

# Wish you were here

## Academic supervision of international professional experience

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International professional experiences have long been esteemed by universities and pre-service teachers alike. This paper analyses the experiences of six academics who have supervised Australian pre-service teachers undertaking international professional experience (PE), with a view to better understanding the problems and prospects that they encounter during their overseas supervision. The respondents reported concerns about duty of care, blurring of relationship distinctions, and pre-service teachers' and the local supervising teachers' expectations. Using a narrative inquiry approach, this paper examines the interface between visiting academic supervisors or pre-service teachers, and the host culture, against a backdrop of globally normed, Western approaches to pedagogy. The paper also explores implications for support needed for international PE academic supervisors.

*Keywords: International professional experience; academic supervision; pre-service teachers; intercultural education; international mobility, narrative inquiry.*

### Background and introduction

Given their disruptive capacity, intercultural exchanges demand and nurture attributes such as flexibility in thinking, openness to new ideas, and interpersonal acceptance, deemed highly valuable in teaching. The Australian university that is the site of this study offers annual in-school, international professional experiences in the Asia-Pacific region for its pre-service primary teachers. Serving the needs of the school students is the ultimate goal of these international PEs. This is optimally done, it is posited here, by supporting the pre-service teachers, and, in turn, the staff who supervise them.

International PEs can be organised in various ways (Buchanan, Major, Harbon & Kearney, 2017). At the site university, an academic accompanies the pre-service teachers overseas to the host schools, observes their lessons, offers advice and writes their reports. These academic supervisors are chosen from among those who respond to a call for expressions of interest. Unless there are sufficient pre-service teachers to warrant a second

staff member, the accompanying supervisor operates alone.

This paper investigates opportunities and challenges encountered by a sole academic supervisor during international PEs. These include personal wellbeing and workload, and relationships with the pre-service teachers, with the host schools, and with the host communities and cultural differences. It is anticipated that this paper will contribute to more informed support for international PE supervisors, through a better understanding of their needs.

### Review of the literature

Little research appears to have been conducted into the conditions under which teacher educators undertake international PE supervision. This literature review, therefore, includes a focus on onshore PE supervision, drawing inferences therefrom.

The positive contributions of international PEs to pre-service teachers have been extensively documented

(Beck & Kosnik, 2002; Cohen, Hoz, & Kaplan, 2013; Fayne, 2007; McDonald, 2014). International PEs offer pre-service teachers multiple and rich opportunities to engage in aspects of teacher competence in ways that differ from onshore PEs. See also Buchanan & Widodo (2016) and Buchanan *et al.* (2017).

Bodycott, Mak and Ramburuth (2013) note the importance of supporting staff in pursuing internationalisation endeavours. Beck and Kosnik (2002), in reviewing the Professional Experience needs of pre-service teachers, nominated emotional support, peer relationships, collaboration and realistic but challenging workloads as key factors. Arguably, international PE academic supervisors have similar needs, but provision of these is problematic across distance.

The roles and responsibilities of PE academic supervisors are significant (McDonald, 2014). Supervisors assume oversight of pre-service teachers who are adapting to 'the unsteady beat of learning to teach' (Mueller & Skamp, 2003, p. 429). This beat can become even more arrhythmic in a context of cultural and procedural unfamiliarity (Buchanan & Widodo, 2016; Buchanan & Maher, 2018).

The PE supervisor needs to engage meaningfully and productively with pre-service teachers and host schools. Fayne (2007) acknowledges that the academic supervisor is typically their institution's sole representative at the host school, having to 'straddle the two worlds of the academy and the school' (p. 54). The relationship between academic supervisor and pre-service teacher is typically characterised by complexity and potential conflicts, even in onshore contexts (Patrick, 2013). Acting in the interests of the profession, or of the pre-service teacher, the tertiary institution or the host school may at times be at odds. The complexities of these roles multiply when working across international, cultural and language borders.

