Chapter 8
Outside in: Learning from an International Professional Experience Program

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Introduction

This chapter explores the experiences of a group of 13 Australian pre-service teachers (all female) and their academic leaders on a three-week international professional experience program in Johannesburg, South Africa. The placement occurred across three different schools with each pre-service teacher in two of these schools, ensuring that they experienced contrasting educational and cultural spaces over the course of the three weeks. The authors (both teacher educators from Monash University in Australia, who were actually born in South Africa) present a series of short reflective cases of three of the pre-service teachers, and we discuss the significant learning and development of these students as a result of their three weeks in South Africa. These cases illuminate how the Australian pre-service teachers journeyed outside the familiarity of their 'home' country to be in South Africa and proceeded to dance between what they perceived as the sameness of the two countries and the differences between them. This choreography appears to have prompted the students to reflect closely on their own practice, to re-consider their identity and place in the world of teaching, and to come to understand the tensions that intersect in their desires to make a difference.

We begin by presenting a narrative focusing on the journey of the pre-service teachers from Melbourne to Johannesburg, including their induction by local students and professional staff in Monash South Africa (MSA) and an early teaching experience in a special program called the Saturday School set within MSA. We juxtapose this with a section which focuses on our perspective on the South African

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A. Fitzgerald et al. (eds.), *Narratives of Learning Through International Professional Experience*, DOI 10.1007/978-981-10-4867-8_8

professional experience program as academic leaders travelling with the pre-service teachers. Following this, we present the reflective cases of Jackie, Karen and Martine, and finally discuss key themes and findings that emerge from them. But first, the journey of the pre-service teachers from Melbourne to their early days in Johannesburg.

Departure and Arrival: Pre-service Teachers' Perspectives

Perhaps the last thing on the minds of the pre-service teachers setting off to Johannesburg, South Africa, was the tedium of airport check-in, the laborious security checks and the interminable waiting at airport gates, amidst hundreds of other travellers. Despite these frustrations, their eyes reflected nothing but the excitement and anticipation they felt at the prospect of interacting with another country, and a friendly Rainbow Nation of diverse people. This excitement, mixed with considerable anxiety for what was to come, generated animated chatter among the group when they were finally in the air. (This chatter would draw censorious glances from fellow passengers attempting to sleep during the fourteen-hour long haul across the Indian Ocean, but this was the least of the pre-service students' concerns.) When one question tumbled over another about Johannesburg schools, protocols and expectations, we two academic leaders tried to draw the students back to the information and documents the pre-service teachers had already been given. These included: the 'Professional Experience Guide' (a document developed by Monash's Professional Experience team in Melbourne that set out expectations for all stakeholders in the International placement); the 'Graduate Teacher Standards' (from a policy document published by a federal government funded body that accredits teacher education programs in Australia); and the "Briefing Guides" (prepared by mentors on previous IPEs). This helped to calm some of the anxiety, but it did not and could not diminish the glow of enthusiasm lighting up their eyes.

Our arrival into Johannesburg saw an exhausted group of bleary-eyed plane travellers emerge into O.R. Tambo International Airport, against a backdrop of the African sun setting in the distance. The day might have been ending in Johannesburg, but the adventure for us all had only just begun. Once again, there were frustrations to deal with in the tedium of customs and waiting for luggage on endless carousels. But in no time at all, these frustrations were behind us, and we found ourselves ensconced in the safety of a minibus (typically known as a taxi in Johannesburg) driven by John G, who had been the official bus driver for every group of Monash pre-service teachers since the first group arrived six years previously.

It is worth pausing in our narrative, for a moment, to talk about some of the history of Monash's South African professional experience program. It began in 2009, born out of a conversation between a teacher educator in Australia and a colleague in MSA (Parr and Rowe 2013). Johannesburg, or "Joburg", had been the most logical choice for an international professional experience for pre-service teachers in South Africa, due to its locality and the positioning of the sister campus, MSA, only forty minutes

outside the city centre. The three-week teaching stint was intended to provide the Australian pre-service teachers with a snapshot of both sides of the South Africa coin. Two weeks were typically spent at a school that bore some similarities to schools the pre-service teachers had taught at in Australia, and for the third week, they commuted to and from a school in a regional setting of outer Johannesburg.

