Chapter 3
Pre-service Teachers' International Teaching Placement: Outcomes for the Accompanying Academic

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Introduction

There is a long research trail exploring the benefits of international education experiences for the learning of students in higher education (e.g., Bennett 1993; Deardorff 2006; Northcote et al. 2014). However, it is only recently that research has begun to focus on accompanying academics and the impact of international professional experiences on their professional and personal well-being (Casinader, in press; see also the many authors in this book). Co-authored by three teacher educator researchers who were accompanying academics on an international teaching placement in Malaysia, this chapter joins the range of emerging literature that investigates a particular international teaching placement with a particular focus on the experiences of the accompanying academic rather than the pre-service teachers. The chapter also provides a deconstruction/reconstruction of the model of academic intercultural competencies (AIC), which we three co-authors proposed in an earlier publication (Lang et al. 2016) as a valuable way for generating insights into the experience of being an accompanying academic on such a placement.

The AIC model that is central to the analytical work of this chapter was developed to depict and investigate our experiences during a Global Education Practicum (GEP) in Kuala Lumpur (KL), Malaysia, in 2015. Through this model, we determined that the growth of our own intercultural competency was not linear,

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and this appeared to be in line with recent research that showed the nonlinear growth of accompanying academics' Cultural Dispositions of Thinking (Casinader 2014). This finding was significant since earlier models (e.g. Bennet 1993; Deardorff 2006) in the literature had reported that the development of students' intercultural competencies tended to follow a linear progression.

In this chapter, we unpack each element of the AIC model, to explain our intercultural competency trajectory while on an international teaching placement. We show that our experiences on that placement enhanced our understanding of the shifting and variable role of the accompanying academic on global education practicums. Before we do this, we explore the conceptual framework underpinning the model's representation. To do this, we want to take you on a journey down mathematical memory lane and share a narrative that may generate some discomfort in you as a reader depending on your memories or associations with mathematics. This is a deliberate strategy.

Early mathematicians G.W. von Leibniz (1646–1716), Leonhard Euler (1707–1783), John Venn (1834–1923) and finally Georg Cantor (1845–1918) developed and refined what became known as the Venn diagram and its associated theory to represent statements of logic concerning relationships as components of a universal set. Venn diagrams are commonly associated with the discipline of mathematics, but we are conscious of course that they have been used in a number of other disciplines in the hundreds of years since they were developed. Our AIC model uses a simple Venn diagram to represent the relationships between three aspects that contribute to an academic's intercultural competencies while accompanying pre-service teachers on an international teaching placement. In Fig. 1, we represent these aspects within a universal set we call "U", which constitutes our international professional experience as accompanying academics on a placement in Malaysia. Readers may be aware that the language and representation of "sets" became the basis of the "new math" movement of the 1960s and 1970s across English-speaking and some European countries (Quine 1982). Perhaps you recall from primary school that according to "set theory", the objects in a collection are called *elements*

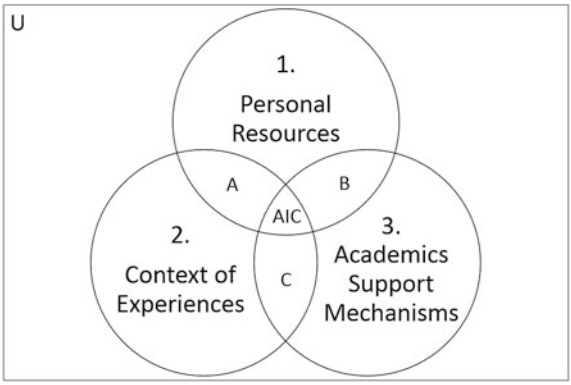

Fig. 1 Academic Intercultural Competencies (AIC) model (modified from Lang et al. 2016)

{x}. The three "sets" drawn from our AIC model are *personal resources, context of experiences* and the *academic's support mechanisms*.

From these sets, it is possible to identify certain "elements", which in our study include concepts such as *content and pedagogical knowledge*, *school policy and student age*, and *self-sought and collegial support* (see Table 1). If mathematics is not a strong part of your academic background, please bear with us for a moment, while we take you further down the mathematical memory lane by examining Table 1.

