CHAPTER 22

DEVELOPMENT OF GLOBALLY ACCEPTABLE TEACHERS: A STUDY CONDUCTED IN AN AUSTRALIAN TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAM

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Abstract

With an increasing number of English as a Second Language (ESL) students entering teacher education, the support for ESL pre-service teachers is becoming an increasingly important issue facing Australian universities (Han, 2005; Miller, 2010). This chapter explores the perceptions of 11 ESL pre-service teachers of the Master of Teaching program at the University of Tasmania, and support strategies that are in place to support their future teaching and learning. These ESL pre-service teachers were from four language and cultural backgrounds. They were encouraged to reflect on their teaching practices in weekly focus group meetings, reflective journals and surveys responses. The finding of this study contribute valuable insights on these ESL pre-service teachers', including my own, experiences, values, beliefs, attitudes as well as the cultural and educational needs in the professional development toward globally accepted teachers.
Keywords
Teacher education – ESL education – Support strategy

Introduction
Due to the increasing number of ESL students entering teacher education in Australia, the support for this student-teacher group has become a critical issue. Recent literatures have identified an increasing diversified teaching force in Australia (Miller, 2010; Ryan & Hellmundt, 2003). Many international students come to teacher education institutions in their goal to be professional teachers. These beginning teachers bring different experiences and a global perspective to Australian classrooms. However, they also face great challenges due to their state of being ESL students and pre-service teachers. That is, they need to overcome the challenge of language and cultural differences as well as form a new identity of being professional teachers (Han, 2005). In dealing with this situation, ESL pre-service teachers need to be provided with strategies and support structures. In response, universities are under pressure to accommodate and provide assistance to these students to address their significant cultural and language differences and their identity shift (Cruickshank, Newell, & Cole, 2003; Dong, 2004). Hence, the teaching of ESL pre-service teachers is becoming an increasingly important issue facing Australian universities.

This paper reports a qualitative and ethnographic study which seeks to understand what support strategies would be beneficial in supporting ESL pre-service teachers to become professional teachers. This paper describes the perceptions of a group of 11 ESL pre-service teachers, including the researcher, from the Master of Teaching program at the University of Tasmania. Data were gathered from surveys, focus
group meetings, participants' journal entries on their practicum experiences, and the researcher's reflective journals on the focus group meetings, to seek further clarification of how to best cater for ESL pre-service teachers in future teaching and learning. During this research, the researcher placed herself as an insider within the research activities. This position enabled her to observe, participate and reflect as a member of this special target group. It is believed that the findings of this study may provide an opportunity to improve teacher education practices, especially support mediation for ESL pre-service teachers in their transition from ESL students to professional teachers.

1. Literature Review

The importance of providing support to students from non-English speaking backgrounds in teacher education profession has been emphasised by a large number of researchers (Bangou, Fleming, & Goff-Kfouri, 2011; Dong, 2004; Li & Kaye, 1998). There is evidence which showed that ESL pre-service teachers from other language and cultural backgrounds bring students in English speaking countries multi-cultural learning experiences (Barkhuizen & Feryok, 2006; Cruickshank, Newell, & Cole, 2003; Han, 2005). Hence, support structures put in place in universities can assist in the development of worldly teachers who have multi-cultural and global perspectives (Clement & Outlaw, 2002). An examination of the support strategies adopted by universities is beneficial for the intercultural development of both beginning ESL pre-service teachers and the institutions they belong.

Due to the status of being both ESL students and pre-service teachers, ESL pre-service teachers are required to have a higher level of English proficiency and self-resilience, so as to complete coursework at university and to perform as professional teachers in
classrooms. As a result of the language and cultural differences, the ESL pre-service teachers face great challenges in their coursework, such as hardly understanding lectures, getting poor marks for assignments, lacking of participation in tutorials, having problem communicating with colleague teachers, and hardly gaining rapport from their students (Cruickshank, Newell, & Cole, 2003; Miller, 2010). In addition, some ESL pre-service teachers have difficulties in their practicum experiences which is an important part in their teacher education in Australia. The practicum experiences involve making connections between what they have learned at the university and how this knowledge and skills can be applied in classrooms (Kiggins & Gibson, 2003). Some ESL pre-service teachers suffer from lacking of prior experiences in local learning environments and systems. When confronting these problems some of them may feel under pressure or even lose their hope of becoming a teacher and withdraw from the program. Thus, effective support strategies are never so important for them to overcome the obstacles and continue their study.