The professional experience in South Africa consequently encapsulates multiple layers, and it is hoped that these layers will help equip pre-service teachers as they prepare to enter the teaching profession. There is the exciting challenge of acculturating, about skilling oneself, and also skilling those around. It becomes a journey of building upon, questioning and sometimes setting aside previous ideas about teaching and learning, and this includes the fragile and delicate positioning and identities of teachers within a wider global context. The literature suggests there are important benefits to the pre-service teacher of increased confidence, and personal and professional growth (Pence and Macgillivray 2008). Perhaps most apparent with experiences such as these is the nurturing of an identity, that is best thought of in quite fluid terms. This teaching identity changes and flows constantly. It is evolving, professional and personal, but somehow due to its nature, very public too (Connelly and Clandinin 1999; Flores and Day 2006). The literature also suggests that changes in individual identities and personas occur in quite public ways during the course of international professional experience programs, when pre-service teachers are working and living with each other for three weeks. As academic leaders, we are reflecting on this, as John's minibus stops at the accommodation centre after the long drive from the airport. This centre will be our home for the next three weeks. We note that the glow in pre-service teachers' eyes is different now—undimmed, but somehow warmer.

As the pre-service teachers enter the accommodation, they cannot avoid noticing the famous quote of iconic Nelson Mandela, inscribed proudly on a large picture frame at the entrance: "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world". Literally and figuratively, all of the pre-service teachers want to change and be changed. The doors to their minds are surely open to this change, or they would not have embarked on this great adventure into the unknown. Each pauses as she passes the words, seemingly inspired by, and perhaps even a little in awe of, Mandela's words. In a way, this quote can be seen to frame this international professional experience for these students. Despite weariness after the long flight, the prospect of imminent change is keenly felt by those who stepped aboard that Qantas jet in Melbourne a mere 24 hours ago.

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The following day we travelled with John again to the MSA campus, where we were met by MSA professional staff along with student volunteers from MSA's Community Engagement department. The African sun was hot, but the air was not quite foreign. There were smiling faces everywhere, welcoming us, as our hands met in friendly connection. They would lead us through a day of induction to South Africa. "Blessed are the flexible," they quipped, "for they shall survive," which seemed to be received with a combination of reassurance and perhaps a little foreboding. The South African greeting, "Howzit", became familiar, and started to roll

off the tongue of the newly arrived pre-service teachers. This was also a time to get to know a range of unfamiliar language, derived from the eleven official South African languages. The pre-service teachers heard about "boerewors" (a form of sausage), "pap" (traditional porridge made out of maize meal), "bakkie" (a small open truck), "tekkies" (trainers/sports shoes) and "slap chips" (french fries). Part of their initial engagement with the differences of South Africa involved trying out these different words and imaging themselves into a context when they might use them.

Pre-service teachers Amy and Karen, arms linked, grinned sheepishly at each other, as they suspected a local student alongside them was swearing in Afrikaans. The tirade, directed at his ill-functioning laptop, drew sympathetic glances and perhaps even commiseration at the familiar plight of a university student across the globe. Amy and Karen were friends already. They attended the same classes in their teacher education course back in Australia and were both aiming to teach the same subjects on their great South African adventure. Early in the induction day, they exuded optimism and great enthusiasm. "Bring it on," they seemed to say.

And yet as the day unfolded, Amy appeared to become a little more cautious, as she took in new knowledge and understandings about Africa and as she wondered about those aspects of Johannesburg schools that were as yet unknown to her. She sensed that her interactions with the Johannesburg teachers would be a huge learning curve for her, one which she did not plan to take lightly. There was much to absorb from such encounters. She was heard to say: "Our minds should be like sponges taking it all in." Another pre-service teacher, Bella, agreed with her, but with a wicked grin. She laughed off the idea of the sponge. The sponge idea did not work for her because of what she called "synapse elimination". "The Biology teacher!" others were heard to say, laughing uproariously at her clever wit.