In addition to the roles of assessor and instructor, Fayne (2007) distinguished three other roles of the tertiary supervisor: manager, evaluator and confidante. These latter, more pastoral dimensions of supervision, may assume increased importance when operating in an international and, by definition, residential PE. In a moral if not legal sense, duty of care assumes broader proportions in such circumstances. Fayne (2007) elicited pre-service teachers' views on their supervisor's help with: adjustment to the PE; willingness to confer; getting to know the pre-service teacher; observation and resulting suggestions; and trouble-shooting. It stands to reason that in international situations, international PE supervisors face greater pre-service teacher demands for support, particularly if the

co-operating classroom teacher has limited English. Arguably, pre-service teachers depend more on their academic supervisor during an international PE than domestically, where they have more avenues of support. Equally, supervisors may be in need of such support themselves, and may feel reduced capacity to offer the same to the pre-service teachers in their care.

The academic supervisor needs to foster a relationship with the co-operating schools' classroom teachers. In the context of English as a foreign language (EFL) pre-service teachers teaching in China, Yan and He (2010) recommend closer school-university collaboration. In a Kenyan context, Ong'ondo and Borg (2011, p. 516) noted that, 'co-operating teachers very often took a hands-off approach to their role and had little contact with the student teachers they were meant to be supporting'. Naturally, many counter-examples of this can be found, with co-operating teachers deeply dedicated to the professional development of their protégés. Nevertheless, a complicating factor in the program examined in this paper is that local teachers receive no payment for classroom supervision, so it is not possible to insist that they provide feedback or other support to our pre-service teachers.

Another potential fault line of PEs is authenticity. Fayne (2007) asserts a progressive characteristic of pre-service teacher education programs, as opposed to a pedagogical conservatism typical of schools. Ong'ondo and Borg (2011) cite one of their pre-service teachers referring to teaching as 'plastic (i.e. artificial) performances motivated by fear of and designed to please supervisors' (p. 521). If an objective of a PE is to develop 'pedagogical reasoning' (Ong'ondo & Borg, 2011, p. 523), then authenticity assumes crucial importance. Inauthenticity can assume greater proportions when teaching across cultures, as can assumptions about preferred pedagogies.

Some research has been conducted into rural and remote PE programs, which may resonate with international PEs for reasons such as cultural adjustment, distance from home, and difficulties regarding supervision. Ryan, Jones and Walta (2012, p. 52) use the aspirational terms 'sustainable' and 'supportive' for their rural PEs, recognising the added complexities of supervision over distance. They identify inter-university partnerships and emerging technologies as currently underutilised mechanisms with potential to improve such programs.

The usual positioning of co-operating teacher as expert, and pre-service teacher as novice, can face challenge in developing country contexts, where international PEs run the risk of becoming normative, thereby potentially

establishing or reinforcing visitors' and hosts' views that Western pedagogical approaches are superior. Buchanan and Widodo (2016) refer to this as risk as a *cultura franca*, a globally-accepted, Western-dominated set of norms for behaviour and attitudes.

It is recognised here that using 'culture' as a shorthand term is prone to essentialism (Dervin, 2010). Suffice it to say, though, that individuals and institutions approach one another with certain assumptions about ways of thinking, doing and being, that can lead to confusion or offence. In summary, international PEs offer great potential for intercultural professional and personal learning and discovery, even though such experiences may be overwhelming at times, particularly in the context of an assessable PE for a pre-service teacher.

While shedding little light on the circumstances specific to international tertiary supervisors, the literature has established that international PEs can be valuable for pre-service teachers; the role of the tertiary supervisor is an important one; and this role is problematic because it may invert the usual professional relationship of pre-service teacher and host teacher. These distinctions form the starting points for this paper.

## Methodology

Five staff from a metropolitan Australian university, who had supervised an international PE, accepted invitations to participate in interviews or focus groups to narrate their experiences of rewards and demands as academic supervisors and quality controllers for the university's international PE program (see Appendix for interview protocol). There were two small focus groups, and one interview, governed in part by participants' availability. Focus groups were the preferred approach, in that they facilitate conversation, in a 'comfortable, permissive environment' (Kruger & Casey, 2000, p. 9). Moreover, some participants had supervised at the same destination, albeit at different times, permitting further conversation. The researcher, as a coordinator of International Programs, had also supervised some international PEs, as well as a PE in an Aboriginal community in Australia's Northern Territory, took part as a participant-observer. The narratives exposed benefits and difficulties emerging from supervising an international PE, particularly those different from supervising onshore PEs, and in particular any critical incidents and the interviewees' responses to and reflections on them. The international PEs under discussion had taken place in Thailand, China, Indonesia and Samoa, mostly in the previous five years, with

a total of approximately 50 pre-service teachers. Of the destinations, only in Samoa is English the medium of instruction (from Year 3 onwards). Some of the interviewees had supervised on several international PEs in multiple locations, while others drew on their experiences of a single international PE.

