colleague Robyn, embarking on their first IPE. Their first, but my fourth. Due to extraordinary circumstances, I had been asked to fill in as leader of the 2015 Cook Islands IPE, one month before it was due to start. Up until a month ago, I thought I had lead my last Cook Islands IPE. This year, I had not been involved in the planning; I didn't know any of the students; I didn't know Robyn very well; and I was keenly aware that they were all very disappointed that their original leader was no longer able to go with them. I felt a bit like an interloper, but in some ways, a rescuer too. I was fortunate to be perceived as an 'expert' on the Cook Islands IPE, and well placed to step in at this late stage and, along with Robyn and the students themselves, to make this wonderful experience happen. I was looking forward to this unexpected opportunity. How did I come to be in this position? When I look back to 2012, I remember my fellow academic Ange, now my co-editing colleague, coming into my office when I was Director of Professional Experience. She flopped into the chair, shook her head, and said "I can't get anyone to come with me to the Cook Islands! What will I do?" It was unusual not to have even one staff member volunteer to be the 'learner' to Ange's 'leader.' I had looked at the invitation to lead the Cook Islands IPE several times over the past couple of years, but had always thought that I couldn't do it—it all seemed so much hard work, way outside my comfort zone, and I probably didn't have what it took to do it anyway. Despite this trepidation, after discussing and

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deciding against several options with Ange, I tentatively said, "Well, I suppose I *could go." Momentous words, as they turned out to be. Little did I know then what a transformative professional and personal journey they would lead me on.*

Introduction

In this chapter, I draw on self-study data and reflective memories to share my journey of professional learning as a teacher educator during my involvement in the Monash IPE program. Through a series of narratives, I explore the evolution of my understanding of IPE not only as an educational program for pre-service teachers, but also as a significant professional and personal learning opportunity for me as teacher educator. The work of teacher educators in IPE is under-researched in the academic literature, but also little understood by colleagues who have no personal experience of the challenges, complexities and career-affirming opportunities that involvement in IPE presents. This is understandable, as insight and deep understanding are only truly gained by active participation in an experience. IPE is no exception. Therefore, in this chapter, I aim to "pull back the curtain" on this facet of teacher educator work, and hopefully, to inspire others (teacher educators, academic leaders and administrators) to embrace the idea of IPE as a significant professional learning opportunity, and to value the work of all participants, especially those hardy souls who take on the daunting task of leading a group of pre-service teachers on such a memorable, and potentially transformative journey.

I was Director of Professional Experience when I first undertook the Cook Islands IPE, and was subsequently involved in the development of other IPEs as the program expanded. Professional experience had always been an essential part of my work: as a primary school teacher, mentoring pre-service teachers in my classroom; as a teacher educator teaching in courses related to pre-service teachers' professional experience; and visiting schools and working with mentor teachers during the practicum. So being involved in pre-service teachers' learning in schools was not new to me, neither did I ever feel uncomfortable or lacking in knowledge about the work of professional experience. The IPE program, however, presented me with new challenges and opportunities that I wasn't even aware existed, let alone felt fully prepared to tackle and embrace. When I first cautiously offered to be the "learner" on my first Cook Islands IPE, my main concern was whether or not I would be able to drive the 15-seater minivan—this was my first "first" of the experience, with many more to come.

Learning from Professional Experience Programs

Working in the field of professional experience (PE) offers challenges and opportunities for teacher educators, no matter what the context. It is a complex educational and cultural space, which calls for a multitude of skills, experiences and

personal capacities. Research has shown that involvement in PE is often a highly charged intellectual and emotional experience, with relationships at the heart of the work that takes place during these programs. Working in schools and other educational contexts during PE calls for mutual respect and understanding, critical reflection, resilience and perhaps most importantly, dialogue to unpack the learning and challenges that are experienced by all participants—pre-service teachers, students, mentor teachers and teacher educators. Philpott (2015) recognised that there were significant personal and emotional needs of pre-service teachers during professional experience, while Yuan and Lee (2015) found that the challenging emotional experiences of practicum are an integral part of the development of a pre-service teacher's professional identity. Hastings (2004) explored the emotional demands experienced by cooperating, or supervising, teachers when they mentor pre-service teachers, and found that they 'experience a wide range of differing emotions directly related to their practicum role…[including] feelings of guilt, responsibility, disappointment, relief, frustration, sympathy, anxiety and satisfaction' (p. 138).