At lunchtime, Jackie and Martine discovered a common interest in sampling great South African food, courtesy of a delicious lunch that the people from MSA had prepared for us during our induction. "Chakalaka", beamed the caterer, holding up a spoonful over Jackie's plate. Jackie's head bobbed in immediate and enthusiastic approval, as the red tomato chutney was poured over the contents of her plate. There was no time for individual tasting or selecting. We were all one and we would all eat the same food. Martine also approved. The tastes were "unique", but "divine", she purred, as she worked her way through "boerewors and pap" with relish.

And so the induction day ran, in fast and furious African splendour, away from us. At the end of the day, an MSA young leader had told us about the Saturday School, a program for children at risk in local community schools which was hosted within the MSA campus, and the Monash pre-service students would be participating in this tomorrow morning. The children from surrounding communities would be brought by bus to the campus for a meal and lessons in literacy and numeracy. It is an outreach program, engaging parents, MSA students and teachers in an initiative that would hopefully lift school engagement and indeed school completion rates in this part of Johannesburg. School on Saturday did not sound like fun and may in fact be viewed as drudgery in a different setting. But the rationale behind the Saturday School was interesting for us all to hear about; we

were intrigued to learn more about this form of partnership between the local communities and the MSA campus.

When we arrived back at the Saturday School building on the MSA campus the following day, volunteers in bright orange T-Shirts were there to meet us at the door, smiling, the same ready welcome in their eyes. Any questions about how the children in the school would consider attending school on a Saturday morning were blown away when we heard the laughter and merriment in the children's' voices as they marched up three flights of stairs to the Saturday School "classrooms". The morning began with lively song and dance, African voices booming through the corridors of academia, as traditional and contemporary dancing blended into a delightful chorus. The Monash pre-service students were mesmerised. Learning had clearly begun in earnest, but who were the teachers and who the learners?

A Sunday morning briefing, early the following day, brought the pre-service teachers and us academic leaders together again; this time, heads were bowed over textbooks, worksheets and lesson plans. The delight of the previous day was briefly replaced by palpable anxiety about the expectations of teaching on the first day in South African schools. After the intensity of the opening days, Karen was now a little teary, as homesickness and the prospect of everything falling into a heap became all too real. But soon the books and lesson plans were put aside for a few hours, while the whole group took an all-day excursion to Soweto. This promised to put the anxieties all back into perspective.

The South Western Townships (more commonly known as "SOWETO") is a sprawling proliferation of closely compacted dwellings, as far as the eye can see. Twin power chimneys, once used to provide electricity to the area, welcomed our minibus as we drove into the section of Soweto we were scheduled to visit. It was the presage to Nelson Mandela House, the home of South Africa's first democratically elected president. The house had been turned into a museum, and the students were in awe. It almost seemed like we were trespassing. The curators of the house museum had done a brilliant job to retain its authenticity and the feeling of being lived in. The experience of walking through the rooms where a young Nelson Mandela and his equally young wives had lived was surreal, even jolting. The pre-service students' minds seemed to be transformed, renewed, whether consciously or subconsciously…. Sitting in the comfort of John's minibus on the way back to our accommodation centre, there was plenty to think about as the students prepared for their first days in Johannesburg classrooms.

Departure and Arrival: The Academic Leaders' Perspective

As leaders of this program, we experienced the international placement experience in South Africa amidst tensions. We were open to, and enthusiastic about, the possibilities for change that awaited the students. At the same time, we recognised that the notion of "study abroad" as a contested concept (Anderson 1991). It signals the changing landscapes through the process of globalisation which pervade late

capitalism (Harvey 1990). We acknowledged Appadurai's (1990) assertion of the new "…global cultural economy as a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order, which cannot be any longer understood in terms of existing centre-periphery mode" (p. 296). Appadurai's five scapes attest to relations which do not look the same from every angle of vision but which are deeply perspectival constructs, inflected very much by the historical, linguistic and political situatedness of different sorts of actors. We felt these perspectival constructs as leaders because we, too, viewed this experience as both returning "home" and entering a "host" location as we prepared for and engaged in the international professional experience program in South Africa.

