Chapter 12
(Re)navigating the Classroom as a Teacher Educator

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Abstract Using identity as a frame, this chapter captures the realities of the author grappling with her own practices in becoming a teacher educator through a series of raw and genuine narratives that draw on professional experience as a context for learning and growth. In the context of this work, professional experience is imagined as school-based experiences, which provide pre-service teachers with the opportunity to engage with theoretical and conceptual ideas about learning and teaching in a supported classroom environment. From the perspective of pre-service teachers' learning, these experiences are relatively well documented. Drawing on journal entries spanning several years, this chapter instead explores how a teacher educator negotiates a professional experience space to make the most of this opportunity in terms of how it informs her own thinking, practice and ultimately ways of being.

> Experience is the best teacher.

Introduction

This timeless proverb certainly has a point. There is nothing quite like learning experientially to really understand something deeply, with a sense of purpose and in ways that you will not forget in a hurry. In supporting pre-service teachers for over a decade now in learning to teach, it is a message that I have heard time and time again. *'I want more time in classrooms'; 'My placements were my best experiences in the course'; 'I learnt the most about teaching when I was in a school setting'.* I am sure I voiced similar sentiments when I was a pre-service teacher too. What perhaps is underplayed in these scenarios is the role that reflection and mentoring play in maximising the learning from such an opportunity. Learning does not typically happen in a vacuum. Experiences are relived, remembered and re-experienced through

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discussion, critique and critical thinking. Often these acts happen in collaboration with another, who is knowledgeable of the context and the situation.

These considerations are interesting to draw upon in light of the context I found myself in when I started as a teacher educator in the Faculty of Education at Monash University in 2010. While I had been involved in sessional university work over the previous 3 years at a university interstate, this was my first academic appointment. I had very little understanding about where to even begin in this space, but I did quickly discover that a number of the units I had been allocated to were being taught off campus, in schools, and colleagues were very keen to know if I would continue these school-based experiences. I said, of course, why not? It was certainly a starting point and seemed like an opportunity that would be engaging and authentic to pre-service teachers, with learning and teaching coming to life.

School-based experiences are just as they sound—experiences that enable engagement with learning and teaching in school settings. They are different from practicum experiences in that they tend to be over shorter periods of time, in small groups and with a more focused purpose in mind. The context for which I found myself developing and implementing school-based experiences will be explained in more detail later in this chapter. However, in brief, my units were based in classrooms weekly or fortnightly for around an hour with pre-service teachers working in pairs to enact learning opportunities for small groups of students based on what they were focusing on in the particular academic unit. There are currently teacher education programs both nationally (e.g. Watson, Hay, Hellyer, Stuckey, & Woolnough, 2008) and internationally (e.g. Hardy, 1999; Moseley, Ramsey & Ruff, 2004) that have incorporated school-based experiences to support quality learning and teaching practices. I have seen the value of these opportunities for pre-service teachers first hand, and research tells us similar things (e.g. Buitink, 2009). For example, Moseley et al. (2004) discovered that pre-service teacher participation in their version of school-based experiences was beneficial in the construction of pedagogical content knowledge, but also, in their particular context, fostered positive attitudes and identity (in this case, sense of self as a future teacher of science) towards learning and teaching.

The impact of school-based experiences on pre-service teachers is relatively well documented. What is not so well understood is how teacher educators negotiate this space to make the most of this opportunity, not only in terms of maximising the learning of the pre-service teachers, but in how it informs their own thinking and practice. This chapter explores my own experiences of being thrown into the deep end and needing to (re)navigate the classroom as a newly minted teacher educator. It adds further insights to the extensive body of literature that exists around the transition from teacher to teacher educators, which grapples with notions of becoming, belonging and practising in this new space (e.g. Williams, Ritter & Bullock, 2012). This work is an opportunity to unravel the complexities of working in the professional experience space more broadly (in this case, through the use of school-based experiences) and further highlights the necessity of working differently (in this instance, choosing to base my academic units in a classroom setting) as a way to engage with this challenging and nuanced work.