Despite a large body of research about the learning of pre-service teachers and their mentor teachers in host schools during PE, less is known about the experiences of teacher educators supervising professional experience. Emerging self-study research points to challenges in relation to practice and pedagogies, and to the evolving professional identities of former school teachers, who are now university-based teacher educators involved in supervising PE. In their new roles, these teacher educators have to make sense of their work in the field with mentors and with pre-service teachers, and work out how their school teaching experience is relevant in this new space. For example, McDonough (2014) found this experience to be an opportunity to develop new pedagogical practices and relationships and that 'this transformed my practice…as it made me much more cognizant of the need to continually rewrite the script of mentoring and my interactions with others in this space' (p. 220). Cuenca et al. (2011) found that for them, as non-tenured "outsiders" in field supervision, the need to establish credible relationships with pre-service teachers, their cooperating teachers and fellow (tenured) academic staff at the university was paramount.

Learning from International Professional Experience Programs

While the challenges of professional experience programs in more familiar local contexts are well documented, there is less known about these challenges in the less familiar contexts of international professional experience. A small but growing body of research has uncovered the many opportunities that are available to pre-service teachers when they undertake IPE (e.g. Cushner and Mahon 2002; Walters et al. 2009). As many chapters in this book attest, these learning

opportunities include the development of intercultural competencies, enhanced intellectual growth, personal development and global mindedness; acquisition of a new understanding about life, culture, themselves and others; and an increased level of intercultural sensitivity. Brindley et al. (2009) found that for pre-service teachers working on international placements, 'the challenge…can be a catalyst for accelerated professional development…Study abroad experience does challenge pre-existing assumptions about teaching and causes trainee teachers to re-organize and broaden their developing understanding of teaching and learning' (p. 532). Trilokekar and Kukar (2011) found that the most valuable learning for pre-service teachers came from the disorienting experiences they encountered and the extent to which they were able to reflect on these in relation to their existing beliefs and assumptions. They concluded that the greatest value of the study abroad experience lies in pre-service teachers' ability to build 'an awareness of their own frames of reference (social, cultural and political contexts), and…the challenge of confronting difficult discussions [and]…constructing and revising one's perspective of both self and other' (p. 1149).

With the ever-increasing global movements in teacher education (Tudball 2012), the need to understand the experiences of *all* participants is essential. To that end, we need to pay particular attention to an under-researched area of this phenomenon —teacher educators working in diverse international contexts. The work of teacher educators in developing and leading IPE programs is essential to making this experience happen, but there is a tendency to take this work for granted and to underestimate its nature and complexity. A proliferation of global experiences in higher education has resulted in many teacher educators leading short-term study abroad programs, including IPE. As the relatively few studies examining the experiences of teacher educators have shown, working in new international contexts has important implications for their professional learning, identities and practice. Reciprocal learning relationships are inherent in the process of any professional experience, but this is particularly the case in relation to IPE, where the traditional role of the university-based teacher educator is regularly challenged, and the reciprocal nature of multiple relationships lies, largely unexamined, at the heart of the experience.

Teacher Educator Professional Learning Through Working in IPE

In the prevailing managerial discourse of professional standards and accountability of the education workforce, a teacher educator is deemed to be developing professionally if he or she undertakes a diverse range of activities in research, teaching, short courses or seminars, and service/leadership roles. This work is all relatively easy to "measure" or assess. For an increasing number of teacher educators, however, their work involves teaching, researching and leading programs in new