As migrant academics from South Africa now living in Australia, we two academic leaders were travelling abroad and yet also travelling home. We accompanied the pre-service teachers as a group of Australians who were arriving as outsiders in South Africa, and yet we entered the country as both insiders and outsiders. As we drove from the airport, our students' eyes soaked up what they saw. Ours fixed on what used to be familiar. As the students heard South African-isms with ears of unfamiliarity, we smiled at words that were long unused but which were swiftly recognised. And yet, our familiarity was not equally experienced between the two of us either. Our familiarity was mediated by our different skin colour, the different racial categories to which we were assigned as youths in South Africa, and the experiences, prospects, cultures and mobilities that were consequently available to us when this place was our apartheid home. It was these layers of difference that were understandably invisible to our younger students, yet we felt them keenly in these early days back in South Africa.

As academic leaders, we were sensitive to the way in which the host country was positioned for these pre-service teachers as an international study location, an exotic place whose heterogeneity they were seeking to understand at the same time as they sought to understand the differences between practices in their home country and this host country. We knew, too, that this could unwittingly influence their learning in the host country when, indeed, they might encounter practices that they might judge as unfavourable from their "outsider" perspective. It was always possible that their study abroad experience could easily reinforce distance and difference rather than facilitate the connection that it rhetorically promised.

Our roles as academic leaders were driven by competing aspirations. Explicitly, we wanted to promote the way the immersive experience could nurture the pre-service teachers' global competence and enhance their employability. Equally, we appreciated how the program offered a chance to engage with the unfamiliarity of these different educational settings to accentuate particular skills sets and personal attributes to build their resilience. Implicitly, we sought to support our students' experiences in this international location so that they were able to develop "a sensitivity to history's footprints in everyday life" (Doerr 2016, p. 55). In these three aspirations lay divergence. We promoted this international experience as one which could strengthen their prospective employee biographies to respond to the "supercomplexity" of the changing world of work (Tynjälä and Gijbels 2012, p. 219). This meant that we ran the risk of differentiating between the home and host country too simplistically or differentiating in ways which too easily portrayed

the South African learning experience as an extension of the Australian one. We wanted the students to learn about the social, political and cultural differences by encouraging their growing sensitivity, as outsiders; we wanted them to learn about the layers of difference within South Africa that we had learnt about on the inside (albeit many years earlier). We danced between our own perspectives of sameness and difference, and, by so doing, we shaped our students' perceptions in our quest to achieve different ends.

In leading this South African international professional experience program, we were hopeful that the criticisms levelled at teacher education programs, that they do not sufficiently challenge the candidates' personal perspectives through the creation of experiences that differ substantially from their own background (Putnam and Borko 2000; Tarc 2013), would be overturned. We complied with calls for the preparation of students with new pedagogies to nurture their "global consciousness" (Mansilla and Gardner 2007, p. 56) and to build their skills in working with people of different cultural backgrounds (Suarez-Orozco and Qin-Hillard 2004). The literature claimed that exposing students to alternative perspectives and cultural contexts could result in a questioning of personal identity, values, beliefs and mindsets, and could offer significant results in terms of personal growth, self-efficacy, maturity, enhanced intercultural competence and transversal or employability skills for students (Jones 2013). Working within this program, we encouraged these outcomes at the same time as we yearned for the students to deeply understand the layers of difference that mediated educational outcomes in different cultural and educational settings.

Learning in Practice

Travelling from outside of South Africa back into it, we as academic leaders were poised to teach amid our good intentions and somewhat contradictory aspirations. So, too, there were differing aspirations and goals amongst the pre-service teachers who had travelled into South Africa and prepared themselves for teaching in South African schools. The three reflective cases presented as part of the research were constructed from interviews held with participants, in both individualised and focus group settings. They describe significant and complex instances of practice and reflection for a few of these pre-service teachers. These are followed by a discussion section in which we as academic leaders, who travelled with the pre-service teachers, interpret these experiences and evaluate the lessons learnt through their learning to teach.