The investigation adopted a narrative inquiry approach, in that it sought to understand the conditions of offshore PE supervision as narrated by the informants. Connelly and Clandinin (1990, p. 2) assert that narrative inquiry 'is increasingly used in studies of educational experience'. Narrative inquiry sheds light on participants or players, and on their backdrop or circumstances. The process enabled us as respondents to collect our thoughts and analyse them. The study also explored cultural assumptions that accompanied us as visitors. Spector-Mersel (2010) claims that the time is ripe for a narrative inquiry paradigm. Means for establishing trustworthiness (Loh, 2013) appear to be those common to a broader range of qualitative research methods, such as thick description and member checks. This study undertook a holistic content analysis, which sought patterns in the respondents' narratives (Wells, 2011) with a view to 'understanding teaching from the inside' (Elbaz-Lusisch, 2007, p. 359).

The narratives explored the demands and rewards of international PE academic supervision, compared to those of onshore PEs. They were digitally recorded, transcribed and coded (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003) for emergent themes. Coding was thematic (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013), to identify recurring themes, and axial links (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) among them. All participants gave informed consent and were accorded pseudonyms. They were offered an opportunity to comment on earlier drafts of the paper. All are highly experienced academics, of Anglo or European-Australian background.

## The international PEs

Our pre-service teachers, in their second or third year of a four-year Primary Education degree, apply to teach overseas for 10 working days, from two to three hours daily, in primary or junior secondary classrooms. In Samoa, where the medium of instruction is English, the pre-service teachers might teach in any subject area, while at the other destinations, they teach English only. In the latter circumstances, the pre-service teachers may be deployed to junior secondary classes, as the students therein are likely to have more advanced English than their primary school counterparts. The pre-service teachers teach in pairs, to facilitate collaboration and

mutual support, as well as English conversation in class. In preparation for the international PE, pre-service teachers must pass a subject, Teaching English to International Students, which deals with teaching English as a foreign language, intercultural communication, in the context of post-colonialism, and matters specific to the destination. Candidates are assessed, as are their onshore counterparts, against criteria aligning with the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL, 2014).

Academic supervisors are responsible for observing and reporting on the pre-service teachers' lessons and pedagogy, supporting them as necessary, and liaising with the host schools on behalf of the university and the pre-service teachers. Conditions in international PE destinations can differ considerably, and it is not necessarily easy for the University or its supervisors to control the pre-service teachers' teaching circumstances.

## Findings

### Rewards

According to the supervisors, the international PEs certainly appear to have conscientised (Freire, 1970/2007) many of the pre-service teachers. Some, for example, raised money for tsunami-affected schools in Samoa, among other causes, some returned subsequently to their host countries including to work as volunteers.

Our pre-service teachers also seem to have been very well received by the local school children. As Pamela recalled, 'The children were very receptive in the classroom, and loved having our [pre-service teachers] there'. In the context of relative poverty, the visitors often found the locals' generosity and gratitude overwhelming. Pamela recalled:

When the [pre-service] teachers were leaving, members of the [Samoan] school's community made the teachers dresses. They measured them up the day before the Thank You Concert, and they hand-printed the fabric, to honour the work [the pre-service teachers] had done. At times it was overwhelming. I felt uneasy – particularly in the sense that we parachute in. Two or three years later we're back.