As mathematicians, we would observe the notation $x \in S$ shows that x is an element of S or that S "contains" x. Therefore, we can say that *content and pedagogical knowledge* are elements of the *personal resources* set. When all elements in all sets in a universal set are considered, we refer to the *union* U of the universal set. When elements are common to any or all of the original sets, we refer to the *intersection* $\cap$ of the sets. The reality of any teaching situation involves a combination of many elements within these sets. For example, when *content and pedagogical knowledge* from the *personal resources* set are impacted by *school policy* from the *contexts of experiences* set, the two items intersect and together they influence our behaviours. A set of elements in a collection is defined through the use of curly brackets. Table 1 provides a summary of the framing of the AIC's three sets {1, 2, 3} [{personal resources, context of experiences, academic's support mechanisms}] and the corresponding intersections {A, B, C} in the universal set U —our international professional experience in Kuala Lumpur.

The AIC (see Fig. 1 above) employs three circular areas {sets} (U of the universal set) to represent three subsets of the universal set {1, 2, 3} and the areas overlap the intersection $\cap$ of the sets {A, B, C}, resulting in the formation of eight areas (1, 2, 3, A, B, C, AIC and U).

Each area or {set} can be reviewed as a stand-alone factor in the form of an ***Intra-Action***. *W*e can also explore the ***Inter-Action***, or intersection $\cap$ of the sets,

Table 1 The sets and elements of the AIC

Intra-Actions Union U of the universal set	**Inter-Actions** Intersection $\cap$ of the sets
Personal resources S = {$x \in$ PR} 1 = {confidence to …, curriculum documents, pedagogical knowledges, commitment to …, content knowledges $\in$ Personal Resources} *Context of experiences* S = {$x \in$ CE} 2 = {location of placement, school location/accessibility, school policies, student age/ability $\in$ Context of Experiences} *Academics' support mechanisms* S = {$x \in$ ASM} 3 = {self-constructed, self-sought, collegial, resources $\in$ Academics Support Mechanisms}	1 $\cap$ 2 = A 1 $\cap$ 3 = B 2 $\cap$ 3 = C

between the elements. We are using the notion of Intra-Actions within each element of the AIC {1, 2 and 3}, then looking at Inter-Actions {A, B and C}. Through all of this, it is important to note that our emphasis is on *Actions*—what we did, what we decided, etc. Inter-Actions as identified above (see Table 1) are represented using set theory that is mathematically aligned with Venn diagrams.

If mathematics is not an area of strength for you, we suspect that you, our reader, are feeling a degree of discomfort as you attempt to understand our story through a mathematical lens. Perhaps you were part of a generation of children who experienced "new math" in the 1950s and 1960s, with its strange symbols, and the requirement of a precision and maturity of language. Perhaps some of what we are speaking about here may be making some sense to you. But perhaps "new math" passed you by altogether. Perhaps you have always been uncomfortable with mathematics. If you *are* uncomfortable, and if you *are* feeling a degree of discomfort as you read, then we sympathise. We suggest you are now possibly feeling some of the discomfort that we felt when we first experienced an international teaching placement. We have deliberately situated this opening to our chapter within a range of mathematical discourses and symbols. We assumed that many readers would not be comfortable with our use of these discourses and symbols, and so we anticipated that writing in such a way would provoke feelings of distress. We hoped that this would help you, our reader, to more fully understand and empathise with our discomfort we will go on to detail in the pages hereafter.

Please bear with us for just a moment longer, while we pursue the logic of our argument using set theory to its conclusion. In Fig. 1, you can see that we experienced intercultural growth resulting from the intersection of two or more elements of the AIC model. We argue that AIC does not develop as a result of any singular set element, but rather as an intersection of two or more elements. For example, Gillian can outline her intercultural growth (AIC) from a base of *{Personal Resources}*. Her element intersections $\cap$ of the sets are shown as A and B on Fig. 1. Marcelle experienced growth from a *{Academic's Support Mechanism}* base and uses A and C to represent her element intersections $\cap$. Catherine uses B and C to represent her growth pathway from a base of the *{Context of Experiences}* through either *{Academic's Support Mechanism}* or *{Personal Resources}*. None of us experienced a permanent state of discomfort on the GEP, so we feel it is inappropriate to continue any mathematical discomfort you may be experiencing. However, for the remainder of this chapter, we will intersperse the mathematical lens as a metaphor for representing and making sense of our discomforting experiences.

How we navigate through pedagogical discomfort when meeting the challenges of an international teaching placement is a matter of concern for all educators who are committed to global education. In this chapter, we present our journey as an example of the ways in which academics can embrace and make sense of alternative world views. In the next section, we present a summary of the literature that informed the development of our AIC model overall and each of the "sets" in that model, i.e., the Personal Resources set, the Context of Experiences set and the Academic's Support Mechanisms set.

