

The Longer-Term Influences of International Professional Experience on Teachers' Professional Practice and Growth

Angela Fitzgerald¹ & Rebecca Cooper²

¹ School of Education, RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia

² School of Curriculum, Teaching and Inclusive Education, Monash University, Melbourne, Australia

Correspondence: Angela Fitzgerald, School of Education, RMIT University, Melbourne, Victoria, 3000, Australia.
E-mail: angela.fitzgerald@rmit.edu.au

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Abstract

The intention of this paper is to examine the longer-term impacts of international professional experience (IPE). Participants in the study were all early-career teachers who had participated in IPE as part of their education degree and were invited to participate through the alumni office of an education faculty from one university. Thirty participants took part in this research study by completing an online questionnaire with two continuing on to a focus group discussion. The two data sets – from the online questionnaire and interview transcripts – were scrutinized individually using a deductive approach, informed by the five categories from the integrated works of Willard-Holt (2001) and Pence and Macgillivray (2008) as a framing lens. The impact of IPE on the identity formation, practices and career-based decision making of the focus group participants reiterated what emerged from the literature and questionnaire data. This research highlights the impact that IPE has on future teachers' sense of self and practice as a teacher, their approach to learning, teaching and education more broadly, and on the decisions, they make about their career options and pathways. This study has implications for the ways in which future teachers are prepared for culturally diverse classrooms.

Keywords: international mobility, teacher education, professional practice, long-term impacts

1. Introduction

The importance of providing opportunities in initial teacher education (ITE) programs for teaching experiences situated in cross-cultural settings is becoming increasingly recognised (Pence & Macgillivray, 2008). There is a growing requirement to ensure that teachers can cater for the needs of diverse groups of learners as populations, particularly in developed nations, become increasingly heterogeneous (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). To provide some context and in keeping with the intent of this paper, a total of 189,097 people migrated to Australia in the year starting July 2014 to June 2015 with school-aged children making up approximately 6% (11,346) of this figure (Department of Immigration and Border Protection, 2015). In the particular state of Australia where this study is situated (Victoria, which is in the south-eastern corner of the country), 27% of the student population are from language backgrounds other than English (Department of Education and Training, 2014); a statistic with similar trends (20-25%) nationwide (Hammond, 2012).

Based on accessible data (e.g., marketing brochures, websites, etc.), it seems that about a third of Schools and Faculties of Education in Australia are offering international mobility experiences as part of their ITE offerings. Monash University has been leading the way in this regard (see Fitzgerald, Parr, & Williams, 2017). Their International Professional Experience (IPE) program supports pre-service teachers to participate in a 15-day teaching placement abroad as part of their ITE programming (Bachelor of Education and Master of Teaching). These experiences have been found to diversify teaching, develop transcultural capacities and provide engagement with local cultures through meaningful relationships developed in schools, with students and communities (e.g., Fitzgerald et al., 2017).

This study is significant as it offers insights from an Australian context into an under-researched area of international mobility – the longer-term influences (Richardson & Munday, 2013). We know in the short-term that such an experience challenges and changes pre-service teachers' identity and confidence as a teacher (Selby, 2018). There is, however, little data to support the ongoing influence of this growing practice and institutional

focus (e.g., Jones et al., 2016). This research is important for anyone offering or designing an international experience as part of a workplace integrated learning (WIL) program with the long game in mind. The implications of this research are also useful to researchers in the field who may wish to use this work as a starting point for larger-scale, longitudinal studies. Equally this study is of importance to pre-service teachers, who may want to better understand the possible influence of undertaking an IPE on their preparation and development as a teacher.

The aim of this paper is not to focus on evaluating a particular international mobility program. The intention of this study is to instead examine participants' perceptions of the longer-term influence of IPE on their teaching practice. This work will also explore the ways in which the skills, knowledge and understandings participants perceived they attained through this experience have been applied to their places of work, whether that be in classroom settings or otherwise. The specific program that is the focus of this study is a university-directed IPE and is used in this instance as a focal point for interpreting and responding to the key research question driving this study: What perceived influence has participating in an international professional experience program had on participants' professional practice over time?