and diverse global locations, such as IPE. The professional learning derived from these experiences is less easily measured. Just what and how teacher educators learn from leading IPE is not well documented in the literature, although this is beginning to change. As Kidman, Easton and Davies (in thesis Chapter "Acknowledging and Learning from Discomfort: The Learners' Perspective" in this book) found, many of the learning opportunities that are available to pre-service teachers on IPE are also relevant to the academics who accompany them. In examining our experiences as leaders of two different IPEs, Cook Islands and Kenya, respectively, my colleague Arlene Grierson and I found that one of our greatest challenges was to negotiate and build relationships with local mentor teachers, based on sensitivity and awareness of cultural and pedagogical differences. We saw that there were many parallels between our professional learning and that of the pre-service teachers in regard to acquiring intercultural knowledge and understanding, and in learning to work in new educational and social contexts. We concluded that 'the importance of teacher educators adopting a global perspective and a deep consciousness of how they may be perceived by others who are culturally, racially, and/or linguistically different, is fundamental to successfully leading international practicum' (Williams and Grierson 2016, pp. 13–14). Parr (2012) used the concept of border crossing to analyse his experiences in leading a teaching practicum in South Africa. As a teacher educator, he found that during these practicums, he crossed many borders—geographic, economic, cultural, sectoral, disciplinary and political—and in doing so, came to 'appreciate anew the importance of a dialogic ethics in my own work as a teacher educator…These ethics urge me to appreciate the multiple and overlapping ways in which I, as an educator-academic-researcher, am related to the Other with whom I am teaching, working and researching' (p. 106). Parr concluded that participation in IPE enables both pre-service teachers and teacher educators to learn about themselves through learning about others. The notion of "dialogic ethics" is central to Parr's learning from his IPE experience.

A review of the relatively limited literature on the experiences of teacher educators leading IPE suggests that it is complex and challenging work, and requires deep reflection on personal and pedagogical beliefs, examination of assumptions and experiences and awareness of the emotional and ethical dimensions of the work. Such understanding leads to a heightened sense of self as a teacher educator, and deeper understandings of practice. There are significant implications from this for teacher education programs and professional learning both at home and abroad.

Teacher Educator Identity and the Academic *Self*

The literature on teacher (including teacher educator) identity suggests that its construction is a process of individual sense-making in conjunction with the influences of contextual factors and relationships, a convergence of the inner world of our own perceptions of our worth and "safety" with the outer world of our

working and learning contexts (Beijaard et al. 2004; De Weerdt et al. 2006). Teacher educator identity has been examined in some depth in the self-study literature, and was described by Williams et al. (2012) as a complex and multilayered process, involving

> personal and professional biography; institutional contexts and the nature of community; and the on-going development of a personal pedagogy of teacher education. Becoming a teacher educator involves examining beliefs and values grounded in personal biography, and dealing with the inherent tensions that arise from overlapping and interrelated personal and professional identities. (p. 256)

While Williams et al. were referring to beginning teacher educators making the transition from classroom teaching to the academy, the complexity of this identity work continues throughout a teacher educator's career, as they traverse different institutional, social and cultural contexts. As professionals, teacher educators are constantly learning from experience, as they move through time and space, and develop collaborative and pedagogical relationships with colleagues, students and communities (see Williams and Hayler 2015).

To understand teacher educator professional identity in relation to IPE, the work of Sanderson (2008) is particularly pertinent. Sanderson maintains that universities' goals of internationalisation for students cannot be fully realised without the internationalisation of the personal and professional outlooks of the teaching staff involved in these programs. He argues that

> the internationalization of the academic *Self* should be seen as a fundamental building block in an institution's response to global forces affecting higher education…[Other researchers] have maintained that universities have embarked on a mission to help all students become new internationalist learners, workers, and citizens. The corollary, indeed precursor, of this is that [university] teachers as individuals must operate from a base that extends beyond local and national perspectives. They, themselves, have to be among the cosmopolitans of the 21st century. (pp. 276–7)

By the term *cosmopolitans*, Sanderson refers to the disposition of university teachers to display attitudes of "openness, interconnectivity, interdependence, reciprocity, and plurality [rather] than necessarily knowing a lot about other cultures" (pp. 288–9).