Literature Informing Our Model

Any academic accompanying pre-service teachers on an international placement brings with them a rich range of *Personal Resources.* This is the title we give to set 1 in our AIC. We include in amongst these resources the collection of life experiences that a teacher brings to their teaching, be they in-field or out-of-field. Examining a teacher's Personal Resources makes it possible to identify what is immediately present and what is not immediately present—i.e. what the teacher *needs* to adapt in order to meet the particular teaching challenges he/she encounters. Adaptive expertise, according to Holyoak (1991), is the ability to apply knowledge effectively to novel problems or atypical cases. According to Simmons et al. (1999), adaptive expertise refers to cognitive, motivational and personality-related elements as well as habits of mind and dispositions. As teachers adapt to and work within different educational environments, they construct their knowledge and beliefs "from the perspectives of self in relation-to-social context" (Simmons et al. 1999, p. 948). As academics accompanying pre-service teachers on international placements, we each found ourselves tapping into our personal experiences in different ways at different times.

The second set in our AIC model is titled *Context of Experiences*. When we conducted a search for literature related to short-term International Professional Experience programs, we found that there is usually some mention of the importance of context in published articles. However, the discussion of context is more often related to the student experience than to the experience of the accompanying academic. For example, Campbell and Walta (2015) focus on the ways pre-service teacher comments on the first GEP program frequently related to accommodation and cultural differences. They assert that "PSTs commented on the problematic issues of finding the hostel from the airport; the conditions of the hostel including air conditioners not working and cold showers; difficulties finding food, and the inappropriate allocation of bedrooms" (p. 9). Their focus is on the effectiveness of the pre-departure orientation programs for pre-service teachers, but there is no consideration given to the value of such programs for preparing the accompanying academic.

Similarly, Barkhuizen and Fervok (2006) mention context as a positive and a negative aspect of the student experience. The reflections of the Hong Kong students who undertook a short-term placement in New Zealand mention context in terms of New Zealand cultures, the teaching environment and students' personal growth. Generally, the students were surprised at how different New Zealand culture is compared to what they expected and they made many comments related to the food. The environment and negotiating public transport also featured as a theme. These authors concluded that students' expectations and actual experiences are interrelated in complex, sometimes unexpected, ways. Here again, though, their attention is on student perspectives, and not on those of the accompanying academic.

Against this trend of focusing on students only, Parr (2012) wrote an essay inquiring into his own experiences as a teacher educator "leader" on a short-term international professional experience program in Johannesburg, South Africa. In the essay, he reflects on the "complex reworking" of his "intellectual and emotional responses" (p. 99) to razor wire used by his own country to fence in refugees and the appearance of razor wire around almost all housing and buildings in Johannesburg. His reflections not only capture the physical challenges that he encountered, but also the cultural and educational experiences he faced when planning and leading this program. The benefits of dealing with challenging situations are also discussed. Parr concludes that "one meaningful indicator of the value of the project for me is the extent to which it has prompted me to think differently about my own work as a teacher educator, especially about the value of transcultural and transnational collaborations" (p. 106). Parr's views are not too dissimilar from ours.

Concepts like intercultural competency, transcultural capacity, global citizenship, ethnorelativism and culture shock regularly feature in teacher education journal articles that assess the impact of international teaching placements (Doungphummes and Cacciattolo 2015; Northcote et al. 2014) or issues relating to the cultural competence of educators (Casinader and Walsh 2015). Additionally, the social, physical and ethical challenges that almost always arise for pre-service teachers when teaching in a foreign context have been acknowledged as important to their personal and professional growth (Brown 2009; Sleeter 2008; Kissock and Richardson 2010). All this literature suggests that international placements, in unfamiliar settings, can help to create transformative spaces for pre-service teachers (and accompanying academics) to unpack and reassess taken-for-granted assumptions around privilege, political beliefs and "the world's community of peoples" (O'Reilly et al. 2013, p. 164). The literature also suggests that providing pre-service teachers with opportunities to live and work in foreign settings can help them to develop a greater awareness of cultural, religious and linguistic diversity (Kissock and Richardson 2010; Lee 2011).

But as we have said, the impact of overseas teaching placements on the accompanying academic is a relatively recent area of investigation. Few research articles draw attention to the kinds of mind-shifts that can occur for teacher educators when they lead and participate in IPE programs (Williams and Grierson 2016). As a result, the types of academic support mechanisms that we rely on when confronted by unexpected complexities remain largely unexplored in the research literature. We posit that this is an area that deserves much closer attention, as it helps us identify and better understand those skills and competencies that make up highly effective teacher educators. This is largely what we are referring to in set 3 of our AIC model, *Academics' Support Mechanisms*. Engaging in systematic inquiry through a process of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action (Schon 1983) places teacher educators in a better position to "understand the effects of our

motivations, prejudices and aspirations upon the ways in which we create, manage, receive, sift and evaluate knowledge". Just as importantly, it enables us to appreciate the ways in which teacher educators are "influencing the lives, directions and achievements of those whom we nurture and teach" (Day 1999, p. 229).