Australian universities and other tertiary education institutions have developed a variety of support strategies to address the issues faced by ESL students. The traditional support strategy refers to university assistance, where ESL students have access to language assessment, self-access materials, as well as short courses on study skills, such as academic writing, note making, and grammar (Cruickshank, Newell, & Cole, 2003). However, teacher educators nowadays intend to develop support models for a more specific purpose of assisting ESL pre-service teachers in their teaching profession. For instance, at the University of Sydney ESL pre-service teachers are supported by a number of teaching strategies including the Cruickshank, Newell, and Cole’s (2003)
mode, which provides remedial classes in each semester to help them cope with the mainstream classes.

2. Background of the program
The Master of Teaching program in the Faculty of Education at the University of Tasmania is a two-year postgraduate degree with a graduate entry requirement. The program has curriculum and method classes as well as a professional practice component, Professional Studies, which is based around understanding the practice of teaching. The four practicum experiences are seen as a significant part of this program. They involve pre-service teachers going into schools and taking responsibilities in teaching with the help and guidance from one or more colleague teachers. The ESL pre-service teachers are required to undertake the School University Partnership Program (SUPP) and four practicum experiences in the same way as the local pre-service teachers. They also have the support from the colleague teacher(s) in the classrooms and a university lecturer to come to their classrooms weekly to monitor their progress.

Apart from the assistance provided for teaching experiences, these ESL pre-service teachers also benefit from the following relevant supports and assistances provided to support their coursework:

- University wide content-based courses, which allow ESL students to learn languages in meaningful contexts, rather than to have them study the language as a separate subject;
- Tutoring approach and focus groups, one in which support staff work with individuals or small groups on specific areas of needs (Cruickshank, Newell, & Cole, 2003);
• Self-directed learning, which is mainly behind the establishment of self-access materials and the provision of on-line support (International Students, 2011);
• Other support services, (e.g. Weekly skill-based courses focusing on academic writing and preparation for examinations) (ELYSIS, 2011).

3. Participants
The research involved the participation of 11 ESL pre-service teachers who are from four non-English speaking countries including Chile, China, Japan and Germany. Of these 11 participants, the five Chilean pre-service teachers and the one from Germany were exchange students who were studying a degree in the Faculties of Education in their own countries and came to Australia for a six month exchange experience. The other pre-service teachers were full-time students in the program. These participants were from both the first year and second year of the program.

4. Aims and research questions
The study aims to determine the dominant discourses present in the ESL pre-service teachers’ perceptions of their experiences in learning and teaching within the Master of Teaching program. The research seeks to find out how the ESL pre-service teachers are supported in both their practicum experiences as well as their university courses. It also gives recommendations to enable future ESL pre-service teachers to be better supported in their teaching and learning. This paper addresses the following three research questions,

• What are the experiences and perceptions of ESL pre-service teachers studying in the Master of Teaching program at the University of Tasmania?
• What are the responses and actions undertaken by educational institutions to include the culturally diverse student population?
• What support should be in place to provide ESL pre-service teachers with a meaningful cross-cultural experience, and assist their shift of teacher identity?

5. Methodology and data collection
This study is designed based on the theoretical framework of qualitative approach, ethnography approach (Charmaz, 2006) and constructivist grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). During the eight weeks research period all the first year pre-service teachers were doing their School University Partnership Program (SUPP) as well as their Professional Experience One (PE1). The second year ESL pre-service teachers, however, were undertaking their Professional Experience Three (PE3). Within the research activities, the participants were encouraged to record and reflect on their teaching experiences, including the engagement, happiness, achievement, as well as their confusions, doubts, problems, difficulties and frustrations.

The data collection methods were in forms of surveys, focus group meetings, journal entries and the researcher’s reflective journals. Surveys were given before and after the practicum experiences to seek changes in the participants’ understandings toward the teaching profession. Focus group meetings were organised on every Tuesday afternoon during these eight weeks. The discussion of the focus group meetings was audio taped and made into transcripts to enable further analysis and interpretation of the conversations. The participants’ journal entries in relation to their perceptions of teaching and learning in Australian classrooms were collected in the last week of the data collection to further support the evidence. It is important to mention that the researcher was involved in the research activities as a member of the participant group. Therefore, she was required to keep
a journal on her practicum experiences as well as a reflective journal on the focus group meetings. These reflective journals were a further support to the tape recording of the focus group meetings.