Similarly, Linda recalled that in China the children made outfits for our pre-service teachers. The research participants cited these as real positives of the program, along with the relationships that are formed between the visiting teachers and the locals in each destination. Moreover, the visitors had practice – some perhaps for the first time – in 'being a foreigner' and exploring what living and attending school in Australia might be like for a non-English speaker. This will presumably help

them understand the challenges that face newly-arrived students in Australia, particularly those from the country they visited, as well as providing a starting point for bridge-building with these children and their families. Pamela, for example, observed:

[Some] Samoan parents sit under a tree in the playground all day. The kids sat with extended family groups at playtimes. Imagine being a parent coming to an Australian school, and being told to drop your kids at the gate. You go away and come back at the end of the day.

More broadly, the academic supervisors reported that our pre-service teachers grew in confidence and learned coping skills, realising that they could deliver sound educational experiences with minimal resources and minimal advance notice. Further research might explore how first-hand experience of a regional country and its education system might also inform pre-service teachers' subsequent teaching.

### Responsibilities and duty of care

Duty of care during international PEs, and where this reasonably begins and ends, emerged as significant for the supervisors. Steve described his experience of being an academic supervisor as 'more intimate' than its onshore counterpart. Others referred to the need for greater mentoring or counselling than at home. This aspect is further illustrated by the following conversations with Pamela and Beverly about their visits to Samoa.

I had a student disclose to me before we went...issues of anxiety. She wanted to know which room I was sleeping in, so that if she needed to, in the night, she could come and speak with me. (Pamela)

When crossing the street I actually grabbed their hands and they grabbed each other's hands and we walked across as a team and I'm the one who put my hand up to stop the traffic. [Author's note: This is routine practice in Bandung; local pedestrians routinely hold up their hands to halt traffic, momentarily interrupting its walking-pace progress.] A couple of times I went into the girls' rooms, and particularly when a student was having an anxiety attack and I sat on the bed and helped them. When some students were told their clothes were too revealing [to be appropriate for school], I actually gave them a couple of my tops to wear that were a bit longer. (Beverly)

These roles operate in conjunction with the routine supervisor-student teacher interactions, which, as discussed previously, can also be fraught. The participants all agreed that had the genders involved been different, the above scenarios would be have been impossible or inappropriate. As Pamela commented, 'If one of the male

students had asked which room I was sleeping in, I would have felt creepy'. Both Pamela and Beverly commented that their roles at times resembled mothering, with Beverly reporting feeling a strong sense of being 'in loco parentis'. Steve also commented, 'Because I'm middle aged, I tend to be more parental in initial expectations of the students. Some were traumatised by how things were going, they needed some fatherly care'. By contrast, Mike commented, 'I don't think females relate the same way to males. [Females are] like the mum; we're like the slightly weird uncle'. Another issue that arose concerned the use of alcohol; knowing whether and when to join pre-service teachers at social occasions created some uncertainty, as some of these were formal functions of the hosting institutions. As Pamela explained, even when we compensate for our 'alien' home culture in an effort to be sensitive to host cultures, our resulting behaviours might not match local expectations. 'Perhaps even because of over-compensating,' added James.

Concerns about protecting our pre-service teachers also presented an ill-defined demarcation line. During one Samoa international PE, an Australian male rugby team booked into the same hotel as the visitors. Pamela recalled their arrival as they first encountered our pre-service teachers: 'You could see their eyes popping out of their heads...these beautiful young women lying in bikinis reading their books beside the pool'. Pamela lamented that following the final day of teaching some of the pre-service teachers decided to watch the team play and then join the post-match celebrations. She said, 'It then split the group, at a time when they should have come together to celebrate their [teaching] achievement'. The next day, one of the pre-service teachers came to her and reported to her what had happened at the celebrations. 'I felt professionally compromised and awkward,' she said. Given that some students struggled interculturally and, in one case, had disclosed beforehand potential problems, there remained a range of tensions for the academic international PE supervisors. Among these are exclusion criteria for international PE applicants; reasonable harm minimisation and duty of care; equality of opportunity for pre-service teachers; minimising the likelihood of at-risk situations; and upholding the reputation of institutions, the profession, and, most fundamentally, teaching quality.

The international PE places other demands on academic supervisors exceeding those of supervisors onshore. Because the supervisors take principal responsibility for writing pre-service teachers' reports, they need to

observe as many lessons as practicable. They typically supervise more pre-service teachers than would be the case domestically. Social and cultural obligations, such as welcome and farewell functions, convivial though they are, also demand a supervisor's time. Beverly and Linda also mentioned delivering seminars at their respective host/gatekeeper universities – three, in Beverly's case.