Framing our research around the AIC, we pose the questions: Can discomfort be helpful in teacher education? This is a key question in the burgeoning literature around "pedagogies of discomfort" (see Boler and Zembylas 2003). It is the question that was prompting you the reader to reflect on as you were reading the opening mathematical framing of this chapter. It is worthwhile reflecting now whether you did in fact feel some discomfort, and how you responded to that discomfort. Did you persevere with that section of the chapter? Or did you gloss over it. Perhaps you stopped reading altogether? If you did read on, were you able to make sense of the mathematics or the issues? Was the initial discomfort helpful in an ongoing way as you grow in your understanding?

Please keep these questions in mind in the next section as we engage in critical deconstruction of the AIC model and reflect on its value in our reflection as teacher educators. In the writing that follows, we each draw upon the reflective diaries we kept on the international placement in Malaysia, and on the writing we continue to do as we frame and reframe our universal set-our IPE.

Gillian: Personal Resources

The Venn diagram in Fig. 2 represents my journey as an accompanying academic on my first international teaching placement. I begin my discussion of that diagram focusing on the *Personal Resources* set in our AIC model.

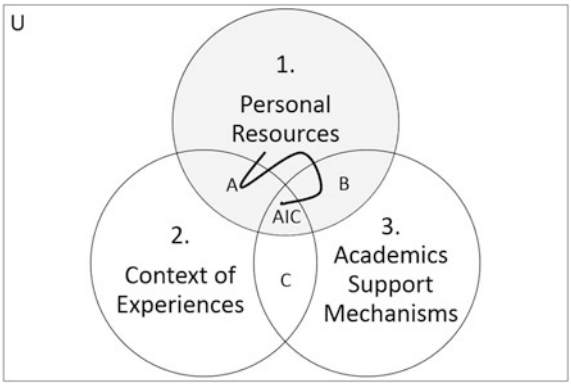

Fig. 2 Gillian's looping back to resources journey

Mathematics is my comfort zone. My field of expertise is as a mathematics and science teacher, teacher educator and researcher, but the Malaysian placement required me to work with teachers who were not mathematics educators, and this was quite discomforting for me. As my story below indicates, I see myself as resilient; throughout my career have I relied on a range of what I might call my inner strengths to work through challenges and to achieve. So *Personal Resources* is a natural starting point for me when reflecting on my experience on this teaching placement. I think I know myself and my abilities as well as my preferred ways of doing things. I have not spent a great deal of time deliberately analysing myself, but I know and understand what makes me comfortable and I tend to stay within my comfort zone if possible.

I have grown up living in and negotiating multiple (Western) cultures. Moving between continents and cultures was an important part of my childhood. Negotiating across different cultural traditions and expectations was second nature to me as I grew up, and it has continued to be as I have developed my knowledge and expertise as a mathematics and science educator and researcher. In fact, I see much of the negotiating skills as akin to the scientific process of an investigation. As a researcher, I am aware how much of my training has been in honing my skills in observation and analysis as I move forward and build knowledge. But I find when culturally challenged, I don't always travel in a forward direction. At times I have to go back and reassess myself. I sometimes find myself on a roundabout learning more on each revolution. I tend to revisit my comfort zone many times before I truly move forward.

When teaching curricular planning and delivery of instruction, I utilise a lot of scientific and mathematical disciplinary resources. I have my favourite "tools of the trade". Before departing Australia to begin the placement in KL, it did not occur to me that I would not have many of these disciplinary "tools" at hand. The particular group of pre-service teachers I was accompanying were not teaching any of the sciences (including mathematics) which I was so familiar with; instead, they were teaching predominantly English language in primary schools. None of my tools were appropriate. In giving instructional pedagogy assistance "out-of-field" I often felt like I was trying to do an electrician's job using a spade. My discomfort may have been akin to what you experienced when reading the earlier framing section of this chapter. It is confronting facing the unfamiliar. I have no experience (and therefore no confidence) in teaching English language in primary schools in Australia or elsewhere. I had no idea what were effective methods and what resources to use. My teaching philosophy meant I was not satisfied with recommending pedagogical strategies that revolved around a textbook. I needed an interactive approach to recommend to my pre-service teachers.

