Article

DIFFERENT VOICES, DIVERSE JOURNEYS: EXPLORING REFLECTIONS ON PRACTICUM LEARNING

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INTRODUCTION

Aspects of the learning practicum related to learners' lived experiences require further investigation at undergraduate and postgraduate levels (Ulvik & Smith, 2015). New models of delivering work-based or -integrated practicums are being implemented, particularly as COVID-19 requires the insights of practitioners in e-practicums (Muller et al., 2022). The teaching practicum is the most tangible, visible reminder of the interdependence of universities and real-world classrooms in teacher education (Santos et al., 2015). In this partnership-based Australian study with relevance to professional practice programmes in Aotearoa New Zealand, we examine how reflective practice, evidenced by learners' artefacts created on practicum, demonstrates emerging teaching ability "in real work situations," as one participant, "Miguel," reflected.

Here, we chart key learning landmarks from practice teachers' reflections (Mattsson et al., 2011). This study aims to contribute to the knowledge base for assessment design in teacher education by drawing on data from 22 practice teachers undertaking practicums. Their portfolios capture their growth and afford researchers access to rich experiential narratives. We demonstrate how critical moments on the practicum journey of practice teachers are experienced and present our discoveries thematically. After Bourdieu (1986), we maintain that the practicum contributes to the evolving formation of the *habitus*, revealing the worth of types of learning that occur. These are the cultural, social and symbolic capital of the practicum, and our study asks: What types of learning do practice teachers describe as the most impactful in their practicum enquiry?

Professional practice, in this case in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), occurs in the process of comparing what is observed on practicum with learners' beliefs and pre-formed theories about teaching and learning (Farrell, 2018). This is a complex process of resisting and accepting what appears valuable or not. According to Mayer (1999, p. 2), "comfortable metanarratives [about how to learn to teach]" are rare. Mayer (1999) argues that learning to teach is open to continued and ongoing redefinition. Therefore, she calls for empirical research generating "depth of analysis with [a] specific group of … teachers" over application of theory (Mayer, 1999, p. 2). This study aims to examine reflective practice, evidenced by learners' reflective artefacts created on practicum, and outline key themes in the contextualised journeys of a group of postgraduate students who completed their teaching at sites in West Melbourne.

CONTEXT

This study concerns practice teachers on TESOL practicums on postgraduate qualifications which involve a minimum of 22 days or 60 hours of supervised and planned work experience; in this case, teaching. Practice teachers can operate in a range of vocational language centres, secondary and primary schools, and private or government centres. Working with migrant and refugee adult students in government-sponsored programs such as AMES Australia (Adult Multicultural Education Services) is of particular interest for practice teachers. Another

attractive alternative for completing teaching rounds is a placement in an ELICOS centre (English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students) supporting international students, predominantly adults, in improving their English for a range of purposes. Indeed, 99 percent of practice teachers in this research project completed their placements in adult settings. Experienced mentors supervise practice teachers. Supervisors are required to provide constructive feedback on each taught lesson and complete a final report on practice teachers' performance, identifying areas of achievement and areas for improvement. A university colleague visits practice teachers at least once during their practicum to provide formative feedback. Practice teachers are encouraged to visit each other to support peer learning. Combined with a range of units in methodology and applied theory, the programme meets the requirements for further employment in Australia.

Postgraduate practicum is a challenging unit as students who undertake it are not a homogeneous group. Their main motivation is to expand career opportunities. As their teacher beliefs and identity emerge, there are at least two levels of transformation: from a university student into a teacher; and learning to become part of a complex educational setting with its own distinct histories, cultures, practices and discourses (Fitzgerald, 2018). We add one more level – personal construction. At this level, practice teachers form "a personal framework" of practice (Brown & Lee, 2015, p. 541) emerging from the experiences and learnings they identify as valuable.