Sanderson (2008) goes on to claim that while many universities develop as internationalised organisations, and put in place policies and programs to achieve these ends, far less attention is paid to the professional learning of the staff involved in organising and/or leading these programs. He argues that there is a need for greater exploration of the development of individuals' academic *Self* in relation to understanding the complexities and contested spaces of internationalised higher education programs. Indeed, Sanderson argues that 'a consolidated body of theory on how academic staff might internationalise their personal and professional outlooks…is not evident at this stage' (p. 281). He maintains that "the growing cultural, language and educational diversity in Australian higher education institutions presents a strong case for universities to take heed of the importance of fostering cosmopolitan perspectives in their staff" (p. 300). An essential element in

developing the academic *Self* is self-awareness and the ability to reflect deeply and critically on one's work and its social and cultural contexts. Building on the work of Cranton (2001), Sanderson suggests that authenticity in teaching is grounded in self-knowledge, an appreciation of cultural difference and an understanding of 'how [educators'] home culture produces and supports their personal and social world-views' (p. 282). He argues for the importance of self-reflection to understand one's beliefs, assumptions and implicit cultural values and norms:

> critical reflection and self-reflection are important mechanisms by which individuals can become aware of the context in which they live and work. These processes have the potential to assist in the development of an authenticity that allows individuals to genuinely engage with others in teaching and in life in general. (p. 287)

Research Design

This research is qualitative in nature, using self-study and narrative inquiry as the methodologies.

Self-study

Self-study as methodology enables the researcher to examine their beliefs, assumptions and practices, and to explore how these impact on practice (Pinnegar and Hamilton 2009). Self-study helps the researcher to examine and reframe their experiences not only in their own contexts, but also in relation to the experiences of others (Samaras and Freese 2006). LaBosky (2004) states that self-study research aims to develop and test theories of teacher learning, and involves 'the investigation of our own practice…This means we are simultaneously concerned with our own learning…transformed practice…and the resultant effects on the reframed thinking and transformed practice of our student teachers' (p. 819). Self-study was appropriate to this study as I was able to examine my experiences, assumptions, understandings and practices in relation to my own learning and also to explore the implications for my practice, not only during IPE but also in my broader role as a teacher educator.

Narrative inquiry

This study is also a narrative inquiry. Sisson (2016) claims that 'in narrative inquiry, the story is the source of data' (p. 672). According to Creswell (2013), narrative inquiry '…might be the term assigned to any text or discourse…with a specific focus on the stories told by individuals' (p. 54). He goes on to explain how 'Re-storying is the process of reorganizing the stories into some general type of framework' (p. 56). The "story" of my experiences of learning then leading the Cook Islands IPE was captured in my reflective journal, in which I documented events, thoughts and responses to particular incidents that occurred before, during

and after each placement over the course of four consecutive years. Sisson (2016) maintains that even seemingly inconsequential incidents or encounters, sometimes reframed as "critical incidents", can have a significant impact on shaping identity and agency. In this chapter, an account of particular "critical moments" during my experiences is presented, based on selected excerpts from my journal. Each of these excerpts is followed by a retelling of the event that triggered the journal entry, and includes reflections on the impact the event had on my professional learning.

Reframing data as narratives of experience

For this chapter, the data contained in my reflective journal were re-examined and three excerpts about critical moments were selected, which represent the three interrelated themes that emerged from previous multiple analyses of the self-study data. These are as follows: (1) negotiating and managing new professional relationships with mentor teachers; (2) understanding new professional relationships with pre-service teachers; and (3) developing a deeper sense of self as a teacher educator. As Merryfield (2000) suggested, '…experiences in themselves have no essentialist effect or meaning. It is in the telling of experiences, in creating one's narratives of experience, that who a person is and what the person experienced become one' (p. 431). The excerpts selected illustrate the challenges that I faced and the learning opportunities that arose from these challenges over the three years during which I kept my reflective journal. I present them in chronological order. However, this does not suggest that learning was lockstep and linear. Learning about developing and negotiating new professional relationships, and shifts in my identity as a teacher educator, occurred constantly and simultaneously, with progressions and regressions. The final narrative, written some time after my reflective journal, involves my "going back to the beginning" and reflecting on my learning over the course of my four-year involvement in the Cook Islands IPE. As the narratives show, over time I came to see the everyday challenges of leading an IPE in new ways and I became increasingly aware of the impact this had on other dimensions of my teaching.