2. Conceptual Framing

The focus of this study was to better understanding the longer-term influences of international mobility opportunities and therefore this literature review is interested in understanding what has been documented in this area. The works of Willard-Holt (2001) and Pence and Macgillivray (2008) are of particular relevance due to the similarities between their studies and ours (e.g., short term mobility experiences, shared goals, etc.). However, in an effort to consider the longer-term influences, our participants had completed their ITE studies and commenced work as teachers. Irrespective of this difference, we saw the work of Willard-Holt (2001) as a particularly appropriate starting point for our framing of this research. Like Willard-Holt (2001), we believe that IPEs encourage engagement with others from different cultural backgrounds. This intercultural exchange supports the development of pre-service and eventually in-service teachers, who are culturally responsive (Villegas & Lucas, 2002) and reflective practitioners (Loughran, 2002). Willard-Holt's (2001) research resulted in a set of major categories to describe their findings. These categories were then adapted by Pence and Macgillivray (2008), who used the following five categories to make sense of their research:

- 1) preconceptions;
- 2) observations of the school: curriculum, culture, and students;
- 3) personal and professional change;
- 4) negative impact; and
- 5) faculty support and feedback.

As our research considers longer-term influences with participants who have now graduated, we have drawn on aspects of both projects to construct our own framework. As shown in Table 1 below, we have drawn on category (3) – personal and professional change - from Pence and Macgillivray's (2008) work (see column 1) as it is most relevant to the intentions of this study. We then used this category as this lens for organising the traits and characteristics emerging from Willard-Holt's (2001) research (see the dot points in rows 2 to 6 in column 1). Alongside these notions of personal and professional change, we categorised (see column 2) the various influences, arising from the literature, on an individual following an international mobility experience.

Table 1. Conceptual framework for this study

Personal and professional change	Categories influencing this research
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact on student teaching and beyond • Integrating content/techniques observed • Appreciate own resources 	Pedagogical approaches
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sensitivity/empathy • Flexibility/thinking on feet • Patience • Reflectivity • Professionalism 	Teacher characteristics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-confidence • Over confidence 	Confidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Propensity toward global education • Broadened perspective • Personal change 	Changed world view
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outlook on life 	Exposure to career pathways

We will now briefly outline our interpretation, as drawn from the literature, of the five categories that frame this study.

2.1 Pedagogical Approaches

Willard-Holt (2001) identified that pre-service teachers integrated their learning from abroad into their practice as a contextual feature or an example to enrich their teaching approach. For example, the teachers drew upon their experiences in Mexico to inform and enhance learning and teaching in areas like mathematics (e.g., using currency conversion from pesos to dollars) and social education (e.g., understanding community through shopping at local markets in Mexico). This lived experience enabled the pre-service teachers to bring a more globalised perspective into their classrooms, which led to their students being exposed to different worldviews and ultimately influenced the development of greater cultural awareness (Willard-Holt, 2001). In our study, we have looked for where participants have identified or discussed an example of where they have seen or used a new and/or innovative pedagogical approach as part of their international experience, which they subsequently recognised as something they have or will use as part of their future teaching repertoire.

2.2 Teacher Characteristics

Participants in the study by Maynes, Allison, and Julien-Schultz (2013) reported how their international experience resulted in first-hand understandings of the challenges of working in a language other than their native language. This knowledge resulted in empathy for people from non-English speaking backgrounds. Thus, in our study, we have looked for where our participants have discussed characteristics of themselves as a teacher that they developed due to their international experience, such as sensitivity, empathy and patience. Willard-Holt's (2001) research extends on these critical teacher characteristics through identifying that IPE also supports pre-service teachers to enhance their professionalism in this context through the attributes of flexibility, patience and the harnessing of reflective practice.