The respondents referred to the potential advantages of having a supervising partner to help or to confer with. Beverly recounted how the day following the panic attack referred to above, she decided it was preferable not to leave the pre-service teacher alone at the hotel, but to invite her to observe at the school. Another panic attack occurred during the day and Beverly sent the student back to the hotel with another pre-service teacher, because she herself had to continue supervising. She said having another academic staff member on hand would have been useful in such circumstances. Pamela said that on one occasion in Samoa she decided that the bus provided by the local Ministry of Education should leave for school without waiting any longer for a tardy pre-service teacher, adding that it would have been good to confer with another supervisor on how long it was appropriate to wait. One of Pamela's pre-service teachers failed the international PE, and Pamela said she would have preferred to confer with another academic and discuss the matter jointly with this pre-service teacher. She reflected that the student, too, was without the immediate support of friends and family.

### ***Cultural issues***

Dissonance between the pre-service teachers' home and host cultures presented occasional problems for the academic supervisors, sometimes vicariously. In all four destinations divergent expectations emerged about appropriate school organisation. These included dress codes in Indonesia, preparedness of international PE schools in Thailand, and use of corporal punishment in Samoa; one of our pre-service teachers was traumatised by witnessing 'pulling ears, poking, pinching' of children, to the point where she asked to be deployed to another classroom. Some co-operating teachers in Samoa are also taxi drivers, and they would accept a fare during school time, which occasionally left our pre-service teachers without classroom support for extended periods.

The pre-service teacher's distress with corporal punishment was resolved easily. Because of the informal allocation of our pre-service teachers to classes, it was a fairly straightforward matter to redeploy her. The research participants indicated that this may be less

confronting for the academic supervisors, whose own schooling may have been characterised similarly, than for a young female pre-service teacher. Further compounding this, such instances of corporal punishment, if observed in Australia, would constitute an offence mandating reporting.

The corporal punishment incident seemed to pass relatively unnoticed by the Samoans at the school, but it left the visitors feeling discomfited. In Australia, a request to deploy a pre-service teacher to another class might be more likely to raise questions or objections from a co-operating teacher. The participants reported other incidents with similar apparent impact. Steve recalled an encounter with a Ministerial official, who arrived two hours late: 'We went to a school, and they [left] and I never spoke to them again, despite trying to initiate contact'. Pamela recounted a planned meeting with a Ministry contact person at the onset of the Samoan PE. The Ministry official was to meet Pamela at the hotel at 3pm prior to the first day's teaching. When Pamela returned to the hotel in good time for the proposed meeting, she was informed that the official had called in earlier and left, and would not be returning. Aware of the importance of first impressions, Pamela rang the official, 'profusely apologising'. The official responded that she just happened to be passing the hotel earlier, and decided to drop in at that time instead. We are left to infer that Samoans and Australians might typically interpret such encounters differently. As Pamela recollected, 'It didn't seem to matter to her at all, but it mattered to me'.

An incident in Thailand that disquieted the visitors concerned the organisation and allocation of PE schools in Thailand. Having agreed that the appointed time of year would be appropriate for the international PE, we learnt upon arrival that national exams were being conducted in all high schools, rendering them unavailable. When asked during the interview if that might be 'a cultural thing', Mike responded,

I don't care where it is, what country it is, anyone can organise that. I don't think it's a cultural thing. I think it's really slack, and I think these people need to lift their game, dramatically. To send you to a school where the students are doing exams this week so no classes - the person didn't even bother to check. You can't sugar coat this - they need to lift their game.

A matter of dress code arose in Samoa but was easily resolved. As Pamela explained, the Principal at one school was openly critical of one of our male pre-service teachers, 'who, to his credit, went and bought some *lava lavas* [traditional male wraparound] and collared shirts

from the local market to subsequently wear to school. This was openly appreciated by the Principal'.

It stands to reason that Australians must also behave in ways that remain subliminal to us or seem not to matter, but matter to the hosts, who might politely decline to bring the indiscretion to visitors' attention. Some of our pre-service teachers appear to have flouted local social conventions. Mike recollected with displeasure that several of our pre-service teachers departed early from a school farewell lunch in Thailand.