Narrative of Learning About Negotiating and Managing New Professional Relationships with Mentor Teachers

First Journal Entry 11/07/12

I am sitting on the deck of our accommodation, overlooking a beautiful coral bay in the Cook Islands. I'm here as a teacher educator, accompanying 23 pre-service teachers on a three week practicum. I haven't done such a thing since going on school camp when I was teaching primary school. I have been here almost three weeks, but it has taken until yesterday to have the 'ah-ha' moment that demonstrated to me that I am not as culturally-aware and sensitive as I thought I was

when I embarked on this trip. Funny how a brief conversation with someone can undo all the 'good' you were going to do, and expose you to be as culturally-insensitive as some others that you might criticise. After sunny weather, the dark clouds are gathering this morning, and a few drops of rain are starting to fall. A bit like my own outlook really. Things were looking good—I was planning to do some really important research on intercultural learning, then a light-bulb moment of insight, initially lightened, then darkened my outlook and brought on the gloom. Nothing very dramatic or bad happened, but I did receive a culture shock that I thought I was past receiving (me, the seasoned traveller who has 'been there, done that'!!). The gloom set in but it is not too late to retrieve the situation, and my pride. I need to sit back and reconsider how this conversation taught me about what it means to be a teacher educator in what is for me a new and different cultural context.

The context of this journal entry was that I had shared with a mentor teacher, who was an expatriate from New Zealand, my intention to organise (when I returned in the following year) a professional development (PD) session for the mentors who host our pre-service teachers. My initial plan was to present some information about the changing nature of mentoring in Australia, and what the expectations of the university were in regard to mentoring our students. In other words, I was planning a PD session in which I assumed that my knowledge and experience were relevant and of interest to Cook Island teachers. I wrote in my journal that, when I shared my thoughts with this particular mentor teacher, *'he was immediately sceptical. I had the feeling that he saw through my enthusiasm and actually saw my ignorance. He told me that in his experience, when local teachers sensed that an outsider tries to influence how they teach, "the walls go up" and they are not interested' (11/07/12).* This experience was the catalyst to my deeper reflection on how to negotiate professional relationships with local mentor teachers in my role as a teacher educator, and how to do this with cultural sensitivity and respect for the knowledge already held by local teachers. This would be my task when I returned as leader next year. As explored with a colleague who had a similar experience on IPE in Africa (Williams and Grierson 2016), my challenge was to understand my relationship with the local mentor teachers, and my role in the practicum experience for them and for the pre-service teachers. I grappled with questions such as 'What is my expertise and how is it relevant to this context?' 'How should I interact with mentors, pre-service teachers and children in the Cook Island classrooms?' 'What authority do I have to present PD on mentoring, based on my own "Western" views of this activity?' My journal entries over the three years of involvement in the IPE reveal frequent feelings of uncertainty as I encountered situations that were new to me, and that I was unsure of how to handle. There were times when I was unsure of my relationships not only with the local mentor teachers but also with the pre-service teachers themselves. These challenges emerged largely from the new and unfamiliar roles and responsibilities I assumed as leader of the IPE.

Narrative of Learning About Understanding New Professional Relationships with Pre-Service Teachers

Journal Entry 05/09/14

Looking back on the past two years, perhaps one of the greatest differences I see this year is that I have been more prepared to be more open with the pre-service teachers, and to join in activities and be part of their social experience, in addition to the more formal teacher educator role. Also, being sick with them, when about 10 of us came down with a gastro bug, and providing comfort to them when they were sick, created a bond that isn't possible at home. Back in Australia when I mentor students who are on a teaching placement, I don't look after their health (except in a pastoral way as student advisor), I don't take them to the doctor or hospital, I don't check in them at night and in the morning to see if they are OK. The relationship and duty of care here is so different from that at home. It creates a whole new relationship—they are individual people as well as students, whereas at home, the main focus is on them as students. That boundary between the personal and professional is very blurred—as a teacher educator in an overseas practicum my first responsibility is actually to their welfare, and the teaching comes second. The priorities change, and this changes the nature of the relationship. I care about and for them in different ways….