The practicum requires various types of knowledge, skills and abilities (Brown & Lee, 2015). These types can be brought to two bigger areas: subject matter and the teacher's subjective philosophy. The first type of knowledge includes knowing the aspects of teaching (such as curricular goals, lesson plans, activities and materials). The second relates to teachers' views on what constitutes good teaching. Teachers' belief systems are built gradually over time, so a practicum would be only the beginning of the journey. Any beliefs impacting a practice teacher's emergent philosophy of teaching can be captured in their reflective notes.

The portfolio mode of assessment for professional practice (the practicum unit) allows a trajectory of 'becoming' via reflective practice and enables transformative learning to occur (Andrew & Razoumova, 2017). Whether graded or ungraded, the portfolio is a valuable holistic assessment. It consists of observation notes; reflection on teaching entries; lesson plans, supervisor feedback and a practicum survey. It is a strength-based assessment *for* learning rather than an on-the-day assessment of learning. Becoming a teacher, Graham and Phelps (2003) write, is a multi-faceted process involving individuals intellectually, socially, morally and emotionally.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Three themes permeate the literature informing practicum learning: identity, reflectivity and portfolio assessment. This emphasis is reflected in this brief overview of key literature informing the study. There has been much inconclusive research on how to learn to teach and what knowledge and skills are required to enter a profession (Yunus et al., 2010). This leaves researchers with diverse opportunities to review the practicum (Mayer, 1999; Ulvik & Smith, 2011). One dominant practice for both novice and experienced teachers' professional growth is reflection (reflective practice, reflective action and reflective enquiry) on events in and outside the classroom, a trend echoing Dewey's (1933) call for teachers to participate in reflection (Farrell, 2016). As such, teaching practice can be seen from two sides. First, the 'insider' (emic) view draws on teachers' beliefs about teaching from their experience and perceptions. Farrell (2007) calls these "theories-in-use." A second side sees teaching practice as an ongoing process of forming newly emerging discourses depending on the context and setting, the group of learners and other external (etic) factors.

Teaching how to reflect is a core pedagogical component of preparation for practicum. We define 'reflection' as "a generic term for those intellectual and affective activities in which individuals engage to explore their experiences in order to lead to new understandings and appreciations" (Boude, Keogh & Walker, 1985, p. 19). Focusing on reflectivity helps learners understand the affective, emotional significance of their learning (Kathpalia & Heah, 2008). Expecting novice teachers to engage in a reflective model is challenging. Their first exposure might

result in oversimplistic 'reflections,' "a myriad of judgements about what they experienced" (Walkington, 2005, p. 58). Acquiring a reflective approach to practicum enquiry builds a praxis that involves reflexive integration of thought, desire and action (Pennycook, 2004). According to Posner (2000), non-reflective and non-critical teachers by contrast rely on routine behavior and impulse, tradition and authority.

The practicum is a constant balancing act between received and experiential knowledge (Schön, 1983). This fact echoes Mayer's (1999) distinction between the teachers' functional role and the focus on forming a teacher identity, the process of 'becoming.' Drawing on Gee's (1991) theory of apprenticeship via discourse community interaction, Mayer (1999) argues that "doing the job" and "performing skills" are a good start for "becoming" an expert practitioner. Uzum et al. (2014) maintain that practicum experiences consolidate teachers' emerging understanding of the profession and contribute to their professionalisation. However, to become truly professional requires feeling like a teacher, getting involved personally, sharing knowledge and beliefs, and making a classroom a unique learning space (Graham & Phelps, 2003). Crucially, Ulvik and Smith (2011) stress, practice teachers want to *practise (v)* teaching and experience how it feels to be a teacher.

Considering these insights, we contend that the practicum creates a platform for teachers' socialisation, modelling, reflection and transformation – affordances evidenced in our narratives.