Our limited literacy with the host cultures gave rise to what research participants saw as mixed or contradictory messages from the hosts. Having anticipated high levels of extended family support and care in their host countries, both Linda and Steve reported being taken aback by seeing people with no apparent source of family support and little government welfare. Linda was shocked to meet a retired university lecturer, who was 'pretty much confined to one room because there wasn't a welfare system'. Steve also recounted what he saw as a paradox between Samoan religious fealty and apparent levels of drunkenness and domestic violence. He also said it struck him as counterintuitive that, despite the apparent predominance of collaboration or collectivism over competition in Samoa, one of the schools set out to help their students gain entry to a selective high school. Such encounters serve to illustrate the multi-dimensionality and, at times, impenetrability of others' culture. We accept that we inevitably export our own cultural norms, assumptions and corresponding interpretations with us, despite our best deconstructive efforts.

Disparities in available technology also presented challenges, and/or opportunities, to pre-service students. Given our university's association with technology, some host school staff anticipated that our students might be there to teach them about the use of pedagogical technologies. While this misunderstanding was easily resolved, there do appear to be associated assumptions that technology affords superior pedagogies compared to technology-poor approaches. For our pre-service teachers to be positioned as the experts arguably inverts the pre-service teacher-host supervising teacher relationship. This also has implications for the expectations of academic supervisors. As Pamela observed, 'If the [pre-service teachers] are positioned as experts, then this really positions the academic staff as super-experts'.

One difference between international PEs and onshore PEs is that our university does not pay international PE cooperating teachers. In defence of non-payment, the academic supervisor assumes much of the cooperating

teacher's responsibilities through provision of planning support and feedback to pre-service teachers. Moreover, with a view to mimicking conditions in Australia, and for accreditation purposes, we adopt the onshore IP reporting form, the language of which may be unfamiliar to overseas teachers. Additionally, during the international PE the pre-service teachers may teach in a range of classrooms and at several schools, making it difficult to identify the co-operating teacher to receive payment. Nevertheless, non-payment arguably signals that local teachers are unworthy of assuming the responsibilities of supervision.

## Discussion

Two international PE-related factors emerged from the narratives: reward, demand and support, and intercultural dissonance. These elements highlight the backdrop against which the participants play their part. A third element, temperament, investigates the players themselves, and their interplay with their circumstances. A discussion of each element follows.

### *Encounters: Reward, demand and support*

This element concerns the demands placed on international PE supervisors, vis-à-vis the rewards and support offered. It explores the cultural milieus in which international PE supervisors find themselves and interrogates the kinds of responses these might precipitate. In the case of international PEs, it also seeks to understand how modifying some circumstances might better support pre-service teachers facing an assessable, accredited international PE, and for supervisors facing difficult decisions with little support or advice immediately available. This element also examines how building knowledge, expectations and resilience prior to the international PE might help supervisors and pre-service teachers to minimise some of the adjustment difficulties encountered.

A certain level of challenge is not necessarily deleterious. As Pamela explained, 'Culture shock is good; it's part of the experience', for academic supervisors and pre-service teachers alike. Pamela offered to supervise an international

PE because 'I didn't want a "smooth ride", but I wanted to professionally challenge myself and open up a sense of new possibilities - for myself - in terms of my own professional learning as a teacher educator'. Nevertheless, high demands without reward or support may prove debilitating for a lone international PE supervisor. Further research into reward, demand and support will complement existing literature on cultural dissonance.

### *Intercultural dissonance*

To the demands of an onshore PE, an international PE introduces higher levels of intercultural dissonance. Logically, a host culture that is more similar to one's own might present fewer challenges. The more unfamiliar the new culture, the more difficult it might be for international PE supervisors and pre-service teachers to

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fathom 'how the symbolic, material and behavioural practices in teaching and learning are experienced, work together, are related to broader social, political and economic developments, and have particular effects on individuals and communities' (Halse, 2013, p. 150). This supervisor-culture interplay needs to be taken into account when planning international PEs and

preparing pre-service teachers and supervisors for them.