This narrative was written during my third IPE, following an outbreak of illness to which several of the students and I succumbed. For the first time on IPE, I had to deal with quite severe illness, including some students being admitted to hospital for several hours. I was also ill for 24 h, and was I touched by the concern shown by the students for my welfare. I had never before been in such a vulnerable position in my work as a teacher educator. When I first agreed to be part of the Cook Islands IPE, I assumed that my greatest challenge (apart from driving the van!) would be in working in very different school environments and with the local mentor teachers, who, I assumed, would have very different ways of teaching. While this assumption was accurate in many ways, as my experience progressed I became increasingly aware of the complexity of the roles and responsibilities that I also assumed in relation to the pre-service teachers in my care, and of the impact of this on my relationships with them.

Initially as learner, and then as leader of each placement, I assumed multiple roles and responsibilities which I had previously not had as a teacher educator at home. These included travel organiser, bus driver, social secretary, counsellor, nurse and general information provider and troubleshooter, in addition to the more familiar role as teacher and practicum assessor. In undertaking these various tasks, and living in close quarters, day and night for three weeks, I was aware of the constantly shifting relationships with the pre-service teachers—one minute I was organising a birthday dinner, the next observing their teaching in classrooms, and in one instance, counselling a student who had been told that he had failed his placement. How was I to straddle these relational boundaries between professional

and personal? To what extent should I socialise with the pre-service teachers? How do I maintain a close personal relationship while advising about and assessing their teaching? Throughout the four years of leading the IPE, this was a constant challenge for me, but by the third placement, I realised the tremendous value of these relationships. Rather than being overly challenged by this boundary crossing work, I came to see that the close personal and professional relationships I forged with each group of pre-service teachers were actually a key part of my own personal and professional learning as a teacher educator. Over time, I came to see more clearly that the relationships that I develop with my students, whether on IPE or at home, are a key to my success as a teacher educator. This is something that I have taught my students for many years—that communication and relationships are at the heart of successful teaching. However, it took my participation in IPE to really understand just how important this is, not just for the students in their teaching, but also for my own.

Narrative of Learning About Developing a Deeper Sense of Self as a Teacher Educator

Final Journal Entry 28/04/15

I have identified throughout my journal that relationships with mentors and pre-service teachers were the key dimension of the Cook Islands experience for me. I have written about the challenges involved in this, but I can see from the later entries in this journal, that negotiating and managing these relationships was a very important experience and has helped me to gain a stronger sense of self as a teacher educator…Being involved in these relationships meant that I got to know the students in ways that would not be possible otherwise. In Melbourne, students attend their placement, classes and sometimes my office for discussions (or a cry), then they leave the university and I don't know their world outside the boundaries of the institution. In the Cook Islands, those boundaries were very much blurred…I now teach two of the students [in Melbourne] and my relationship with them is different—I know them better, I have seen them in different circumstances… and I understand them better. This puts us in a different position compared to the other students in the class. If only I knew those students better, but I only see them for two hours per week, and am unlikely to see them on their upcoming placement. Such a different situation! In my earlier journal entries, I positioned my concerns about my relationships with students as a problem—I was unsure about how to balance the personal and professional relationships. I can see now that it doesn't have to be one or the other—the challenge is to do both. While Monash confers a certain level of authority on me, effective authority really is bestowed by the students themselves. It has to be earned, together with respect. I think that my increased confidence over the last three years has helped me to find that balance, and to gain a more assured

identity as a teacher educator. I have learned how to be me *in this international context.*