METHODOLOGY

This practitioner research study employed a naturalistic methodology broadly called qualitative descriptive analysis (Sandelowski, 2000). This approach enables exploration of practice teacher experience on its own terms in the manner of Mattsson et al. (2011). We use qualitative descriptive analysis because we present thematic narratives rather than retold stories, and we apply the principles of "evolved" constructivist grounded theory (Mills, Bonner & Francis, 2006). As Charmaz (2014, p. 10) wrote: "We construct our grounded theories through our past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives, and research practices … Participants' implicit meanings, experiential views – and researchers' finished grounded theories – are constructions of reality." The researchers identified "indigenous themes" (Patton, 1990) by using a holistic, instinctive, multiple-technique method. The two researchers used cross-checking for reliability and viability (Patton, 1990), comparing notes and generating convergent themes. To apply the thinking of Polkinghorne (1995), we analysed the practice teachers' narratives thematically and re-presented our findings as narrative enquiries. This method adopts word-based and scrutiny-based techniques of observation (Ryan & Bernard, 2003) to query the text, constantly comparing data within the sample. This process enables researchers to locate specific topics that can indicate broad social and cultural themes (Ryan & Bernard, 2003).

This approach has epistemological advantages. First, it enables the voices of participants, speaking through the narratives in their portfolios (their end-of-practicum surveys and their reflections on their practicums), to emerge as authentic data. This, in turn, enables practitioner–researchers to create theme-based narratives of lived experience, "reshaping an experience through narrating" (Barkhuizen, 2011, p. 6). This approach imparts a human-centredness that is central to our beliefs about knowledge creation via interaction in practicum education. The participants' narratives are valuable, situated demonstrations of "how conscious and reflective persons re-present and re-story their memories of events and experiences" (Mishler, 2006, p. 36). Second, treating these data narratively enables us to capture "critical moments" (Pennycook, 2004; Farrell, 2007) or "moments of experience" (Sandelowski, 2000, p. 337) to demonstrate turning points of practice teachers on practicum. Thirdly, it enables the practitioner–researchers, inextricably complicit in the practicum narratives and indeed this academic re-storying of them, to honour themselves as the authors of a reconstruction of experience and meaning (Mills et al., 2006).

Ethics, data collection, participants

We gained ethics approval to use the portfolio texts as data (Victoria University, HRE15-173). The portfolio included: a description of the theoretical underpinning of practice teachers' personal approach to teaching; lesson plans including reflections; the supervising teacher's report, and a set of reflective responses to survey questions designed to capture impressions of the practicum-based learning. For this article, we limit our data to the reflective surveys, aware that they best represent the emergent teaching identity of each participant, capturing experiences of journeying towards professional identity (Uzum et al., 2014; Yunus et al., 2010).

The 22 participants are practice teachers studying in a core postgraduate unit. They range in age from 22 to 70, 30 percent male and 70 percent female. They range in teaching experience from zero to 15 years. As mentioned, 50 percent are native speakers of English. Figure 1 presents the participants.

Participant	Pseudonym	L1 background	Years of experience	Gender	Age
Participant 1	Andrew	Native speaker (NS)	No experience (NE)	M	55
Participant 2	Runa	NS	10	F	48
Participant 3	Amaley	Nonnative speaker (NNS)	10	F	54
Participant 4	Wilson	NS	NE	M	52
Participant 5	Arina	NS	3	F	45
Participant 6	Michael	NNS	2	M	35
Participant 7	Edward	NS	NE	M	59
Participant 8	Ruth	NNS	NE	F	36
Participant 9	Era	NS	2	F	55
Participant 10	Migul	NS	10	M	56
Participant 11	Eva	NS	6 months	F	25
Participant 12	Rebecca	NNS	3	F	25
Participant 13	Ronie	NS	NE	M	73
Participant 14	Max	NS	6 months	M	28
Participant 15	Vera	NS	5	F	37
Participant 16	Andrea	NNS	NE	F	35
Participant 17	Lisa	NNS	3	F	35
Participant 18	Elena	NNS	5	F	36
Participant 19	Grace	NNS	3	F	45
Participant 20	Tania	NNS	2	F	40
Participant 21	Laura	NNS	NE	F	25
Participant 22	Mira	NS	4	F	32

Figure 1. Study participants.