Positioning the Context

Before continuing much further, in better understanding this chapter and its purpose, it is useful if I provide some insights into the context in which I have positioned this research and the documentation processes I have used. Below I introduce the first of six narrative sequences. These storied accounts span a period of 7 years and are based on journal entries from the time that have been reconsidered and reshaped to best capture the particular emphasis of this work. In enacting this approach, I draw on Lawrence-Lightfoot's (with Hoffman Davis, 1997) thinking about narrative, which she described as *portraiture*. Portraiture draws on a range of data sets, in this case lived experiences and formal reflections, to weave together more holistic and rich insights.

This first narrative provides some background to how I initially understood the notion of school-based experiences, what I imagined this looked like in practice and why I thought this was a beneficial approach to initial teacher education. It was written from a place of having just been employed as a science teacher educator with a focus on primary school education and preparing for my first semester in this role.

May 2010

I submitted my PhD thesis in the afternoon before we jumped into our heavily laden ute and made the crossing of the Nullarbor (a 1100 km stretch of road running east-west in a desert region situated in central to western Australia) for the sixth and last time. Making our way back to the east where I left as a teacher and return as a teacher educator. I arrived in the west with that common mix of excitement and nerves about the unknown ahead and leave feeling the same way, but with a completely different adventure ahead - one of being an academic and all that brings. It might seem like I write that with some sense of authority, but I still don't really know what means or what it will actually look like! At the moment, what lay ahead is more of a rough sketch than a carefully detailed illustration, but that will come. What I do know is that school-based experiences are part of the mix. I love the idea of basing my science education units in local primary schools. What's not to love, right? An opportunity for my students to put into practice the things we will be thinking about and discussing through our workshops as well as building confidence in working in collaborative ways with primary school kids. Science will be the vehicle for a lot of learning and teaching, both personally (in the sense of who they are as a teacher and what education means to them) and professionally (more the act of developing and implementing learning experiences). I really think the Monash students will see the spark that science brings to children and the curiosity and engagement that it engenders and my wish is that it will be contagious! I love the idea of all of this for selfish reasons too. It will be a chance for me to be in a place where I get great energy from and learn a lot about my own approaches to learning and teaching – the classroom. I'm not that long out of being a classroom teacher full-time and in some ways I haven't left. The last three years saw me in primary school classrooms regularly, for research and casual relief teaching work. But this experience will offer a different perspective again. I'm imaging a birds' eye view of all that is happening and the rich, reflective discussions that may flow from these first-hand experiences. Another aspect of what lays ahead I also know about is that the groups I will be working with in the coming semester are Bachelor of Education (primary) students in their first year of the course and Graduate Diploma of Education students who will be about halfway through their intense year of learning to be a teacher. So while they will have had some professional experiences prior to working with me, in the form of the usual practicum (I think it will be five days for the B.Ed. students and 25 days for the Grad Dip students), they still have had

limited time and opportunities to really immerse themselves in classrooms and schools. I'm aware of that shift in thinking about education from our perspective as a student, which we have all had long apprenticeships in, to the perspective of being a teacher, moving to the other side of the desk. Who knows how this will pan out, but this approach certainly seems like an innovative way to further induct students into the work of a teacher. Time, and my pauses for thought to reflect on and make sense of this, will tell.

With some clarification around the context of this work, it is important to restate that this chapter is a representation of my experience as a teacher educator developing not only in the area of science education, but the multi-dimensional and interdisciplinary space of professional experience. While science education plays an important role, it is much more a contextual feature than a defining characteristic of this work. The following four narratives play out over a period of two years and I use this series of reflections to reconstruct my lived experience of (re)navigating the classroom as a teacher educator. Each narrative is followed by interpretations intended to provide additional insights into identity development and notions of becoming a teacher educator. These reflections speak to times that represent the achievements and the challenges I faced as I grappled with thinking more deeply and differently about teacher education and the role of professional experience within it. The chapter ends with the sixth, and final narrative, which looks back on these stories after a number of years to highlight the value of this approach to professional experience for the learner and their learning, and in this case, as part of their journey to becoming a teacher and intertwines with my own journey to becoming a teacher educator.

Who Am I? Bringing Meaning to This Context

When I last wrote about my experiences and learning in the professional experience space (Fitzgerald, 2017), it was through the lens of border crossing (as articulated by Aikenhead, 1996). I was grappling with my role co-ordinating professional experience in international contexts and navigating my way of *becoming* through a process of negotiating the constant shifting between being a learner and teacher/leader. In that circumstance, border crossing was an appropriate frame for analysis as it articulated the sense of movement and shape shifting that I was encountering as I lead a new initiative for the Faculty. Fast forward to now and my experience as Director of Professional Experience: I look back on my understandings of and connections with the professional experience space in a different light. The following extract from my previous writing (Fitzgerald, 2017) captures where I got to in my thinking.