This journal entry was written a few months after the third placement, before I knew I was going for a fourth time. It captures my awareness of my personal as well as professional growth as a teacher educator through leading the IPE. It recounts an increase in my confidence to straddle relational boundaries, especially between myself and the pre-service teachers. The entry also illustrates how my experiences on IPE caused me to reflect in new ways on my work at home. I became increasingly aware of how little I know about my students, their lives and their practicum experiences, compared to those with whom I worked in the Cook Islands. My relationship with the IPE students was much deeper because being with them enabled me to see the complexities and difficulties, as well as the successes, of learning to teach during practicum. I had a greater understanding of, and respect for, the impact that personal issues have on learning to teach, because I experienced it all with them. I was increasingly comfortable to be myself and to do the work of a teacher educator in new ways: to be more informal with pre-service teachers, to get to know them on a more personal level, to be open to conversations and new learning with them, but also to be aware of the need to maintain professional and personal boundaries. The trick was to work out what those boundaries should be. This learning also guided my interaction with pre-service teachers on my return to home in Melbourne—I began to see them more as complex human beings, not merely as student teachers. Even though they weren't Cook Islands IPE students, they *could* have been. It was very likely that they faced many of the same challenges in their lives and on practicum that IPE participants did. I was, and still am, much more careful to not make assumptions about particular students, and to make the effort to get to know them on a more personal basis, even though the opportunities for doing this are relatively limited.

After my three years of participating in the Cook Islands IPE, this journal entry shows that I had accumulated much experience, confidence and wisdom as a teacher educator that I was unlikely to have gained otherwise. I was much more aware of the challenges and potential risks that are inherent in any IPE, but I felt more confident that I could cope if and when any problems arose. Although I was still, and always will be, a learner, I was not the beginner that I was in 2012, as I embarked on my first-ever international professional experience.

Learning from Narratives of Learning

These narratives of learning from IPE suggest the importance of self-awareness and self-knowledge in understanding the challenges and opportunities available to teacher educators who lead IPE. Each narrative was triggered by my reflection on a particular incident or circumstance that leads to a deeper exploration of what it means to be a teacher educator in an unfamiliar cultural context. The narratives also enabled me to reflect more deeply on what it means to become a teacher, as there

were many parallels between my learning journey and that of the pre-service teachers. Just as I had to negotiate new relationships and to understand the new roles and responsibilities, so did they. They had to build personal and professional relationships with their peers, mentor teachers and other staff. So did I. They had to negotiate their role within the classroom and to work out how to bring in new ideas about teaching and learning, while acknowledging and respecting those of their mentor teacher. So did I. Together, we all had to learn how to appreciate, respect and negotiate within an unfamiliar cultural context, even when we were challenged or confronted by our experiences. Being a teacher/learner myself in this context, I was reminded of the challenges experienced by pre-service teachers on any practicum, at home or internationally, and that my experiences as a learner are just as relevant to my teaching about teaching (and learning to teach) in my home institution.

Sanderson (2008) argued that 'a thorough understanding of the Self can empower teachers to make informed choices based on who they really are' (p. 283). Reflecting on who I really was as a teacher educator on IPE, and capturing this in a self-study, was an important part of my professional learning and growth. I learned to look deeply and critically at myself, and like many of the pre-service teachers, I progressively gained more confidence to undertake the challenges, and to gain the rewards, of being involved in such an important professional experience. I learned that I can do this work, and do it effectively, and although I am not on IPE to change the world, I am there to make a contribution to pre-service teacher learning, to intercultural relationships and understandings, and to knowledge about IPE as an educational endeavour. Negotiating relationships and working out not just how to *do* teacher education on IPE, but how to *be* a teacher educator in this context, is an on-going, complex but highly rewarding part of my work. I believe my experiences on IPE have served to move me at least some way in the direction of Sanderson's (2008) *cosmopolitanism*—the ability to 'critically reflect on one's own values [which] is fundamental to being able to dismantle the barriers that obstruct a legitimate understanding and acceptance of others' (p. 287).