6. Data analysis

A constructivist grounded theory approach was used to interpret and interrogate the textual data and transcripts to find the dominant discourses present in the ESL pre-service teachers' responses to their experiences (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dominant discourses</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discourse 1: Cultural conflict</td>
<td>614</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Categories:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Cultural aspects in teaching and learning</td>
<td>487</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Language aspect in teaching and learning</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discourse 2: Pragmatic practice</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category:</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Experience about the Professional Experiences</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discourse 3: Limitations</td>
<td>314</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Beginning teachers' concerns</td>
<td>314</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discourse 4: Professional identity</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Categories:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Attributes teachers should have</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Reason for choice of education</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The researcher used three coding processes: open, axial and selective coding to organise the collection of data (Sarantakos, 2005). Through each step of the coding approach, the textual data were identified and labelled into open codes, axial codes and selective codes. The responses to the identified codes were
recorded and constructed according to the frequency of their occurrence. Thirty seven open codes emerged from the open coding process. These codes were then reclassified into fourteen themes in the axial coding stage, and further refined and reduced into six categories in the selective coding process. Based on the categories emerged from data analysis, the research has uncovered four dominant discourses in understanding ESL pre-service teachers’ perceptions of their experiences of the Master of Teaching program. These dominant discourses are shown in Table 1 above.

7. Findings and discussions
Two dominant findings emerged in this study. The first finding involves the process of phronesis, in which the ESL pre-service teachers explore and refine their own perceptions of teaching through their practicum experiences. The second finding, however, is the construction of binaries in the ESL pre-service teachers’ knowledge of teaching.

7.1. Phronesis
Developing a “practical wisdom based on the perception of a situation” (Korthagen cited in Berry, 2004, p. 1307) on their practicum experiences is a challenge for these ESL pre-service teachers. Added to these initial perceptions is their difficulty in speaking the language which limits their understanding and perceptions of teaching. These ESL pre-service teachers came to Australia with a non-English speaking background; they must adjust rapidly and learn fast, in order to cope both academically and socially (Sawir, 2005). The ability to develop and reconceptualise their perceptions of teaching on their practicum experiences and make adjustments to their teaching practices is an essential requirement.
For phronesis to occur successfully this means that the university needs to provide structures, such as focus group meetings, that support ESL pre-service teachers’ construction of knowledge. Traditional teacher education practices have been challenged in that pre-service teachers cannot successfully produce the knowledge they have been presented and expected to produce in their own classrooms (Berry, 2004). In comparison to traditional lectures and tutorials, the focus group meetings provide ESL pre-service teachers with more opportunities to discuss their concerns and ideas, as the topics of the meetings are designed with more of a focus on their developing perspectives and the size of the groups are usually smaller (Cruickshank, Newell, & Cole 2003). Also, these focus groups support the construction of these ESL professional identities. As Lee and Boud (2003, p. 188) argue, “Academic identities, including identities as researchers, are forged, rehearsed and remade in local sites of practice”. The Master of Teaching program is a local site of practice for ESL pre-service teachers to develop and construct their teaching identities. This finding is evidenced in one of the ESL pre-service teachers’ discussions in the last focus group meetings:

"Now I can possibly say, I have given a beautiful full stop to my PE3 (Professional Experience Three). In this practicum, I took more teaching and stayed closer to my students as a real teacher. I found now I can fit myself into an Australian classroom and I made another big step towards my life of teaching... It has been a great experience spending time with all of you to discuss what we have learnt during the weeks. I have learned a lot during the discussions, and most important, having the chance to meet all the people in the group gives me a lot more confidence because I know that I can come to someone to discuss the difficulties I met, and know that there is someone there to support me."