It is possible that our pre-service teacher who faced a panic crisis in Indonesia might not have reacted to the same extent in Samoa. Similarly, the student who feared facing anxiety prior to visiting Samoa may have been more likely to do so in Indonesia; we can only speculate. Nevertheless, an aspect of Samoan practice, corporal punishment, proved to be among the most confronting for some of the visitors. James reported that of all his PE destinations, one in Australia's Northern Territory, in a relatively isolated school with almost exclusively Aboriginal students and staff, appeared to him 'the most foreign' he had encountered, as ways of thinking and doing were so unfamiliar to him. This highlights the difficulty in anticipating and predicting intercultural dissonance, making optimal preparation for an international PE difficult to ascertain. Nevertheless, equipping all students and supervising staff with as much cultural knowledge as practicable is a vital precursor to the successful operation of an international PE, and optimal support for its participants.

## Temperament

A supervisor's or pre-service teacher's temperament may influence intercultural interactions (Bastian, McCord, Marks & Carpenter, 2017). Temperament is an idiosyncratic, personal component, an 'emotional style' (Eren, 2014, p. 381) that can perhaps be gauged by one's responses to problems or crises. No attempt to venture into any psychological analysis of behaviour is proposed here but suffice it to say that different individuals react in various ways to otherwise similar circumstances. Only one pre-service teacher is known to have suffered a panic attack during any of the international PEs under discussion, although another feared she might. A thwarted meeting with a Ministry official appears to have had a deeper impact on Pamela than on Steve, even though both of them pursued means to address the situation. Similarly, Linda appeared more disconcerted by her encounter with a local person with no family support than did Steve.

Reactions might be a combination of individual temperament and circumstance. Our pre-service teacher who failed the international PE appeared relatively unfazed by the outcome. According to Pamela, 'He had already been having doubts about his suitability to teaching. It was a productive conversation and we were able to plan a path for him'. She added, 'But it was awful for me to be in this situation'.

Temperament may also derive from previous in/experience. Pamela had not travelled to developing countries before, whereas Beverly had visited Afghanistan, Iran, Myanmar and Algeria. Such prior experiences are likely to lessen culture shock for academic supervisors. Whether a person's previous destinations can be an indicator of resilience in such matters is more difficult to discern, however.

It might be tempting to consider increased intercultural acceptance as unquestionably preferable to the alternative. But universal acceptance of all aspects of all cultures may also be problematic. An acceptance or rejection of corporal punishment, and attitudes to dress codes are two examples that arose in this study. Similarly, we might not want to affirm taxi-driving teachers, although we understand the dynamics that might precipitate it. Concerning the Indonesian dress code, Beverly shared,

Part of me says I want to push the envelope here and not wear something too long...I'm a Western woman and this is what I wear. So I did do that a little bit, but on the other hand, in a classroom with Muslim kids, it's different.

Reserving our right to 'critique everything' is arguably a set of Western values that we seek to impose universally. Moreover, we are probably overlooking those things that we hesitate to critique in the West. As Steve put it, 'I didn't want to give the impression that I'm the great white bwana coming in to show them how to do their job'. Or in James's words, 'We're not there to rid or cure them of their Indonesian or Samoan tendencies'. I am inclined to sympathise with Mike's lament about the disorganisation encountered in Thailand: 'This is no way to run an organisation'; in so doing, I am arguably imposing my Western values.

All elements above are arguably controllable to some extent. The choice of destinations according to (perceived) cultural dissonance may assist supervisors in their responsibilities. Similarly, choosing supervisors with broader intercultural experience may minimise related problems, but neither approach guarantees a problem-free international PE. Perhaps the most controllable aspect in this narrative is building resilience, possibly through prior sharing of knowledge, information and understanding of the host culture, enabling participants to devote greater focus to their teaching or supervision.