Case 1: Trust and indifference

> Jackie was possibly the youngest member of the group, although her enthusiasm for being in South Africa more than made up for her youth and inexperience. She was forthright about her reactions to South Africa, admitting that she had experienced thoughts of coming to a land to teach what she knew, but realising, almost upon touching down that she was the

one who would be learning. She correctly maintained that her lack of foresight was confronting and forced her into a new dimension of thinking, a new paradigm, of what it really meant to be a teacher. She conceded that there was a great deal to be gleaned from the South African system, that teachers in that country often deal with challenges which those in more developed countries would never have to consider. She recalled the day she taught a lesson on money and currency to a Year 5 Maths class, in which she circulated both South African currency and Australian currency. The students in her group were in awe of her trust of them, with many wide-eyed throughout the activity. On another day, Jackie had developed a lesson which included her sharing her devastation on the passing of a friend who had died from cancer when she was at school, and the trauma that followed for both the family and herself. She was almost horrified to note the nonchalant air of acceptance on the part of some of the students, as death, even in children so young appeared to be commonplace to them. She had the sense that students had become desensitised to pain and trauma, and this was upsetting to her on multiple levels. Stepping back from the incident, Jackie acknowledged that she was unprepared for the 'worldliness' of the children, of their 'street smartness', which forced maturation upon even the youngest. She conceded that her lack of knowledge and limited understanding of the social and cultural dynamic in South Africa did not adequately prepare her for teaching there. Upon reflection, she ought to have been more culturally sensitive to student needs, and even revealed that her 'money activity' may have been perceived as self-aggrandizement, in a community where need and poverty were so dominant.

Case 2: Nothing but relationship

Martine was a vivacious and animated pre-service teacher, with an incredible zest for her role as teacher and indeed for adventure. In the first weeks of the professional experience, while teaching at her first school, she appeared, for all intents and purposes, the model pre-service teacher. She embraced all things with an open mind and fervour. After her first days at her second school in the last week of the professional experience, however, Martine was silent and introspective. Her Australian peers knew immediately that something was wrong. In her first lesson at this school, she was confronted with 55 Year 7 students in the one classroom, many of whom shared desks and, for the most part, they appeared content with this situation. There were no high-tech facilities, two of the windows in the room were broken, and the floor had been stripped away due to use and lack of maintenance. A chalkboard at the front was scarred and marked, offering a very poor resource for teaching. There was no talk of photocopying or printing – such amenities did not seem to exist here. Confronted by eager faces, wide eyed and curious, Martine was lost for a few moments, and her South African mentor teacher seemed to have left the room. She recalled that her first reaction was to cry, and then to leave. Instead, it took all her courage to look up, and begin talking to her students. This did not involve bells and whistles. Here she needed to be a teacher as there were no flash resources, no teaching aids or technology. She did not have the safety of her specialism. All she had was the hearts and minds of her students, and it was her role to teach. Upon reflection, she better understood the need for improvisation, for thinking on her feet, and of being creatively inventive in the work of a teacher. She was relieved that the students were attentive and compliant – 'Half the battle won,' she grinned later. In moments during her placement in that second school, she believed she transitioned from a struggling pre-service teacher thinking of running away, to a real teacher adept at responding to her students' needs, aware of the need to increase her knowledge, of how to respond to difference. Such was evolution from potential quitter to victor, during her South African experience.

Case 3: The gap within

Karen was a widely travelled individual, who had often spent time abroad with her parents on mission trips. In undertaking a professional experience in South Africa, she was aware that she was crossing cultural boundaries and that she may be challenged by being outside her comfort zone. She admitted later that she had arrived in Johannesburg with a sub-conscious assumption that she would be making an impact on the classrooms she faced. A confident teacher, with a strong classroom presence, she was initially undaunted and undeterred by the large numbers of students in a single class she was teaching. She thought the content on accommodating diversity she had learnt within her teacher education course back in Australia would equip her appropriately as she set out to teach here in Johannesburg. It was true that she possessed sound classroom skills. However, as the days wore on, she realised that the adaptions required by her were intrinsic, not merely extrinsic. The subtleties were noticeable only to her, but she became aware that a fundamental change was occurring not just in her teaching methods but also in the way she thought about her identity as a teacher. The South African classrooms, she later explained, trundled on as they always did, but she was the one who was slowly changing. She discovered soon that she lacked the knowledge that would allow her to feel comfortable about this situation, that what she came to see as her "arrogance" soon set her apart, and prevented her from acclimatising appropriately. Her self-perception and self-awareness began to evolve, compelling her to feel a degree of vulnerability. As a consequence, her personal boundaries were challenged, prompting her to seek ways of acculturating with more deliberate intent. Karen saw that her awareness of her cultural capital, and the limitations of that cultural capital, framed her world in markedly different ways. She came to see her South African students and the teachers in her schools, and indeed the people in the communities she visited, as resilient and hardy, capable of surviving the harshness of life, while having a degree of acceptance of whatever they were forced to work with. She confessed that the 'gap' she originally perceived was not in the schools or among her students, but in herself. Although she admitted that she did not feel out of her depth, she realised that the nuances of difference induced an altered state of mind in her. Looking back, she conceded that a 'different mindset' earlier on in her professional experience would have offered a different lens on her teaching, which may have widened her opportunities to acculturate sooner.