> As I reflect on the continuous shifting that occurred between my roles of learner and leader, it becomes apparent that this experience was much less about changing myself to manage a situation, and much more about adopting a constantly evolving sense of self. My narratives may give a sense of an evolution of my identity in these border-crossing spaces that is linear or progressive. The reality was, however, that I was required to draw upon aspects of being a learner and a leader all of the time. It was just that different dimensions of these identities were required to emerge, to be foregrounded, at different times for different purposes. The experiences reflected upon in these narratives certainly speak to Kamler and

> Thomson's (2006) understandings of identity, which suggest that this construct is plural in nature and that multiple identities may form in response to specific contexts and experiences. Of particular interest to this narrative, and the development of my own identity as a learner and a leader of the IPE [International Professional Experience] program, is the notion that identity is not fixed, but always under construction, being made and remade as we live out an experience (Kamler & Thomson, 2006).
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> (Fitzgerald, 2017, p. 25)

It is from this place that I pick up the loose threads and delve into the area of identity, using Kamler and Thomson's (2006) work as a guide, rather than border crossing as I did previously. I do this as a way of further considering my role as a teacher educator and the continual pull I experience between being a learner and a teacher. In some ways this focus builds upon Zeichner's (2005) pivotal work highlighting his own personal journey to becoming a teacher educator. This is an opportunity to reveal and ruminate on what the development of my own professional identify as a teacher of teachers, or second-order practitioner (Murray & Male, 2005), means for not only me and my sense of self, but how this reverberates down to the pre-service teachers I work with, and to their development as future teachers. As someone who has been invested in professional experiences in various iterations and guises over a significant period of time, this becomes the context in which identity will be examined in this chapter.

Following this section are four narratives that trace my work as a teacher educator (with primary science education as the context) over two years, which also happen to coincide with the beginning of my academic career. They capture my lived experiences of providing pre-service teachers with professional experience opportunities in the form of school-based experiences as part of an academic unit focused on science learning and teaching in the primary years. But more than that, these narratives provide insights into how I was thinking and responding to this approach over time as well as revealing my burgeoning identity in the process of becoming a teacher educator. Emerging from this sequence is a characterisation of the steep learning curve that I was engaging with as part of my identify formation. Murray and Male's (2005) work connects the development of identity as moving between exhilarating and terrifying, which I can certainly relate to. However, through this chapter, I characterise my evolving identity as evoking a variety of emotions over time ranging from *discomfort* to *comfort* and *content* to *discontent*. Capturing this evolution reinforces Kamler and Thomson's (2006) view of identity as being, in a sense, a continual work-in-progress. My interpretations of these narratives shed light on my own personal journey to becoming a teacher educator and the role that professional experience had in challenging me to question, define and redefine what matters in the preparation of future teachers and why.

DISCOMFORT: Finding My Feet

June 2010

Not sure if the honeymoon is over, but the gloss of naïve optimism has certainly dulled slightly. This sounds a bit dramatic I know, it is probably more that the reality of the work and my new role has kicked in. It is definitely sleeves up now and time to make school-based experiences happen. I know that this has all happened before and very successfully (the baton wouldn't have been passed otherwise!), but I am now left to my own devices and feel a bit alone in the process. My sense is that I am now perceived as the academic overseeing this experience, so it is my responsibility. Luckily I love nutting out logistics! I use love loosely here, but this part of a process doesn't overwhelm me. I enjoy piecing the parts of the puzzle together to come up with a workable solution. Some of the considerations that are at the front of my mind include transport issues, parking at the schools, decisions about the materials we will need to bring, matching university timetabling with school times, putting risk management processes in place and the most appropriate ways to distribute students across classes. For example, the Grad Dip cohort is to be divided into three groups of forty students over a day and a half and keeping in mind that the school we are working with only has a couple of hundred students. See the logistical juggle?! For me, these are just details to work with and a process to move through. The bigger consideration is around the structure of the program and what the students will be doing during their school-based experiences, how they will do this and, importantly, why. Alongside this I need to also consider the learning opportunities and scaffolding I provide for my students, to support them in being able to subsequently support and enhance the primary school children's experience of learning science. It is quite the cycle! At this point, the confidence driving my relative youth in this space seems to be pushing me through. I know no better! I have an implicit trust that things will work out as others have experienced this as successful and as a valuable approach to continue. I also have a personal sense that this really must result in a powerful learning experience for our students and is worthy to pursue. But just under the veneer, I know I have self-doubts lurking. Being new to teacher education, I question that I will be taken seriously by my students, let alone the teachers in the schools we will work with. I am just pushing 30, am regularly mistaken as a pre-service teacher in the schools I visit, do not have decades of school experiences under my belt and haven't even been in the state for the last three and a bit years … what would I know? I don't want to scratch too hard just yet as I'm worried the stitching will come undone and the stuffing will all fall out, but if I let my mind wander there for a moment, I do worry that I lack any street cred to actually pull this off.