2.3 Confidence

Confidence in the classroom was another influence reported by teachers who had undertaken IPE as part of their ITE programs. A number of studies (e.g., Maynes et al., 2013, Willard-Holt, 2001) capture an increased sense of self-confidence with this mainly being attributed to having a greater awareness of learner diversity and a sense of connectedness with students from another culture. Cushner's (2007) work revealed how pre-service teachers were exposed to new pedagogical approaches and education philosophies during their experience abroad, which led to increased confidence and ultimately supported quality practice. Further to this, Cinelli and Jones' (2017) research referred to the role of autonomy in boosting confidence levels and a sense of teacher identity. This was mainly experienced as opportunities to spend a significant period of time fully engaged in the work of a teacher (e.g., taking whole lessons for most of the day), which is not always the experience in local contexts. This immersion allowed participants to develop their teaching techniques, demonstrate flexibility in their responsiveness to learners' needs, and find the teaching approaches that best suited them and their students.

2.4 Changed World View

Maynes and colleagues (2013) followed up two teachers four years after their international mobility experience.

Unsurprisingly, their responses to their learning and teaching experiences in Kenya were less emotive than they had initially been. It was still evident, however, that the experience had been internalised, assimilated and had some influence in shaping who they were as people. The researchers noted that the participants' previous emotive reflections had become more mature and philosophical over time. The teachers still held strong feelings about their experience, but with passing time this had developed into a set of beliefs and experiences that enriched their professional and personal lives. They shared an increased awareness and participation in social justice issues and more personal action around sustainability issues that stemmed from what they had observed and experienced abroad.

2.5 Exposure to Career Pathways

The development of a broader notion of career pathways and options for teachers is another commonly reported longer-term influence of IPE. Baxter's (2011) research revealed an interest from participants in engaging in work in international contexts, both inside and outside of the classroom. This is, however, a 'chicken and egg' scenario in that it is difficult to determine whether involvement in an international mobility program led to an interest to move abroad or whether that was an underlying interest that led to participation in such an experience. Regardless, international exposure contributed to a foundation where participants in this particular study followed career paths such as teaching in international schools, teaching outside mainstream classrooms in their country of origin, working with marginalised youth, involvement with tourism, and educating journalists in Africa to promote human rights. A further example is Bryan and Sprague's (1997) study involving 10 participants. When interviewed a year after their IPE, they found that eight of the 10 had taken up classroom positions as teachers with the other two taking up roles outside the field.

3. Methodology

Qualitative research approaches use 'rich' and 'thick' descriptions of experience (Merriam, 1998), which is effective in valuing and bringing participant voice to the fore. A limited sample of rich data is also an appropriate approach to take in meaningfully answering the research question as the number of pre-service teachers who participate in an IPE accounts for only a small proportion of the wider cohort. The particular approach adopted for this study is interpretive (Elliot & Timulak, 2005). This methodological decision is appropriate in this research context as it allows for a sharing of meaning-making practices, while showing how those practices can generate observable outcomes such as themes or recommendations. This section will identify the participants in this study and how they were selected before describing the data collection and analysis processes.

3.1 Participants and Their Selection

Purposeful sampling is widely used in qualitative research (Palinkas et al., 2015) and enables the selection of participants who are part of the population which is relevant to the research question being explored (Suri, 2011). In the case of this study, we were seeking participants who had participated in IPE as part of their ITE degree. Working with the alumni relations manager and Study Abroad office in our institution, 494 emails were sent out to past students who met two criteria:

- 1) were registered as alum; and
- 2) were recorded as having participated an IPE.

The email introduced the study and contained a link to the online anonymous questionnaire. As part of the questionnaire, participants were invited to participate in a focus group interview by sharing their contact details. Over 50% identified as interested, but only two continued on in the study.

Thirty participants (approximately 6% of the initial cohort who received an email invitation) took part in this research study by completing an online questionnaire with two continuing on by contributing to a focus group discussion. As pre-service teachers, the participants had nominated to participate in at least one IPE opportunity for one of their mandatory professional experience placements as part of their specific ITE program. In the Australian context, pre-service teachers in undergraduate programs are required to complete a minimum of 80 days of supervised placement, while pre-service teachers in graduate programs are required to complete a minimum of 60 days. The demographic characteristics of this group are summarised in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Participant demographics