Learning in Practice: A Discussion of the Reflective Cases

What, indeed, can be gleaned from a teaching experience overseas? Much of the literature enthusiastically claims that it shapes and redefines teachers' worlds, their thoughts and experiences. Was it Seneca who said that travel and change of place brings new vigour to the mind? As academic leaders on this international professional experience program in South Africa, we believe that culture, in its broadest sense, is fundamental to such encounters abroad, and one cannot frame any narrative on teaching overseas without a consideration of this element. Additionally, the concept of a "shared" experience becomes integral to a professional experience of this nature (González et al. 2005). The pre-service teachers we travelled and worked with in Johannesburg came to see that the schools they taught in were reflections of both the society they were situated within, and a specific cultural framework (González et al. 2005). In South Africa, we have seen that the complexity of this phenomenon is enhanced, as the schools draw students from varying

backgrounds and races. The history of a country once divided on racial grounds, with the concept of discrimination embedded into everyday life, continues to mark schools, although perhaps not as intensively in the present day as a decade ago. This complex and multifaceted country, with its complex and multifaceted educational institutions, presented its own intricate dynamic to the Australian pre-service teachers. It was within this complexity that they had to find a space to teach and to learn.

Perhaps the most jarring experience for them was recounted in Jackie's case, situated during the final phase of the experience in Johannesburg, which took students into a relatively rural location and to a school that was over populated, under-resourced and in need. A "fight or flight" mentality might have pervaded the pre-service teachers' initial responses, and they chose not to flee. Their fight involved rising to the educational challenges they were confronted with. It was in this response that we saw their personal vision of themselves as teachers emerging. They assumed responsibility, in a space that felt very "foreign", a place in which they wondered if their impact would really be felt. They urged each other forward. As the days unfolded, and their stories became richer with new experiences of both disheartenment and success, it was evident that "culturally responsive" actions, undertaken as intentional steps, steered them forward (Villegas and Lucas 2002). In post-school briefings, their stories were often told with emotion that did not indicate failure, but the urgency of a need to make a difference in their students' lives while they could. These briefings helped give shape and ownership to their experiences, both personally and professionally. It allowed time and space for re-framing of encounters they had not expected, but which now buoyed them as pre-service teachers. They realised quite profoundly that their vision could not be limited to how *they* once saw the world, or their teaching. They needed to expand their vision to include the multiple viewings of their students and their worlds.

In all three cases, the pre-service teachers demonstrated an awareness, perhaps even a consciousness, that their world views were being altered. They began to develop a more solid understanding of themselves as professionals, learnt amidst the differences which presented themselves in this "foreign" context, yet these emerged as affirming and not jolting. Like other studies of international mobility experiences for pre-service teachers (e.g. Biraimah and Jotia 2012; DeVillar and Jiang 2012), findings after experience in Africa or Asia have shown participants becoming more reflective of their developing skills, which required an incorporation of global and multicultural perspectives. They also felt they had become more culturally aware and sensitive (Chinnappan et al. 2013).