FINDINGS

The three themes reported here relate to our enquiry. Our narratives emphasise learners' increased recognition of the features of an effective teacher and their enhanced potential as creators of informed materials and facilitators of learning. These two themes intersect with our third – how the practicum can enable practice teachers to discover and enact their identities as teachers.

Theme 1: Realising the underpinnings of a good TESOL teacher

One learner on practicum, "Max," was encouraged by his supervisor teacher's words: "You are becoming now a good TESOL teacher." What, however, does it take to become a good TESOL teacher? The initial thread in the responses was the choice of teaching approach. For most novice practice teachers putting into practice a communicative language teaching approach, recognising that learners need to communicate in real-life contexts was a valuable stepping-stone in their teacher development and understanding of what a practicum requires.

With growing confidence in navigating a classroom, for practice teachers a practicum became a space where they moved to more critical reflection to 'test' their strengths in new contexts. Practice teachers were keen to evolve, in "Migul"'s words, "their own method" of teaching, emphasising their own beliefs about what their students needed most. Migul and "Runa," for example, who had been teaching in other disciplines, combined various approaches to teaching their TESOL adult classes:

> The most valuable experience I have gained is to look at my teaching practices from a critical standpoint and ensure that I use strategies that align to theoretical standpoints like critical thinking and the incorporation of multi-literacies. (Migul)

> I was mindful of constructing my lessons around the Communicative Language Teaching method … [and] used a range of other theories, such as TPR (Total Physical Response) and Silent Method for certain activities. My teaching would therefore be an Eclectic Approach. (Runa)

It is not unusual for practice teachers to start with a 'standard' communicative language-teaching approach until they find techniques drawn from a range of methods, blending them to serve the purposes of their teaching and their learners. Practicum allowed practice teachers to consolidate their knowledge and start thinking about their own "framework" of practice (Brown & Lee, 2015) or evolve their personal methodology. "Edward" approached his teaching through forming teaching concepts: "I would have to say that all of my thinking during the practicum focused on three concepts – scaffolding, coaching and interactivity. Teaching techniques were chosen squarely on how they satisfied all three." A solid grasp of theories allowed the practice teachers to expand their teaching via creativity. "Ronie," for instance, wanted to bring drama and performance into teaching technique as an innovation: "I envisioned that I might be able to take my lessons further with excursions out into the real world and teaching English through alternative avenues such as singing, movement and theatre." "Era," a learner with a creative bent, reflected: "Any creativity in this context needs to serve, and be anchored to, a defined, structured and practical learning approach." Avoiding an abstract, metaphorical approach was a challenge for her, but a necessary adaptation for the class.

Max, who obtained their teaching degree as a secondary teacher before they joined a TESOL postgraduate course, found the shift from content teaching to a language-teaching approach based on teaching skills challenging; it turned out to be, as Max put it, "so different." They needed a solid framework for increasing confidence. Max's reflection finishes: "I now have a framework within which to understand where I need to develop my teaching." Challenges mounted when Max realised that working with adult learners requires a more holistic approach and finding topics which are of interest to students.

The theme of breaking established thinking patterns, challenging theories through deconstructing them and applying the resultant innovations, and experimenting fearlessly while adhering to principles, emerged strongly. "Eva" stated: "I would also like to explore the idea of teaching EAL through the arts, sport and/or other recreational activities." Learners were clearly seeking personalised styles of becoming a teacher.