In revisiting this reflection, I am sharply reminded of what it feels like to be pushed outside your comfort zone. You do everything you can to cling onto some semblance of the familiar—an understandable coping strategy. I am looking back at my new-to-academia self here and am reminded of my many observations of pre-service teachers in the classroom since this time. Often there is a moment when you realise that while they have put hours into planning a very well thought out lesson, they have focused entirely on the teaching processes and have not really considered what the learner will be doing. In the case of this narrative, I was focusing energy on getting the logistical aspects of this work in order, which are important in terms of creating a seamless experience for both the students and the schools, but are a much lower priority than identifying the values and intentions underpinning this new (to me) approach. At this point, I note that there is a growing awareness of the duality that exists within this role in terms of supporting the pre-service teachers' learning alongside the school students' learning. Interestingly, this duality exists for all teacher educators—we

are all preparing our pre-service teachers to support student learning—but it is not something that I have been so acutely mindful of in other units because it is easy to feel one step removed from the realities of the classroom. In this instance, the inclusion of a school-based component hones the focus and brings the purpose of my practice to the forefront.

In reading this reflection, I am also reminded of a saying which suggests that the loneliest place to be by yourself is in the middle of a big crowd or, in this instance, a big organisation. With everyone busy with their own responsibilities, there is often an implicit sense of trust that you will step up to the mark, use your initiative and reach out for assistance if needed. While that is flattering to a point, it highlights that targeted support is still necessary in finding your way in a new role. Another contextual feature that is evident here is a sense of identity, which is tangled up in issues related to self-doubt. It is not uncommon for early career academics to feel like an imposter or somewhat fraudulent in their new role and setting. In this instance, it is further highlighted through the formation of relationships with a school and concern about how my position as a teacher educator will be perceived. While I had comfortably spent time building relationships in a number of different schools, there was something different about doing that in this new role. It may have been the sense that I was presenting myself as having some sort of expertise and authority because I was from a university or that I would be perceived as existing in an 'ivory tower' and disconnected from the realities of the classroom. I was also acutely aware of my age and the impression that this might give, further reinforcing these concerns.

COMFORT: Feeling at Home

May 2011

So my fears were unfounded. A year into working as a teacher educator in general and using a school-based approach specifically, I haven't been cast out as an interloper or accused of not having anything to offer (at least not to my face!). Having this lived experience has confirmed what I originally suspected. I can now say with insight that these experiences provide students with an enriched and enlivened introduction to science learning and teaching, which impacts their perceived confidence and competence in this area. I am noticing this not only anecdotally, but through some research I have been doing alongside my teaching, to better understand the impact. I am certainly no longer bogged down by concerns around logistics because I understand the routines now and what is needed (or not) to make things work. This is not to say that students don't still enter into these school-based units with some trepidation, but I have noticed that confidence is catchy! It seems that if I come across as being in control and managing things effectively then the students have trust in that. I have a level of confidence now where I can be open with the students about what this experience might look and feel like. For example, I can let them know that this is a messy and uncertain process with no one right way to approach it (a snapshot of what teaching can be like), but that things will come together. And what is the worst that can happen anyway? The activity doesn't work or a child disengages entirely? I am never far away if things unfold in unplanned ways, although I haven't quite reconciled for myself what my role is as the students go about engaging with their small groups of school kids. I feel a bit useless at times. A circling satellite. Well, maybe not a satellite, as I'm not trying to step in and communicate. This is