ITE qualifications	International location 2000 - 2017	Current place of employment	Current role
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undergraduate • Primary (3) • Primary and secondary (2) • Secondary (13) • Graduate • Early years and primary (1) • Primary and secondary (2) • Secondary (9) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • China (2) • Cook Islands (9) • Israel (1) • Italy (6) • Malaysia (4) • South Africa (4) • South Korea (4) • The United Arab Emirates (2) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education settings (24), including 4 in international settings • Public sector (2) • Private sector (2) • Self-employed (1) • Undisclosed (1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Casual relief teacher (1) • Classroom teacher (17) • Curriculum co-ordinator (1) • EAL teacher (4) • Student (1) • Professor (1)

Information about the gender of the questionnaire respondents was not collected, but anecdotally we know that around 90% of international mobility participants in education programs are female. It is also noted that 60% of respondents had participated in an international placement in the last five years (2013 to 2017) with the other respondents' experiences spread across the years dating back to 2001.

The two participants who took part in the focus group interview were Yuan and Louise (pseudonyms). Yuan had completed an international experience in Malaysia in 2017 as part of his Master of Teaching qualification and was working as a casual relief teacher in government secondary schools as well as teaching English to adults with English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D) backgrounds. Louise went abroad in 2015 to South Africa also as part of her Master of Teaching program and was employed full-time as an English teacher in a government secondary school. At the time of the focus group, it had been approximately 18 months since Yuan's international experience and close to three years since Louise had been in a classroom abroad. While these timeframes may be at the lower limits of how long-term is defined, the experiences shared in this paper nonetheless illustrate the influence of IPE over time on professional decision-making and formation of ideas about teachers and teaching.

3.2 Data Collection

As referred to above, two key data collection tools informed this research: an online anonymous questionnaire and a focus group interview. Human ethics permission was sought and received from the focal institution prior to data collection.

Online questionnaires enable participants to respond to a set of questions in a way that is easily accessible (e.g., via a provided link, sent back to researchers directly) and can be completed at a convenient time and place. In terms of this study, the purpose for using a questionnaire was to gather insights from participants about their perceptions of the influence of their involvement in an international experience on their professional practice.

This online questionnaire was completed anonymously and would have taken the participants (N=30) about 15 to 20 minutes to complete. The online platform used in this instance was Survey Monkey. The questionnaire opened with a series of demographic questions focused on gathering details about the respondents' past and present educational background and experiences, such as identifying which ITE program they completed, which IPE they participated in and when, and their current employer and job title. The responses to these questions are further explained in the findings section and are detailed in Table 3.

Focus group interviews provide an opportunity to gain more in-depth insights into the phenomenon under consideration in an environment that fosters the co-construction and sharing of ideas. In this case, the focus was gaining more detailed insights into the long-term influences of participating in an IPE as part of ITE qualifications. The two authors of this paper facilitated the focus group interview with Yuan and Louise, which took place in a meeting room on campus at the university with the first author connecting via online teleconferencing (e.g., Zoom). The discussion lasted around 60 minutes and was audio-recorded before being transcribed. Examination of the questionnaire responses revealed the large extent to which the IPE experience had influenced on the respondents in terms of their interpersonal, intrapersonal and intercultural skills and attributes. These findings are expanded upon in the following section and summarised in Table 3. Due to the intimate nature of the focus group (e.g., two participants), the authors used these broad-brush areas to engage Yuan and Louise to explore the relationship between their IPE experiences and their subsequent teaching practice. The authors acknowledge that a

single one-hour focus group interview seems minimal, however, during this timeframe substantial, in-depth data was gathered from the two participants. The allocated time allowed for intensely focused discussion due to the small size of the group, but also acknowledged Yuan and Louise as busy education professionals who had dedicated time after the workday to travel off-site and share their insights.

At this point, we acknowledge a notable limitation of this study – the small sample size for both the questionnaire and focus group interviews. Other studies with a similar focus (e.g., Baxter, 2011; Maynes et al., 2013) have also experienced this limiting factor. It is not uncommon in qualitative work like this, reliant on human participation and engagement, to have difficulties in attracting large response rates due a range of issues, such as perceived time needed to participate and access to data collection tools. However, given the intention of qualitative research, we believe that this study is a vehicle for contributing participant voice to the conversation and helps to address the identified gap in this area. We also acknowledge that this limitation impacts on how we are able to operationalise the notion of ‘long-term’ as we are influenced, and this research ultimately shaped, by the participants’ own experiences. However, due to the dearth of an evidence base examining international mobility beyond the short-term gains, this work does provide a starting point for launching into a larger-scale conversation about the longer-term influences of these educational opportunities.