Thoughtful supervision is a major contributor to successful learning for practice teachers. Having a fair and reasonable supervisor is crucial for a practice teacher's confidence to present and receive evaluation. Era notes that the process requires goodwill and good communication. It is not all roses. Runa recalled having to bite her tongue when her supervisor's demonstration seemed not up to her speed. "Elena" felt like an ant in a microscope when her supervisor consulted others about her teaching of a grammar point. "Mira," moreover, clashed with her supervisory teacher, perhaps fearing that her innovative methods and popularity with the learners made her a threat. For the most part, where there was trust, practice teachers engaged with supervisors, creating better lessons as a result, as in "Lisa'"s reflection: "I know I made many mistakes during the practicum … I feel that making those mistakes and having a mentor teacher who is not afraid to be honest and direct was what helped me to improve throughout the practicum." With the support of a supervisor and a receptive class, practice teachers report finding their feet.

Theme 2: Recognising capability to generate good lessons and manage multilingual classes

The many functions required in planning and facilitating a good lesson became obvious during the practicum. The analysis of practicum students' portfolios showed that they focused on their own performance as much as they tried to understand learners. The two overriding functions were: planning an optimal lesson which allowed them to survive under supervision; and evaluating their own ability to run a class: "Finding that topic that draws everyone into the lesson is vital" (Elena). According to "Arina," if the lesson is well-planned and considered then it can "run itself," allowing teachers to focus on interaction. "Andrew" learned the error of over-planning: "I have learnt to teach within time constraints and now I feel that sometimes less equals more." In contrast, "Wilson" found the happy medium: "What I really discovered was that the more I put into research before a class … the better I performed in the classroom." Era learned to trust her imagination: "There's a need to harness this imaginative facility in order to serve specific learning goals/outcomes/student needs." Ultimately, she developed a dictum: "Put simply, ideally teachers need a good brain and a good heart."

"Laura" mirrored what many students mentioned – the importance of flexibility and thinking on your feet in designing an engaging lesson and then tweaking it as the session proceeds in line with the mood of the learners:

> During my practicum, I spent a lot of time preparing each lesson plan ... As such, I realized
> that I needed to be as prepared as possible, but, more importantly, I needed to be flexible
> ... I learnt to figure out alternative activities in order to help my day go as smoothly as
> possible and allow students to gain the most from the lessons.

Engaging learners is key, and the practice teachers cited many strategies. Migul writes: "I like to incorporate authentic learning scenarios in my lesson design." Era's strategy is the personal anecdote: "Students are often most engaged if you relate a personal story to them." Such sharing builds trust, which cements relations. Having a versatile repertoire of topics, she argues, is also crucial: "Classroom teachers … talk about many complex and potentially controversial topics such as obesity, civil war, smoking laws, corporal punishment and addiction." Ronie drew on her life experience to recreate a repertoire of authentic learning stories for students, building trust with "my multinational group of speakers of other languages studying English in their new country: Australia." Finding one's authentic teacher voice and using it comprehensibly – "speed, clarity and complexity" – led Edward to a key critical moment.

Getting to know students individually and respecting their culture also creates good lessons. Max believed learning about them at a personal level was essential as it built trust. Laura struggled with self-disclosure, but gradually, with others sharing stories, came to feel safe to speak about her own life. Eva aimed to build rapport, even as she tried to create an identity as a 'master.' Edward created a bridge to his learners by recalling the theorist Gee's (1991) analogy between language learning and learning to play football: "A football coach can only help a player master it in a group with other apprentices." Wilson noticed a transformation in his class, a movement into comfort, when they mastered a communicative activity with his facilitation. Culture is a tightrope that "Ruth" learned to tread: "You must be active and vigilant while dealing with very diverse communities … I must maintain a balance between my teaching and their cultural belief." Era offers a meditation on her cultural learning being more than about skin colour:

> The practicum has enabled me to learn a lot about teaching, but also about humanity. I was interested by the way people from all parts of the globe often respond the same way to jokes or a moving personal story or an overly pedantic classmate. There truly is much that connects and unites us … To me, the most significant differences are variables like levels of empathy between individuals and degree of self-awareness.

Professional collaboration is another significant contributor to successful lessons. Elena and "Grace" spoke of the privilege of having a group conversation about their practice with a supervising teacher and their peers. Sharing ideas about resources and approaches with certified members of the discourse community enabled others' reflectivity to add confidence to their hunches about creating good lessons.