their learning and teaching sequence to facilitate and manage. Maybe this is my own internal battle, as I am used to being active and engaged in the classroom – participating and leading – but I know that I need to not be that person in this context. Or do I? Should I be pointing out the possible opportunities in the moment or offering suggestions for ways to proceed with an outcome or asking the probing questions to further learning? Or are these the points that I can be raising during the debriefing session? I have leaned towards the latter, but it is something that I am still certainly grappling with. What I have also realised is that the current approach to what happens in the hour or so that the Monash students are facilitating is not quite right. It runs directly counter to a key message from the unit, which is primary science education is more than 'fun' activities. It can be that, but there still needs to be strong connections to learning and relevance to the students' lives. Authentic and meaningful are important considerations, so a rethink from my end is in order.

This reflection is characterised by a growing sense of self as a teacher educator, evidenced by being able to move outside of my comfort zone (e.g. moving my focus beyond the logistics) and knowing how to better support the pre-service teachers in terms of their own anxieties and uncertainties with this experience. This was also evident in the deeper thinking I was doing around the value of the school-based approach and identifying where there may be some discordance between some of my beliefs around quality education and how this was being enacted through this experience. There also seems to be an emerging discordance between my practice in and outside of the classroom setting. My sense is that while I am developing an identity as a teacher educator, which is a completely new way of seeing myself, I already have a fixed identity connected with the classroom. However, it is not appropriate to enact that way of being in this context. It is a space that I have been comfortable and confident as a teacher in, but now find myself grappling with uncertainty about how to be and act. Therefore, I am in a period of having to reimagine and readjust who I am in the classroom—no longer the teacher, but the teacher educator instead, which is a theme that has been explored in other research focused on this transition period (e.g. Williams, 2013).

On the surface, this reflection vibrantly captures an increased sense of belonging and connectedness in my role as teacher educator. But scratch a little deeper and my sense of how I belong and connect in the classroom is still under question. This is a really interesting time in terms of how I perceive myself as an educator with one foot becoming more firmly planted in a tertiary setting, while the other one seems to be losing some grip in the school setting after a significant period of being steadfastly planted there. I think for many teacher educators as they move from classroom to lecture theatre, there is a period of transition and a withdrawal of connection with one setting to enable connection with the other. But in this instance, the classroom is proving to be a disruptor in my own transition as I remain connected to both settings, though not in the ways that I have previously known. There is a complexity at play here that is hard to capture and distil. But, for me, it is raising questions about how teacher educators can remain current and connected with teachers and schools while still applying their academic lens to these sites through critique of the state and structures of education. We do not want teacher educators to lose their empathy and understanding for the life and times of a school and being a teacher, but likewise

we do not want to diminish the value they bring in their push to look at education differently.

CONTENT: Locating the Learning

November 2011

This is no news flash, but reflection really is a powerful tool. Taking some time to think and chat with colleagues about the approach to the school-based experiences has enabled me to make some significant changes for the better. Another experience that has had an influence in this period has been stepping into a different context – supporting a different cohort of students on a practicum in the Cook Islands – during this last semester. My sense is that this had an impact on my thinking as I was seeing (reliving!) first hand the trials and tribulations of learning to teach. In bringing this knowledge back to the school-based experiences I was facilitating, what I started to realise is that I was falling into that old trap of focusing on the teaching rather than the learning and dragging the students along on that ride. In this context, the impact is twofold in a sense. For example, the focus had been on what was I *teaching* and what were the Monash students *teaching* instead of what were the Monash students *learning* about science learning and teaching and what were the school students *learning* in science. This signals a significant shift in emphasis. To make this shift has required me to shine the spotlight on myself and the beliefs and assumptions that I carry around to better understand my own patterns of practice. By having a handle on this, I can better articulate to my students why I do what I do and why I believe what I believe constitutes quality science education. This enables the students to draw on these insights and accommodate them into their own ways of being and doing (or not).