And so without these disciplinary tools and resources to help me, I was forced to rely more on my Intra-Actions within the Personal Resources set in order to help the students and to support my own growth as a teacher educator. My pre-service teachers and I, together, had to work hard to adapt their knowledge of teaching English in an Australian context (with the Australian curriculum), and my pedagogical knowledge from years of teaching science and mathematics, to planning

lessons that would align with the teaching of English language (according to the Malaysian curriculum). This process of adaptation and negotiation was challenging. Learning about a country's educational standards in three weeks—such a short period—was daunting. And so, as Fig. 1 shows, I had to consider a range of elements within the Context of Experience set of our AIC model and in particular, we had to keep firmly in mind the school policy and what the school thought was the students' age and ability. The school required a set page of the textbook to be "taught" on a given day—irrespective of the academic or social progress of the students in the classroom. The curriculum provided plenty of answers to the question, "what do we teach?", but it gave no guidance to our questions of "how do we teach it?" In many respects, my personal resources did not help on their own; in key ways, the school policy of teaching prescribed content to students irrespective of their particular needs clashed with our teaching philosophy. As teacher educator and pre-service students, we found that we were naturally supporting each other (aspects of the Academic Support Mechanism element)—it was an equal relationship where the pre-service teacher was not the only learner. I was learning from the pre-service teachers' teaching of English language. (The story of my learning through this collaboration that I have presented here is told from the student perspective in chapter "Acknowledging and Learning from Discomfort: The Learners' Perspective").

Collectively, I think we managed to complete a successful teaching placement. The schools were happy. The pre-service teachers were happy. And my pedagogical discomfort lessened over the course of the placement. I learnt a lot about the teaching assumptions of the KL teachers, coupled with the teaching assumptions of my pre-service teachers. I learnt a lot about myself. As a teacher educator, I am still learning about teaching and learning in other disciplines, and I am still learning about the Malaysian educational system and curriculum. I am not totally comfortable with accepting the Malaysian principles of education as valid alternatives to the disciplines and systems I know. But as I grow to better understand the context of teaching in KL, I am growing to understand why they are the way they are.

The *mathematical sentence* below is a metaphor of my discomfort while in KL and displays the nonlinear path (repeated access to personal resources set 1) of my growth through and beyond this discomfort in terms of my Academic Intercultural Competencies.

1	A	1	B	AIC
$S = \{\epsilon PR\} \rightarrow S = \{\epsilon PR\} \cap S = \{\epsilon CE\} \rightarrow S = \{\epsilon PR\} \rightarrow S = \{\epsilon PR\} \cap S = \{\epsilon ASM\} \rightarrow S = \{\epsilon PR\} \cap S = \{\epsilon CE\} \cap S = \{\in ASM\}$				

Translating these numbers and symbols into English prose, I can say that the *mathematical sentence* shows how I moved from Personal Resources to Context of Experiences, back to Personal Resources then into Academics' Support Mechanism in the process of growing and developing intercultural competence.

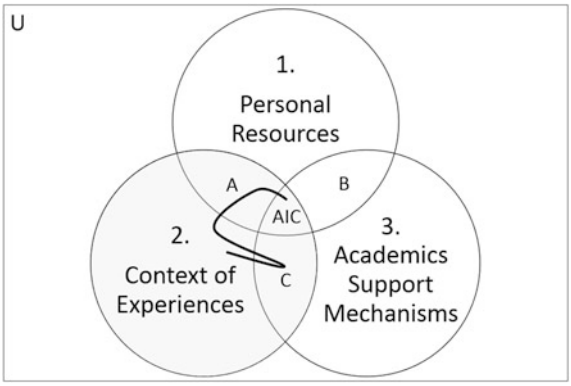

Fig. 3 Catherine's looping back to context journey

Catherine: Context of Experiences

Figure 3 demonstrates my journey of learning on the GEP in Malaysia, which (unlike for Gillian) started at the *Context of Experience* in our AIC model.

Context, in this case defined as the physical climate and location of the international teaching placement, strongly influenced my experience and actions in the first few days of the Malaysian Global Education Practicum. Prior to accompanying my students on this international placement in KL, I had been a familiar traveller in Asia in a variety of different contexts. For example, when I was in a managerial role, I was conducting business in air-conditioned offices, using town cars for transport and staying in five-star hotels. When I was travelling in Asia as a tourist, my experiences were very different again. I was much more relaxed with no time pressures; I was responsible for no other people and often I was looked after by others through pre-arranged activities and transport.