3.3 Data Analysis

The intent is to allow for the emergence of in-depth and detailed descriptions of the experience in an interpretive study. The two data sets – the short-answer responses from the online questionnaire and interview transcripts – were scrutinised individually using a deductive approach. This approach was informed by the five categories that were identified and described above using the integrated works of Willard-Holt (2001) and Pence and Macgillivray (2008) as a framing lens. This essentially involved the authors engaging in four steps:

- 1) Reading the responses/transcripts and using note taking to identify key ideas (including their frequency in the questionnaire data) in direct response to the research question and the five identified categories;
- 2) Re-reading the responses/transcripts to confirm that data encapsulate these categories;
- 3) Re-engaging with the responses/transcripts to locate quotes that would exemplify these categories; and
- 4) Scanning the responses/transcripts a final time in search of disconfirming evidence that could be used in juxtaposition to the categories.

From this process, two outcomes eventuated. Firstly, the responses from the online questionnaire were summarised to provide an overview of the situation. Secondly, the focus group discussion drilled down to offer examples of the categories.

4. Findings

The findings for this study are presented in two parts. Part 1 is drawn from the questionnaire data and provides a snapshot of the participants’ career paths following their participation in an IPE by sharing what they perceived as the influences of this experience on their subsequent practice. Part 2 digs deeper into these influences by identifying examples from the focus group interview, which intends to further highlight the long-term influences of international mobility in an Australian education-focused context.

Part 1: Snapshot of the long-term influences of international professional experience

Drawing on the questionnaire responses from 30 pre-service teachers who had participated in an IPE, the frequency of responses was recorded and are reported in Table 3 below (in parenthesis) to provide an overall sense of the categories. Reference is also made to the five categories described earlier that frame this study, where relevant, and highlight the overlap in these categories across the question types.

Table 3. Overview of responses to open-ended questions

Why they applied for such an experience	Skills and attributes, they were hoping to develop and what they think they actually developed	Factors they believed influenced their future teaching practices	Ongoing personal and professional impacts of learning to teach abroad
<i>Personal goals (n=6)</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Travel abroad • Teaching internationally • Personal challenge • Unique experience 	<i>Before international experience</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching strategies (n=9) • Intrapersonal factors (n=7) • Cultural awareness (n=7) • Interpersonal attributes (n=5) • Employability (n=2) 	<i>Teaching (n=9)</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using visual representations • Resourcefulness 	<i>Discomfort and challenge (n=7)</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Navigating a different cultural landscape
<i>Professional learning (n=9)</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exposure to a range of teaching styles • Challenging existing ideas about education • Supporting students with non-English speaking backgrounds 	<i>After international experience</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intrapersonal factors (n=12) • Working collaboratively (n=5) • Deeper cultural understandings (n=5) • Communication strategies (n=3) • Approaches to learning and teaching (n=3) 	<i>Students (n=7)</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More student-centred • Catering for diverse learners 	<i>Relationships (n=5)</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meaningful relationships with local people, place and peers
<i>Contextual understandings (n=15)</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational systems • Curricula • Cultures • Classroom environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resourcefulness (n=1) • More relaxed in the classroom (n=1) 	<i>Context (n=5)</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Geographic • Cultural • Linguistic • Importance of these factors 	<i>Personal characteristics (n=5)</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of confidence • Teacher identity
		<i>Interpersonal skills (n=3)</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication • Collaboration 	<i>Broader perspective (n=4)</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of cultural insights • Widened worldview
		<i>Intrapersonal skills (n=3)</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexibility • Patience • Adaptability 	<i>Identity (n=4)</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced perspective of education • Being valued as a teacher
		<i>Educational values (n=3)</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lifelong learning • Greater awareness of diversity of views 	<i>English language teaching (n=3)</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interest in working with students with EAL backgrounds
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Future employment (n=2) • Employment abroad
Links to categories 1, 2 & 4	Links to categories 1, 3, 4 & 5	Links to categories 1, 2 & 3	Links to categories 3, 4 & 5