Another realisation was the need to reimagine what the school-based experience structure looked like to further enable this shift from being teaching-focused to learning-focused. The most recent iteration has drawn on the 5E inquiry model (see Bybee et al., 2006), which is commonly used in science education to structure learning sequences and is the backbone of a primary science education resource used in classrooms nationwide, *Primary Connections.* I supported the students by immersing them in an E (e.g. engage, elaborate) experience both theoretically and practically before they applied this learning to a relevant E experience with their small groups of students. Structurally, I also made a change this semester by having the students on campus one week to have their learning experience and then based in a local primary school the next week to enact the learning experience they had planned. This meant that the students were in the classroom six times over the semester and implemented a complete sequence of science learning experiences using the 5E model. These adjustments have helped me to clarify my own role in this space. I feel reassured about my decision to stand back during my students' teaching time and to embrace the opportunity to listen, look and learn. During this time, I scribble notes about things to raise during the reflection section that might encourage the students to think more deeply about their own practices. 18 months of experience in this in-between space – facilitating a closing of the gap for these students between theory and practice in science education specifically – has helped me to understand when to push thinking, where, for what purpose and why. And equally, when not to.

This reflection starts to capture a growing sense of control in this situation and an increased understanding of how to use school-based experiences to maximise the learning for the pre-service teachers. In getting to this point, it is evident that the act of reflection has been an important way to support the ways in which I can navigate around this new role and space. But it is an iterative process and one that

takes time as well as a willingness to wrestle around with the challenges, so that they can be reimagined or reframed as possibilities. Changes in practice do not happen in a vacuum. The previous reflection alludes to the use of research to inform my practice. While not mentioned directly here, informal discussions with the pre-service teachers, teachers at the schools and colleagues all feed into the ways I think about and act on improving this experience. Another interesting advance is a better alignment between the school-based experiences and the realities of classroom, with a stronger sense of mirroring, for example, planning practices and even the timing of learning experiences. This suggests that I am better harnessing my knowledge of learning and teaching to provide the pre-service teachers with a more authentic experience of classroom practice, that they might be able to draw upon and use in the future.

As teacher educators, we are certainly like bower birds when it comes to where we draw inspiration and ideas from, to inform what we do and how we think about what we do. In this narrative, I have drawn insights from another professional experience opportunity to help me better understand the challenges pre-service teachers face as they are learning to teach, and to consider some of the common pitfalls experienced during these early days in the classroom. What is particularly powerful about these insights is that they are not conversations in passing, but my lived experience of observing pre-service teachers in action. This was my first experience of participating in an international professional experience (e.g. in the Cook Islands) and in many ways it had quite a profound impact—it was like a light bulb moment. My learning certainly had a direct impact on how I subsequently thought about the school-based experiences and what could be changed to better utilise the context, both the school environment and the needs of the pre-service teachers. This impact was also evident in my recognition that I could make some structural changes to the program to better realise the value of being in the classroom, as well as maximise the learning that takes place in a broader context (e.g. practicum experiences). This is important because there is a greater realisation that I am not just preparing the pre-service teachers for success in this unit, but for their practicum experiences and beyond. This also reflects my increased sense of ownership of this space and ability to make decisions to improve the experience of all concerned – students, teachers, pre-service teachers and teacher educators.

DISCONTENT: Questioning the Intent

June 2012

The SETU (Student Evaluation of Teaching and Unit) feedback is brimming with positives, one of the school-based units received a 'purple letter' from the Vice-Provost (Learning and Teaching) placing it in the top 5% of units in the university for that given semester, based on student satisfaction. The students are also completing the unit with an increased sense of confidence and competence in primary science education. Two years on and by these counts things are humming along. But I'm not entirely happy, which I know makes me sound incredibly hard to please. I have become increasingly aware of the disconnect that