In undertaking this self-study, I came to see my practice in the Cook Islands and at home differently. Over time, I came to better understand the complexities of learning to teach for pre-service teachers and for myself. This knowledge provides a solid foundation for teaching teachers, and for being a teacher educator, in any context, not just on IPE. I came to appreciate how each school has its own social and cultural context, no matter where it is located. As teachers, we need to be aware of and respect local ways of doing and being, while also making a contribution to furthering knowledge and practice of teaching and learning that is meaningful, relevant and sought in the particular context. The challenge is finding this balance: How can teacher educators and pre-service teachers most effectively make a difference while acknowledging and respecting existing ways of knowing and being? How can we work with local schools and communities (at home and abroad) to improve the educational outcomes for children, families and communities, without promoting a deficit view of their culture and educational systems? How can we work with our peers and colleagues to bring out the best in each other? The answer

to these questions lies at the heart of teacher education. As teacher educators, we need to see and understand our own diverse learning experiences in ways that can support the learning of our pre-service teachers. This, in turn, supports the education of children and their communities, as these future teachers also face the challenges of working in unique and exciting professional spaces.

Where to Now?

This chapter, and the self-study on which it is based, has explored my experiences as a leader of IPE. However, the voices of other academics who do this work are largely silent in the research literature. In several chapters in this book, some of these voices begin to emerge, shining a light on the complex, challenging but ultimately rewarding nature of this work. To have a more in-depth and multifaceted picture of the work of teacher educators leading IPE, more of these voices need to be heard. By learning of their experiences, in conjunction with those of pre-service teachers, local communities and host teachers, a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding will emerge. This has the potential to inform current and future international programs, in terms of planning, structure, processes, and professional and personal learning, to further enrich the experiences of those who participate.

Epilogue

September, 2015

The luggage carousel at Melbourne airport is chugging into life—the Air New Zealand flight from Rarotonga via *Auckland has discharged its load of suitcases and backpacks, some of which are packed with ukuleles, coconut grass skirts, parau (sarongs) and other assorted souvenirs from the South Pacific. As the passengers jockey for position to locate their belongings and to make the final leg of their journey home, I spot our students dotted amongst them. The same people who embarked on this journey only three weeks before, but somehow…different. I can see a mixture of tired, relieved, sad and excited faces, all so familiar now after being together for three weeks. Although they were sad to leave Rarotonga, I can see that most are now looking forward to seeing their loved ones, and to sharing their stories of what many of them have describe as a life-changing experience.*

I think back to our meeting at this airport just three weeks ago, when they were all strangers to me, and think how different it is in the arrivals hall compared to the departure lounge. I remember thinking, as I do each time, that the nervous and excited students and my new colleague, have no idea what they are in for. Just as I had no idea what I was in for when I left for my first IPE with Ange four years ago. Standing at the carousel, it struck me that this really was (probably) my last Cook Islands IPE, and I was hit by conflicting emotions—relief that I didn't have to do

all that work again—planning and preparation, administration, juggling paperwork and budgets, and dealing with all the inevitable 'issues' that arise during placement; sadness that I wouldn't be sharing such a wonderful experience again with students or colleagues; happiness to be heading home to my own family, dog and everything else that is familiar and comforting; and perhaps strongest of all, pride— in the students who have been to the Cook Islands over the past four years, in Robyn, who contributed so much to our shared experience, and in myself—yes, I could do it after all.

I never dreamed that when I took on that first placement with Ange, it would extend beyond the usual two year commitment to become such an important part of my life, for so long. I never thought I would be entrusted so willingly by my university with the huge responsibility of caring for 25 others in another country, far away from their families and home. I never thought I would be able to negotiate the roles and the challenges, the logistics and the emotional work, that is ever-present and an essential part of IPE (yes, I did manage to drive the van without any mishaps). I also felt grateful that this is my career. In my work on IPE, and every day of my professional life, I am helping my students to realise their dreams and to learn about what it means to be a teacher. Some of them will venture out into the world beyond Australia, others will live and work much closer to home. Wherever they end up, I hope I have made some contribution to their future as compassionate, outward-looking professionals, who are well equipped to work and live with others in respectful, interested and interesting ways. We are all teachers and learners together, making sense of ourselves in the world, and building relationships that help us to see who we are and how we can be better. The Cook Islands IPE taught me that.

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