In brief, these findings highlight that:

- Half of the participants decided to take part in an IPE to extend their world view, both personally and professionally;
- Around one-third of the participants, prior to their IPE, hoped to improve their pedagogical skills and knowledge, but after the experience this shifted to over one-third of participants finding they instead improved their interpersonal skills;
- One-third of participants found that the teaching they had engaged in during their IPE had an influence on what they did in their classroom practice and how they went about this; and
- One-quarter of the participants identified that the ongoing influence of their IPE had been improvement in their ability to navigate and negotiate discomfort and challenges in their professional and personal lives.

Part 2: Examples of some of the categories that from the focus group discussion

This section delves further into the long-term influences of IPE by offering examples, taken from the focus group data, of the categories. With such rich data, it was decided to offer more substantial insights for some (two out of

five) of the categories, which in this case are teacher characteristics and exposure to career pathways. The quotes included here offer representative insights into the participants' experiences and evidence of the categories identified after deductive analysis of the interview data.

4.1 Teacher Characteristics

Louisa and Yuan both spoke in-depth about how their experiences abroad shifted their thinking about what matters to them in relation to learning and teaching, especially in terms of the affective characteristics of a teacher.

The following quotes from the focus group discussion start to capture Louisa's sentiments in terms of the influence of her experience in South Africa on her sense of what now matters to her as a teacher.

I feel like [the IPE] was a fast track for seeing what teaching is about at its core, which is keeping kids' safe, making them feel valued and respected, and creating an environment where learning is possible. Everything else is secondary to that and that's what you learn when you take yourself out of these normal contexts... I came back from South Africa telling people, and telling myself, that I didn't teach English and Drama, I taught people, and it seemed like such an obvious thing to say but I had never framed it that way – for other people, for myself, I don't teach subjects, I teach people.

Through these statements, there is an emerging sense that relationships are at the centre of learning and teaching for Louisa. By stepping into an educational environment in South Africa where there were few physical resources and a high teacher-student ratio, the stark reality she faced was that she just had her experiences and personal resources to draw upon to enable quality learning.

Yuan's learning from his time in Malaysia and the influence this had on his sense of the characteristics of a teacher are highlighted in the following quotes drawn from the focus group discussion.

I've always been a strong sort of proponent for equity in schools, and so I think it's great that we want education for all the students, but I have a passion for the students that just don't have access to better equipment, better technology and all that. So, I really learnt how to be compassionate and sensitive towards the needs of students who come from that kind of background - it wasn't simply enough for me to just be nice to these kids.

A lot of them came from really rough backgrounds, and so it's being sensitive to that – maybe they have to work right after school, so don't expect they're going to finish all homework. If they're yawning in class in the morning, it's probably because they've just come back from work, so let's consider that some of them might not even have parents. So, you've got to be considerate for that. And so that really taught me to, I guess, be more sensitive, ask questions in a better way, and to understand that students come from a variety of backgrounds.

Exposure to not only a different cultural context but different social milieu heightened in Yuan an awareness of understanding learners' needs and adapting practice accordingly. In doing this, there is a sense that this ultimately supports and leads to appropriate learning outcomes for that setting and cohort. This experience abroad left Yuan with a set of characteristics that he recognised as important to embed in his ways of being a teacher.

4.2 Exposure to Career Pathways

It is then interesting to consider what influence, if any, participation in an IPE might have on decision making around employment pathways. Both Louisa and Yuan identified a greater clarity around the types of schools they decided to connect with as graduates and cited their experiences in an international context as having a significant influence.

For Louisa, her experience in South Africa opened up a different way of thinking about herself as a teacher and what she was capable of in the classroom. This led to her feeling drawn to seek employment in a secondary school identified as challenging and potentially hard to staff located in the more familiar context of suburban Australia.