exists between what the Monash students are doing with their small groups and how this is positioned in relation to the learning happening at both a classroom and school-based level. Understandably, many teachers will sit back and use the time for planning or preparation, but it means that this experience exists in isolation and is disconnected from the bigger learning picture in the school. From my teacher educator perspective, it also disrupts a key message I share about science education, which is that science can be a vehicle for learning, and to think of science as a specialist subject removes this opportunity. This is not how science exists out there in the world and it can reinforce the message that science is practised only by specialists rather than being a lens that anyone can access as a way to make sense of their lives, their environment, the issues they face and the decisions they make. Again, understandably but somewhat disappointingly too, it seems that some of the teachers and schools who work with us in this program see this experience as ticking their science box for the year. With all this in mind, I have been starting to rummage around with the idea that the school-based experiences may be inadvertently reinforcing messages that I don't believe underpin quality learning and teaching. A possible resolution is working more closely with the leadership teams at the schools to raise the possibility of thinking differently about the approach. If it was more interconnected with the learning happening in the classroom and involved the teacher to a greater degree, which could help to empower and re-engage them to a greater degree in science education, this approach would potentially provide an opportunity for teacher professional learning. From these considerations re-emerges for me the old chestnut of why would principals or classroom teachers want to listen to me. So there are certainly some issues with my own confidence in feeling that I could elicit that sort of buy-in and that people would want to come on board. This begs the question: if they don't want to come on board, do I make a call to move away from working with them as partners, as their values and views are out of kilter with my own? A decision like this is never easy because of the energies expended from both sides to develop and maintain the relationship over time, but all good things do have an endpoint. It also gets me thinking about whose problem this really is and perhaps all the signposts point to me. When my students graduate they will most likely be faced with these views and attitudes from their colleagues, so this might actually suggest that as a teacher educator part of my role is to assist them in understanding how to navigate and negotiate these realities to ensure quality approaches shine through.

This reflection starts to reveal some of the challenges inherent in partnership work. One of the particularly difficult bumps in the road, which is evident in my experiences shared above, is when there is a mismatch in values. In this instance, it might not be so much about values as it is about the intentions of the school-based program and what each stakeholder is hoping to gain from the experience. While my grappling with this challenge comes from a place of continual improvement, if I want to see a realignment of values and intentions then I need to take this out of my own head and engage key people in discussions about where this partnership is heading and what we collectively want to achieve. This highlights a missed opportunity, which should have been embedded in the earlier aspects of my practice as these relationships started. I incorrectly made assumptions, based most likely on a combination of my own naïve sense that we would have a shared vision, that the partnerships were inherited as long standing, and from various challenges due to my being new in the role. Far from this being a criticism, it is much more of a critique of the importance of carefully considering the ways in which a partnership is set up, as these early discussions and exchanges form the foundation for a quality experience for all into the future.

It is interesting to consider partnership work as not only a practice, but embedded in place. Context certainly impacts on how we might consider our needs and goals in a partnership, but it also raises questions about the level of awareness we might bring. In this instance, I certainly had some insider knowledge and experiences of schools that helped me to interpret what their needs may be. It is worth considering, however, the difficulties that principals and teachers have imaging what the needs of a teacher education course are other than drawing on them as a location for professional experience. This suggests that not only are shared purposes and visions a necessary condition of a partnership, but that shared understandings and experiences of each others' contexts are also essential. Based on my current work and research in the professional experience space (Fitzgerald, 2017), notions of border crossing and the roles we take on to help or hinder these crossings come to mind. While there is a level of negotiation and compromise that can be reached between people in the partnership, there is a point at which as an individual you need to be cognisant of adopting different ways of being and acting to suit the situation. While self-doubt might be creeping in and self-worth starts to be questioned, there is recognition in the closing lines of the reflection above that I need to find a way to draw upon these challenges and reframe them as opportunities for learning. It is only by playing around and grappling with the greyness at the borders that I came to an understanding of this.

Making Sense of It All

Experience may certainly be a fantastic teacher, but it is the ability to reflect on and critically examine such experiences where much of the value lies. This chapter has drawn upon professional experience, in this case in the form of school-based experiences, as a context for documenting a personal journey of becoming. This has been considered, however, from the perspective of a teacher educator rather than the usually reported vantage point of the pre-service teacher. What became increasingly clear to me through this reflective process is the role that engaging with (and supporting pre-service teachers to engage with) a form of professional experience had in shaping my own practices, and in how I view myself as a practitioner. This subsequently influenced my ways of preparing future teachers, in this case, for the learning and teaching of science in primary settings. Using this different lens to consider the role and value of professional experience brings with it some challenges and complexities, particularly in relation to the relevance and applicability of this work.

In terms of my own learning, the embedding of professional experience in my own approach to learning and teaching acted to both challenge me about, and keep me connected to, the teaching profession. Part of the challenge for me lay in working in an environment where I felt connected as a teacher but needed to reimagine who I was in that space, and how it informed my practices. The connectedness and classroom currency, however, reminded me as a teacher educator about what matters in terms

of preparing pre-service teachers for the profession (in this case with a focus on science education). The use of professional experience as a learning and teaching tool essentially pointed out the gaps and inconsistencies in my ideologies (sometimes I was not practising what I was preaching) and honed my ability to articulate my own practice, which in turn supports pre-service teachers in the development of their own identities as future teachers.