I found myself acutely under prepared for the hustle and pressure of a Global Education Practicum in KL. As accompanying academics, we had committed to visiting every school where our students were placed from the earliest days of the practicum. In oppressive heat and humidity, I needed to catch trains, taxis and walk to get to schools that were located in various outer suburbs of KL. Time was always an issue. I needed to arrive for the start of school, or to see a student teach a particular lesson. My ability to do this was complicated by my variable knowledge of the distance schools were from train stations, and there was the additional issue of whether taxi drivers would accept the trip when I hopped into their taxi. In more than one case, the driver refused to drive me to the school where I needed to be, because he claimed he did not know the suburb where the school was located. In one cab, I was using the GPS on my phone to direct the driver, who had limited English and who seemed intent on dropping me at another school, not the one I was meant to be at. We seemed to circle an outer block getting trapped in one way roads and a freeway. I recall stopping to ask a fruit vendor how to get to my school, when we were already 20 min late for my appointment. All of these complications added

to the intensity of the first few days of the GEP in KL. As a person who likes order and punctuality, I found it overwhelming.

The other accompanying academics and I also met the pre-service teachers each evening at 6 pm to discuss their day. From very early in the practicum, students used these meetings to complain about issues that appeared either trivial or else beyond our control. Again I felt a lack of preparedness. There were complaints about the program costs: "Why did we pay 'x' dollars for the 3 weeks and 'y' university students pay less than us?" (It was not until much later that details of different grant contributions were made clear to all). Complaints about supervising mentor teachers' behaviours soon followed with remarks such as "My teacher barely talks to me" or "My teacher left me in the staffroom all afternoon". I recall a mature-aged Master's level student complaining about a student from another university who was placed at the same school as her. She asserted that this other student's lack of enthusiasm and interest in teaching had affected relationships with the teachers and leadership in her school. In exasperation, she exclaimed, "Every day this happens and I have to address the situation and try to convince the school principal that I have a passion and am serious about teaching". Other complaints seemed to be about trivialities: the lack of good coffee, availability of western food, the unreliable Internet at the residences, the heat… It was only a few days into the practicum, and already I was exhausted and at a loss how to respond to these complaints. By Day 5 of the program, after visiting my quota of schools, I needed to reconsider my own coping strategies. I did not leave my room at all on Day 5. My need for a quiet space away from students and colleagues was overwhelming. I designed and implemented my own retreat. I remained in a quiet, air-conditioned and controlled environment, ordered in food, caught up with my academic work—which is continuous when on these placements—and I reconsidered my way of operating on this practicum.

My retreat on Day 5 was the first indication of my "self-sought" resources. I needed this time and space to consider how my confidence had been affected by the difficulty of managing the climate and location issues. I acknowledge that I was out of my comfort zone and was the "newer" member of the group of accompanying academics. It took several more days before I began to take note of the interactions amongst my colleagues and observe how they dealt with the climate, the students and the constant flow of questions. Some academics embraced the cultural newness of the placement and when not visiting schools went shopping or sightseeing. I accompanied them on some of these trips, but soon got hot and tired in the extreme humidity or frustrated waiting while they pursued an interest that was not a passion of mine. I observed another accompanying academic who managed her level of interaction with colleagues and students judiciously. She joined the group for breakfast, but never for lunch or dinner, and she limited her interactions with students to the mandatory meeting times in the evening. She never used public transport or bartered with taxi drivers to ensure that they took her exactly where she needed to be, and waited to bring her back. I myself wavered between joining the outgoing shopping, tourist group or keeping myself isolated.

I continued to waver in confidence and question my own abilities to support students and keep my sanity.

As I shuttled between the Context of Experience set and the Personal Resources set, I learned to limit the amount of interaction time with colleagues and adopted some of the practices of the more experienced academic who at first appeared to isolate herself. I grew in confidence and better managed my interactions with taxi drivers and only used public transport when I was with more experienced colleagues. I drew on the Academic Support set of elements to increase my commitment to the educational aspects of program. This helped me discount the more trivial complaints from students, or else I encouraged them to draw on their own resources to find solutions to their issues, like sharing good coffee shops via Facebook, self-organising visits to cultural events, sharing the numbers of good taxi drivers. There were still incidents to deal with, like the student who published on Facebook that she had bedbugs and spread this claim through the group, when in fact it turned out to be nothing more than a heat rash.