The perspectival shifts articulated in Jackie's and Karen's cases, as they began to recognise the multiple ways in which their experiences could be interpreted, indicate growth in their cultural sensitivity. Jackie's encounter with the trusting but indifferent group of Grade Five students opened her eyes to how money and death were constructed by social and political contexts beyond the classroom. Similarly, Karen was challenged by her students, and her own knowledge of teaching within the South African context. She realised that she could not afford to be arrogant about what she had come prepared to teach, but to open herself to the idea of what

she was able to learn. Jackie and Karen came to recognise how culturally responsive teachers can adopt a new lens of understanding, as they attempt to seek greater insights into their students, their understanding of the world and their background. In such contexts, it is impossible to separate home and school, as each plays out in the other. Jackie and Karen like so many of their peers on this professional experience became more aware of where how they needed to draw both home and school into their teaching and learning.

Martine's case shows how she developed new ways of seeing her professional identity. While she had begun the professional experience clinging to her specialisation to define her as a growing professional in Australia, through her South African experience in which she taught across primary and secondary classrooms, and with very few material resources, she learnt that her aspiration to educate was more significant than the content that she taught and that it was relationship building which was the best way to achieve this.

The narrative accounts we have presented here give a sense of the way the pre-service teachers began to appreciate perspectives of culture and multi(cultures). Biraimah and Jotia's (2012) analysis of the longitudinal effects of a study abroad program on teachers' content knowledge and perspectives identifies the significance of culture in fostering rich learning environments. For the pre-service teachers learning in South Africa, the richness of the experience was often founded on a particular difficulty or a sense of trial, which threatened to take away their confidence, but from which they were able to learn and appreciate how the multiplicity of cultures and cultural understanding could be a positive element in their teaching. Briamah and Jotia (2012) call for "…educators to recognise that individuals often cling to their own beliefs in an effort to maintain and sustain their self-identity, a notion of great importance to educators teaching within culturally diverse classrooms" (p. 451). In these culturally rich classrooms in South Africa, the pre-service teachers in these narrative accounts did not defiantly cling to their beliefs or cultural conditioning. They allowed the cultural context to reshape them slowly.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have shown how one group of 13 pre-service teachers from Australia engaged in an international professional experience program in South Africa and began to see and understand the layers of difference in this historically and culturally complex country and in their own identities. In our representation of their cases and our discussion of them, we have drawn attention to our unique perspective as Australian academic leaders on the program: we were both insiders returning to our home country and also outsiders (like the pre-service teachers) making sense of a country that has continued to change in our absence. Keying into these pre-service teachers' reflections on their experiences, articulated through the cases, allowed us to show how the students believe their participation in this international professional experience program enhanced their understanding and

provided perhaps "…denser and richer professional development, than those taken on 'home' soil" (Salmona et al. 2015). The direct acculturation experiences in South Africa, as described above, played a significant role in preparing teachers, easing them into the demands that world be placed on them as they enter the profession.

For example, the expectation that teachers should be culturally competent, and would engage with, relate to and teach a diverse range of students in classrooms, is challenging to achieve. Population changes in Australia have heralded the need for teachers to be aware of and accommodate diverse backgrounds in their students. As of 2015, nearly half of Australia's population has a parent who was born overseas (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016), and the Australian school student population is increasingly reflecting the wide diversity of cultural backgrounds that historical migration patterns have reinforced. The pre-service teachers in this study evolved through their varied experiences, while confronting them through their engagement with the social and cultural dynamics of the classrooms in which they taught. They found themselves taking risks, forcing themselves out of their comfort zone, sometimes by choice, and at other times, because there was no other alternative.

The professional experience program in South Africa became a global experience in which "the infinitely varied mutual contest of sameness and difference" played out for the visiting pre-service teachers and academic leaders who were engaged with it (Appadurai 1990, p. 308). For the pre-service teachers who journeyed to South Africa to undertake professional experience, the challenge posed to their ways of knowing and experiencing the world at home in Australia, both professionally and personally, influenced and coloured the personal and professional learning that was achieved away from home in South Africa.

The international professional experience became a way of knowing and clarifying and learning. The pre-service teachers developed more confidence in and clarity about their roles as teachers and as learners, and they were able to build upon their repertoire of skills and professional understandings that would potentially allow them to promote this as distinctive in their employment biographies. Being situated outside of the familiar and "sameness" of a domestic professional experience opened up powerful prospects for professional growth, for both academic leaders and pre-service teachers alike.

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