Identity is a useful frame for making sense of this research as this work captures the realities of grappling with my own practices through a series of raw and genuine narratives that draw on professional experience as a context for learning and growth. While Kamler and Thomson's (2006) work around identity draws out the notion of multiple identities, this was not as evident on reflection in these series of events as it was in my lived experiences in the international professional experience program (see Fitzgerald, 2017). I didn't sense the sharp tug of being required to move between and within spaces to interpret and respond to what was happening, but more a gentle evolution in relation to a growing sense of self. More akin to Kamler and Thomson's (2006) thoughts was certainly identification with my identity as a teacher educator as being under construction. This work takes steps towards adding further insights to ways of thinking about how we prepare teacher educators for their (often new) roles and highlights the ways in which professional experiences can continue to inform this development.

In considering the relevance and applicability of this chapter, which documents a highly contextualised and personal journey, to the work of others, three key learnings emerge for me. First, there needs to greater acknowledgement of the powerful role that professional experience in its broadest sense (looking well and truly beyond just the practicum) can have in challenging ideas about learning and teaching, not just for pre-service teachers but for teacher educators too. Second, reflecting deeply and critically on your own practice and shining a light on your own incongruences creates an empathy with the experiences of pre-service teachers as they start to engage with the professional experience space and develop their own teacher identity. Third, and lastly, thinking differently about professional experience and the role that a complementary approach to practicum can play, provides an entry point to maintain a currency to our practice that is difficult to achieve if we continue to operate in isolation from the realities of the classroom.

Looking Back

November 2017

Two years ago, I bumped into some of the students from the last unit I had worked in that incorporated school-based experiences. Following a round of hugs, we had a great chat about that experience and what they had learnt. They had kept an eye out for me in their unit guides for the rest of their time in the course hoping that we would have a chance to work together again. While it is lovely to be liked, this is not a popularity contest. I was genuinely interested in why the unit had mattered so much to them. They were warm, open and shared a range of insights, but their thoughts boiled down to three key points. Firstly,

they had developed and implemented a unit of work positioned within the learning area of science that was driven by their small group of students' interest and need. There was a real sense of achievement tangled up in this and they progressed through the rest of the course, including their practicums, feeling secure in the knowledge that they had the abilities to plan and enact lessons in meaningful ways. Secondly, any nerves they felt about the science education totally dissipated and they were able to see science as a context for supporting literacy and numeracy learning, which is a high priority for many in primary education. They certainly felt more confident and competent in themselves to engage in science as a co-learner with their students and with a level of curiosity and questioning about how science helps us to make sense of our lives. Thirdly, the approach to the unit enabled them to form strong bonds with their teaching partner as well as with others within the group because of this shared experience. These peers became important go-to people for support through the course as well as partners for group work tasks in other units. There was also a sense that they viewed each other as future colleagues and would be supportive in this capacity as they graduated and moved into teaching positions. While this feedback is from such a small group, it does mirror findings from data that I collected during that period. Importantly, it was an experience that mattered to and impacted on those students at that time. Circumstance and context, namely large cohorts and equity and access issues for online students, have since conspired and become a barrier to me reintroducing school-based experiences to my practice. Instead, I have experimented with different ways to reach back into the classroom and bring the teacher voice into my units, for example, using podcasts, case studies of practice written by teachers, having teachers as guest speakers about a particular issue or topic, and holding panel discussion that enable questions and answers about practice. At a Faculty-level, we are experiencing a focus on co-teaching (which is explored in other chapters of this book) as a way to maintain currency in and with the teaching profession. The importance of bringing practice to life through professional experiences, and more broadly across initial teacher education courses, is not to be underestimated. Doing it using different approaches in different units with different intents in mind, is critical if we are to turn out well-prepared graduates. As I consider my own learning as explored through this chapter, I recognise that to achieve this goal we, as teacher educators, need to be brave in trying new things, to learn from our mistakes, to model quality practice and to be prepared to reflect openly and honestly about what we do and why.

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