The reflective learning that I engaged in while deconstructing these experiences with my two co-authors for this chapter has allowed me to see how I had adjusted my level of engagement with this community and set parameters for the coming days to ensure that I was at my best to support the students. Towards the end of the GEP, I better understood through learning in context that climate was always going to be a challenge; however, the strategies I adopted allowed me to be prepared better physically, academically and procedurally. The personal journey I took shuttling back and forth between the three Context, Academic Support and Personal Resources sets was not at all linear. However, this process of reflection suggests to me that without the discomfort I felt in this situation there may indeed have been less growth in my understanding of how best to manage myself and support my students when in the role of accompanying academic.

The mathematical sentence below can be read as a metaphor of my discomfort on the journey of this GEP. It shows the nonlinear dynamic of my learning on this practicum (featuring repeated access to the Context *set 2*), and it helps to explain the value of developing a stronger understanding of my personal resources in the process of building my own Academic Intercultural Competency.

2	C	2	A	AIC
$S = \{\epsilon CE\} \rightarrow S = \{\epsilon CE\} \cap S = \{\epsilon ASM\} \rightarrow S = \{\epsilon CE\} \rightarrow S = \{\epsilon CE\} \cap S = \{\epsilon PR\} \rightarrow S = \{\epsilon CE\} \cap S = \{\epsilon PR\} \cap S = \{\epsilon ASM\}$				

Marcelle: Academic Support Mechanisms

Using the AIC Venn diagram again, Fig. 4 shows how my own response to the Malaysian GEP, as an accompanying academic, was slightly different from that of my colleagues Gillian and Catherine. It indicates how my intercultural

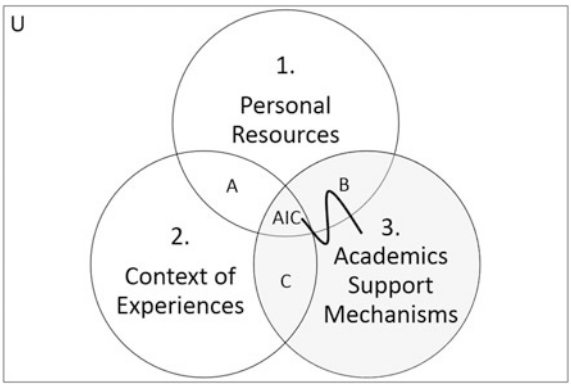

Fig. 4 Marcelle's looping back to academic support mechanisms

competencies grew through a stronger reliance on the Academic's Support Mechanism elements, although I still found it valuable to access my Personal Resources set in order to guide and assist my pre-service teachers.

In the first week of the GEP, I was confronted with anxious first-year pre-service teachers who felt they lacked the skills needed to respond to the cultural challenges of their placement. The pre-service teachers I was responsible for, Sharon and Jane (pseudonyms), both had around 50 students in their classrooms and had limited classroom teaching experience. In the first year of their teacher education degree, they had spent 5 days observing a primary classroom in semester one. In semester two of that year, they had observed seven one-hour sessions in another primary school and also had the opportunity to lead small groups of students on literacy tasks. Yet, these experiences had not prepared them for the behavioural issues that were emerging in their KL classrooms. In addition, Sharon and Jane expressed anxiety about having to embed effective English as an additional language (EAL) learning activities into their lessons. Their inexperience meant that they were unaware of engaging pedagogical approaches that would help them teach English language in complex cross-cultural contexts. What soon emerged in our conversations were doubts about their capacity to do this work and to get through the next two weeks of the placement.

As the pre-service teachers' moved in and out of negative self-talk and with a steady increase in their feelings of discontent, I found myself moving into my own "discomforting space". I started to wonder about how I could have better prepared Sharon and Jane for their teaching stint in KL. I began to reconsider the value of the pre-departure program that I had led with these students and the time I had spent on various intercultural activities. Perhaps I should have spent more time discussing cultural, pedagogical and intercultural concerns. Perhaps if I had discussed the physical, emotional and cognitive challenges that the students would encounter on their practicum, this would have encouraged richer discussion around strategies for coping.

I wondered what my colleagues would say when they found out that two of my students weren't coping with the cultural terrain. In conversation with a colleague

the previous night, I had been questioned as to "why I had allowed first year pre-service teachers to come on the trip?" I remember responding in a defensive way, noting that they had just as much to learn regardless of their inexperience in the field. Now that this situation had emerged, it was as though a threatening spotlight was shining on my academic reputation. I felt anxious and concerned that if these issues weren't resolved that there would be serious consequences to follow.