A related problem concerns our international PE students' own limited knowledge about host countries. In Indonesia this manifested itself culturally in terms of the dress code. In an intercultural rich environment such as Sydney, one might have expected familiarity with typical Muslim dress expectations. A similar unfamiliarity with local context also manifested pedagogically when teaching about the four seasons in Samoa. The local children struggled with the concepts, and our pre-service teachers struggled to understand why. It emerged that they had limited awareness of Samoa's wet and dry seasons. Such cultural and pedagogical responses are disconcerting, not only in terms of the international PE, but also for our graduates, who will, ideally, become globalised third-millennium teachers working inter-culturally. It is to be hoped that these experiences add to our students' capital of intercultural and global knowledge, awareness and sensitivities.

The temperament aspect invokes a further tension. High resilience is at times linked with efficacy and agency (Bandura, 1982). Agency is often couched in terms of ability to change and impact one's circumstances - but such an aim in an intercultural context may smack of neo-colonialism. The circumstances to be impacted are those that concern the children's learning.



## Conclusions

Trede, Bowles and Bridges (2013) observe that inadequate preparation for an international PE can lead to negative learning experiences and outcomes. Ultimately, in the lead-up to and during the relatively short time of an international PE, there is a tussle between prioritising pre-service teachers' intercultural competence and optimising their pedagogy (Buchanan *et al.*, 2017). Pre-service teachers tend to prioritise the latter, their assessable pedagogy, and devoting attention to both can be a demanding task for them. Indeed, there is an argument that the optimal way to serve the international host school students is to focus all one's energies on teaching. This might present a particularly strong argument in the case of helping non-English background speakers acquire and refine their abilities in English, given current global realities and the dominance of English. There is a risk herein that an international professional experience can be a normalising one for staff and students alike, particularly in terms of preferred pedagogies. It is perhaps these two ostensibly competitive, yet also at times complementary, intents (pedagogy and intercultural competence) and the resulting conversations, even arguments, that may serve us best in our teaching endeavours, both at home and abroad. Nevertheless, the academic supervisor is left to do much of this tussling alone. While this is also likely to be an enriching experience for the supervisor, in the short-term, it can also be overwhelming, particularly in the context of meeting their other responsibilities.

The findings here present a strong case to extend further support to academic supervisors, such as deploying international PE supervisors in pairs where practicable. This would incur a considerable cost to the university, including fares and accommodation, and staff lost from onshore supervision and other responsibilities. In addition, there was universal agreement that international PEs consume more supervisor time than their onshore counterparts. Greater and more focused information-sharing prior to the international PE, and debriefing during and afterwards, including increased communication through Skype and other technologies, may address some of these concerns, particularly bearing in mind the ultimate goal of such professional experiences – serving the needs of the school students.

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## Appendix

### **Semi-structured interview/focus group questions**

Preamble: Our discussion will focus on the following: issues of wellbeing, and OH&S for supervising staff; relationships with the pre-service teachers; relationships with the schools (executive, staff and students, as applicable) and other hosts (e.g. a university if applicable); relationships with the locals/negotiating the culture.

[Prompts: Do you have any comments on how you think the host communities, schools and teachers viewed you, and by extension UTS (and, perhaps, Australians)?]

What were the things that surprised you, pleasantly or otherwise, about the international PE you supervised?

[Prompts: any first impressions; thoughts, feelings as you left etc?]

How, if at all, do you think the relationship with our pre-service teachers is different in international PEs (as opposed to onshore PEs)? How do you feel about this?

[Prompts: How did the pre-service teachers view you, do you think? Any differently from on-shore PEs? Did any of this constrain you to behave (or release you from behaving) in certain ways? Do you think they were more (or less) dependent on you, and/or dependent in different ways, during the international PE than in other PEs?]

Was there a host/mediating institution, such as a local university? How did you find negotiating with it and its key gatekeepers/stakeholders?

How would you describe the schools at which you supervised? Was there anything that surprised you, pleasantly or otherwise? How did you find negotiating with the executive, and with cooperating teachers?

Did you have any interaction with local school students? Anything you want to describe about that?

In what ways if at all were the demands different, particularly if they were greater, than in an onshore PE?

(If it's not too personal!) Do you have any comments about the out-of-school time while you were away?

Prompts: What, if any, were the main adjustments you had to make? Was there anything you missed while you were away?

How would you describe the international PE in terms of its capacity as a learning opportunity (or impediment?) for the students and for you?

Are there any structural or other changes you could suggest to make the international PE more supervisor-friendly?