I think before I went and did the IPE, the idea of working at a [challenging] school, which is so diverse [and has] got that rep[utation] for being a rough school, I would never have applied there, I just wouldn't. But coming home from the IPE, I felt a lot more comfortable standing on my own two feet, dealing with school fights, dealing with students who come from a language other than English speaking background, dealing with students who have trauma. I just got the tiniest little taste of it and I found that it wasn't anywhere near as uncomfortable as I thought it was going to be. I found that I handled that pretty well, and I'm in my second year at [this school] now, and I love that school to bits. It's got its problems, but I find that diversity in that sort of patchwork, ragtag nature that makes up that school, is exactly where I want to be. And I don't think I would have been brave enough to put myself forward for a

school like that had I not had the extremes that were in [the school in South Africa].

For Yuan, his experience in Malaysia awoke a greater desire to work with students from non-English speaking backgrounds and bringing skills and experiences to this type of educational context. Yuan's time abroad cemented that this was the pathway he would prefer to pursue over more traditional classroom settings.

I'm more inclined to work with EAL students. I think I've always kind of looked forward to teaching English in all aspects, but mainly mainstream, but after IPE I was really keen to do EAL stuff. Unfortunately, I'm not qualified for that because I don't have the qualifications for EAL, or even TESOL, but I've got that motivation to look into doing that.

Yuan also found that an international experience exposed him to the realities of teaching abroad and provided him with a set of expectations in terms of what this might be like as a prospective career option.

I am quite open to teaching overseas, so this IPE was helpful in showing me what it could be like to teach in a foreign environment, what to expect and what to look out for when considering those options.

5. Discussion

As noted earlier in this paper, based on the work of previous studies similar to our own (e.g., Pence & Macgillivray, (2008); Willard-Holt (2001)), the following categories were expanded on and used to consider our data:

- 1) Pedagogical approaches;
- 2) Teacher characteristics;
- 3) Confidence;
- 4) Changed world view; and
- 5) Exposure to career pathways.

This study reveals findings that connect with and exemplify these categories, showing how participation in an IPE program has influenced participants' professional practice over time. Our research honed its focus on the influences that shaped participants future practices and decision making in relation to the teaching profession, years after the experience itself occurred, to better understand the value of international mobility opportunities for teachers. Aligned with this bigger picture thinking was the decision to maintain a more general rather than granular analysis to allow for a range of insights to emerge and to lay a foundation of understanding for future work in this space that can be genuinely more longitudinal in nature. The small cohort also impacted on this decision in terms of the approach used to the type and level of theorising that made sense in this context. An analysis and interpretation of what both the questionnaire data and focus group responses uncovered in achieving this intended goal and with the above-mentioned considerations in mind are shared below.

The questionnaire data revealed the interrelated nature of personal and professional growth resulting from an international experience with clear links to the five categories framing this paper. Participants reported they developed intrapersonal factors (teacher characteristics) and a deeper cultural understanding (changed world view), growth of a more personal nature (confidence), alongside broadened and enhanced perspectives of education, growth of a more professional nature (exposure to career pathways).

Notions of education world views extend the existing literature in this field (e.g., Mayne et al., 2013; Willard-Holt, 2001) by suggesting that ongoing professional practice is shaped by exposure to what education looks like and how it is valued in international contexts. A significant long-term influence of an experience abroad that also emerged from the questionnaire responses was developing different ways of thinking about and approaching learning and teaching that were more mindful of context, community expectations and learners' needs (pedagogical approaches integrated with a changed world view). All five constructs have an important role to play in quality approaches to learning and teaching not only internationally, but nationally as recognised in the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), 2014).

A final key area identified in the questionnaire data that has longer term ramifications was the development and enrichment of participants' intra and interpersonal skills (teacher characteristics informed by changed levels of confidence). While most participants experienced periods of discomfort and challenge during their time abroad, they emerged from this as teachers with a strong sense of who they are, what they are capable of, particularly under pressure, and a sense of place in the classroom and wider educational context. The earlier literature review might characterise this as enhanced confidence (Cinelli & Jones, 2017; Maynes et al., 2013; Willard-Holt, 2001). The data from this study broadens this notion by finding characteristics of empathy, flexibility, resilience, collaboration and communication emerged from an IPE and became more deeply embedded and influential over time. The

development of these characteristics potentially opened up employment opportunities, locally and globally, as our focus group participants explained they were able to draw on international experiences as clear examples of possessing such characteristics in an educational context.