*Transcription of focus group meetings*
7.2 Binaries

The second finding specifically appears in a Conflicting binaries model which is developed from all of the discourses listed in the last section. As this research has an explicit focus on the ESL pre-service teachers' teaching and learning in the Master of Teaching program, there are a few "living contradictions" in their developing subjectivities (Whitehead cited in Berry, 2004). The ESL pre-service teachers' knowledge about teaching is reframed through phronesis which has the discursive effect of producing a number of conflicting binaries in their knowledge construction. The ESL pre-service teachers reframe their perceptions of teaching and learning, however, they learn to live with the contradictions and binaries in their knowledge construction. As Davies (1994, p. 2) argues, "It enables us to see the diversity and richness of our experience of being a person as we find ourselves positioned now one way and now another". These binaries are shown in Table 2 below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial perceptions of teaching and learning</th>
<th>Reframed perceptions of teaching and learning</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Teaching is about transmission</td>
<td>• Teaching is about the co-creation of knowledge with students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Teacher-centred climate</td>
<td>• Student-centred climate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Surface attributes of a teacher</td>
<td>• Inner attributes of a teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Initial teacher identity</td>
<td>• Developing professional multicultural identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Scared and unprepared for teaching</td>
<td>• Confident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Cultural conflict in teaching practice</td>
<td>• Developing a multicultural teaching philosophy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• English language is a limitation</td>
<td>• First language has become an advantage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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From Table 2 it can be seen that the ESL pre-service teachers’ knowledge and perceptions about teaching have been reframed through the pragmatic practice of teaching experiences. The main change in these ESL pre-service teachers’ perceptions is how knowledge is constructed. That is, teaching in an Australian classroom is not about the transmission of knowledge, which appears as a teacher-centred teaching climate; instead, it is about guiding students to construct their own knowledge, values and beliefs, which appears as a typical student-centred climate. Another change is how these ESL pre-service teachers’ initial teacher identities change and adapt Australian practices. Their ideas about what makes a good teacher changed to include teaching strategies. The ESL pre-service teachers’ identities shift from their “old self” to a new professional teacher identity (Han, 2005), and they start to build a new rapport in Australian classrooms with this new identity to “gain respect from zero” (Han, 2005, p. 2). This finding is evidenced in the journal entries written by one ESL pre-service teachers before and after her first practicum experience:

“I am a little bit scared and feel unprepared for this course. ...How can I teach students with my poor English, I don’t know many technical words, I don’t know all the Australian body language. I have a lot to improve within these two years!”

Journal written before PE1

“I assume studying this course has already had a certain influence to my mind. I want to be a teacher. Now I am not yet confident to say I am a great teacher, but I am sure I will be ready to take all the responsibility to teach in the future.”

Journal written after PE1
7.3. Recommendations

Two recommendations are also provided in this study. One significant recommendation is that the Master of Teaching program improves and develops the support strategies for ESL pre-service teachers. It needs to provide, as in this research, focus group meetings in which the ESL pre-service teachers can learn to reconstruct their teaching practices in "local sites of practice" (Lee & Boud, 2003). Also, social media can also be used to support the professional development of this student teacher group (Ting, 2011). This research also suggests an enabling program which is an online-based program that can provide ESL pre-service teachers with opportunities to exchange ideas with lecturers or other pre-service teachers through online discussions or sending messages. It is believed that these support strategies can cater for ESL pre-service teachers’ concerns and perceptions and better assist future ESL pre-service teachers in their teaching and learning in the Master of Teaching program at the University of Tasmania.

Conclusion

This paper reported a study which aims to investigate ESL pre-service teachers’ perceptions of the Master of Teaching program at the University of Tasmania, Australia. The effects of globalisation and technology means that teacher education institutions need to provide and create spaces that allow for the development of global teachers rather than only focusing on locally acceptable teachers (Han, 2005). The global perspectives and pedagogy that global teachers bring into Australia provide students with a cross-cultural experience which help them to meet their future lifeworlds’ needs in this rapidly changing world (Merryfield, Jarchow, & Pickert, 1997). Hence, setting up support strategies to assist them to enter the Australian teacher profession is becoming a
necessary feature of teacher education institutions. This research has made transparent the continual need for teacher education institutions to provide supportive strategies that can better assist ESL pre-service teachers’ teaching and learning. Supportive strategies and enabling programs, such as those made in the recommendations, are crucial in assisting ESL pre-service teachers to overcome the cultural and language difficulties and to develop their own professional identities to become worldly teachers who have a cross-cultural perspective to teaching and learning.

References