I went into "fix it" mode straight away. I worked solidly with the two pre-service teachers to develop their classroom lesson plan activities so that they were less didactic and more in tune with movement, song and play. Having recently completed a Masters of TESOL, I found myself returning to my own EAL activities that I had designed in my classroom. I shared my resources with the pre-service students and spoke about the importance of engaging primary school students on multiple levels. We also discussed the need to give the primary school students the freedom to use their own language in the classroom. This would be especially important when students were struggling with some of the English language concepts being taught. Working with peers in collaborative ways would provide a safety net when students felt too intimated to ask the teacher for help. I recalled also how during my own TESOL practicum, some years earlier, I had made an effort to encourage students to bring in their own cultural artefacts that told a story about their life-worlds. It was reassuring to note that Sharon and Jane appeared to be responding well to my intensified efforts. They were beginning to consider how they could trial a range of activities that would be more inclusive of the students' local landscape and rich cultural heritages.

When I finally returned home to Australia, I met with my two co-author colleagues to discuss our work on the GEP. It was during this time that I discussed the experience of working through some of the issues that Sharon and Jane had raised. Both Gillian and Catherine discussed the importance of writing about this incident in an attempt to make sense of dilemma that I had encountered. During this time, we also spoke about Boler and Zembylas' (2003) work on "pedagogies of discomfort" and how this linked to the feelings I had encountered. In my initial desire to smooth over the teaching and learning concerns that had been raised, I had missed the opportunity to pry open the importance of "discomforting truths". Gillian, Catherine and I spoke about the value of contradictions and unstable emotions when they arise. We came to understand that emotions and responses represent particular perceptions and mindsets surrounding power, whiteness, dominant truths and cultural identities. The value of sharing my narrative with colleagues and writing about my experience has been important. Through our collaborative discussions, and through our collaboration on writing this chapter, I have been able to consider the importance of provocation and ambiguity when working in intercultural contexts.

I also came to realise that I had missed the opportunity to make connections between spaces of "teacher vulnerability" and transformative learning. When discussing this theme with Gillian and Catherine, we spoke about essential qualities of effective practitioners. These characteristics included the ability to be empathic to the needs of school students who are the least advantaged. For Sharon and Jane,

living out of a space of insecurity and tension led to feelings of self-doubt and failure. These are the likely feelings of so many young people in Australian classrooms who are bullied, homeless, labelled as "under achieving", or who have a learning disability. In these kinds of situations, it is unlikely that life situations can be "easily smoothed over" or "fixed". But, I have come to appreciate how being able to empathise, to stand in the shoes of these students, is the first step to developing understanding, compassion and respect for other ways of being in the world. If this international teaching placement experience enabled Sharon and Jane to rethink their notions of language acquisition, prejudice, racism, poverty and disability, in ways that will propel them to make a difference in young people's lives, then perhaps the discontent they experienced in KL was well worth it.

A similar thing may be said of the discomfort I experienced, as an accompanying academic on this placement. The mathematical sentence below can, as with Gillian and Catherine, be read as a metaphor of my discomfort on the GEP experience. It shows the nonlinear dynamic of my learning on this practicum. But unlike Gillian's or Catherine's experiences, it indicates how for me repeated access to the Academic Support Mechanism *set* was crucial for my growth in terms of Academic Intercultural Competency.

3	B	3	AIC
$S = \{\epsilon ASM\} \rightarrow$ $S = \{\epsilon PR\} \cap S = \{\epsilon ASM\} \rightarrow S = \{\epsilon ASM\} \rightarrow S = \{\epsilon ASM\} \cap$ $S = \{\epsilon PR\} \cap S = \{\epsilon CE\}$			

Our Reflective Summary

In this chapter, we have presented our experiences as accompanying academics on the Global Education Practicum in Kuala Lumpur both in narrative prose as well as through the symbols and metaphor of mathematical sentences. We decided to use this combination of mathematical symbols and metaphors to provoke a level of possible discomfort in you, our reader. The metaphor of mathematical sentences demonstrates how we did not experience linear growth in intercultural competencies but shuttled back and forwards between sets of the AIC Venn diagram model: drawing on personal resources, adjusting to the context of experiences and making good use of our own and colleagues' support mechanisms in our version of the academic "toolbox" that all academics carry. We presented influencing factors in a Venn diagram, as well as narratives to demonstrate that our journey was not linear. The Venn diagram shows through the sets the factors intersect and overlay each other. They do not follow a clear line from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism and deeper Academic Intercultural Competence.

By interrogating our journeys through mathematical metaphors and Boler and Zembylas' (2003) pedagogy of discomfort, we posit that without this level of

discomfort, we may not have experienced as much growth in our intercultural competency and we certainly would not have gained such a strong understanding of that growth. This discomfort allowed us each to achieve an increased awareness and understanding of what we as accompanying academics can gain from these international placement opportunities while supporting our pre-service teachers.

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