The findings shine a light on how and why teaching experiences abroad influenced the professional practice of our participants, who are now qualified and practicing teachers. The data, particularly that from the focus group, signals that the participants' views of a particular set of teacher characteristics (Bryan & Sprague, 1997; Malewski & Phillion, 2009; Maynes et al., 2013) has been expanded through exposure to an international context and consolidated in their future practice. The participants shift in thinking was connected to their sense making about what it meant to be a teacher, which was significantly influenced by their international experience. While this study has not been framed by understandings of identity, the participants' developing ideas connect with Kamler and Thomson's (2006) understandings that identity is not fixed, but always under construction, being made and remade as we live out an experience. Another aspect of the experience of the focus group participants was that while their sense of teacherly self was still characterized by a more contextualized understanding of teaching approaches (Baxter, 2011; Willard-Holt, 2001) and a changed world view (Maynes et al., 2013), they highlighted the importance of examples gained through international experience as a form of currency to assist with employment. Having teaching experience in often quite challenging environments spoke volumes about the type of person and teacher they were as well as what they were capable of.

While the literature and questionnaire data highlighted the influence of international experience in guiding participants into work in international settings (Baxter, 2011), the focus group discussions uncovered a different influence. From their time abroad, the participants became more aware of the kind of school setting where they would seek employment in the Australian context (e.g., disadvantage cohorts, students with English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D) backgrounds, etc.). This finding is significant as it highlights the value of experience in culturally diverse classroom and educational contexts as meaningful beyond seeking work in international settings, which is not widely reported or explored in the literature. Notions of relevance speaks directly to a common criticism of IPE as not preparing pre-service teachers to be classroom-ready (in keeping with understandings and expectations outlined by Craven et al., 2014) for Australian students and schools. Our research highlights IPE as an opportunity to support participants in developing a range of characteristics that enable a successful transition into the classroom and an awareness of educational possibilities beyond mainstream and middle-class schooling while remaining in an Australian setting.

In the context of this study, while Australian-based professional experiences undeniably have a hand in developing and shaping pre-service teachers, experiencing learning and teaching abroad pushes the boundaries in different and unexpected ways resulting in deeper understandings and more significant connections. Louisa and Yuan's insights through the focus group discussion highlight the invaluable opportunity for learning and growth when choices are made to move outside ones' comfort zone.

6. Conclusion

In returning to the research question—what perceived influence has participating in an international professional experience (IPE) program had on participants' professional practice over time?—this research highlights the influence that time abroad has on future teachers' sense of self as a teacher, their approach to learning, teaching and education more broadly, and on the decision-making processes influencing their career options and pathways. International opportunities bring to the fore a range of skills and characteristics that many participants did not recognise they were equipped with until placed in a situation that challenged and caused a certain level of discomfort. Faced with this discomfort, they were required to dig deep and find ways to cope by drawing on the resources around them (human and material) to find a way to support student learning in that context.

Despite the small sample size, the implications of these research findings start to raise insights and questions that can be considered at three levels: policy, leadership and practice. Nationally in Australia, accreditation processes are making it more challenging for ITE programs to include IPE in their offerings. On one hand this is understandable when quality is an important factor, but on the other hand seems like a missed opportunity to speak to the Australian Teacher Professional Standards for graduates, particularly in catering for the needs of diverse learners. Significant leadership is required from schools and faculties of Education to ensure the quality of school placement abroad. If this approach is to be valued, then significant thought to appropriate resourcing and support mechanisms from top-down is required. At a practice level, this work reiterates that professional experience outside of a local school context is not a disadvantage but instead enriching, and in fact, highly valued by school leadership teams in the Australian context. Teachers with lived cultural insights and experience add a depth of understanding and expertise to their school classrooms and communities.

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