Theme 3: Finding teacher identity

Edward (whose story appeared in Theme 2) spoke of finding his teacher's voice. It may not have been his authentic, vernacular self, but this persona communicated to learners and as long as he felt well-prepared, he was happy with his performance. The practice teachers struggled with professional personas, with Era stating: "I'm not a 'natural' like some," but also realising that easing into her teacher persona enabled her to see herself as suited to teaching. This realisation came about because of the impact of professional practice (PP) over time: "PP has been something of an eye-opener – my self-concept has shifted a little. I didn't expect this. So, PP has been a more personally informative, even profound, experience than I was expecting." Ronie, too, became acquainted with her teacherly persona: "I gained an awareness of my teacher personality with an ability to be patient particularly with lower-level students." Ruth used her supervisor's advice to find her teacherly self and adjust it to suit: "Now I can say that I am more mature and confident to deliver the content to students."

Those who found their teacher persona contrast with those who discovered 'natural' selves. Edward remarked that his supervising teacher "says that the best teachers make the best use of their natural talents." Wilson stated: "I learned that I am a natural teacher and can put things together relatively quickly if I have to." Arina reflected: "[I have learnt] to trust my instincts and [I have realised] that I actually can do this." Andrew channeled his inner empathetic volunteer to create a natural persona: "I am also interested in doing some volunteer work in a variety of ESL settings to help broaden my knowledge and practical application of ESL teaching methodology." Ronie realised that her long experience working with people from other cultures made her a natural ambassador for the Australian way of speaking: "The practicum gave me an opportunity to build my professional identity as a teacher, consider appropriate body language, my appearance – wearing appropriate clothes and behaving appropriately – with a friendly attitude and a restrained sense of humour."

For some, the practicum was life-affirming. As Wilson said, "The course has confirmed my idea that I would be a good English teacher and it would be something that I would enjoy. I only wish that I had started many years earlier." For Lisa, the journey is one not of being at the destination, but making progress along the way:

I know that I am capable of receiving feedback and adapting my teaching in subsequent lessons to improve. I know that I am in no way a perfect teacher, and I don't believe that anyone is. I believe that every educator should have a culture of self-reflection and self-improvement.

Learning to teach takes resilience, patience, self-care and, above all, reflectivity. Practice teachers genuinely work on becoming 'good teachers' for their students and creating 'good lessons' – and if 'good' is not achieved it might become a discovery of its own. Their frequent use of emotive words indicates the dominant feelings in the practice students' learning: "complex" (Max); "pleasant and enriching," "relevant" (Migul); "realistic" (Eva); "fascinating, generous and welcoming" (Era); "the first long-term authentic teaching context," "terrific," "humbling," "daunting" (Edward); "invaluable" (Andrew); "warm" ("Amaley"); "challenging" ("Andrea"); "unforgettable" (Grace). Teaching and learning to teach are deeply emotional undertakings – by virtue of teaching being a social activity rather than a rational one, and the linking of emotions and cognition in a complex and non-linear way (Golombeck & Jonhson, 2014; Richards, 2020).

DISCUSSION

Our enquiry asked what types of learning practice teachers find impactful in their practicum learning and indicated three core factors, all bearing on emerging teacher identity and revealing capacities to learn reflectively from observation of and socialisation with mentors; and to create, facilitate and embody principles enacted in preparatory theoretical training. Like much of the recent literature (Graham & Phelps, 2003; Walkington, 2005; Farrell, 2016; Fitzgerald, 2018), this investigation showed that, for this group of practice teachers, becoming a teacher was a complex, personalised process involving building a teaching identity within multiple contexts and went beyond a simply tension-filled attempt to balance theory–practice application during the practicum. The emotion-rich process of 'becoming' is underscored by the participants' language, their reported findings of their teacherly personas, and the transformative nature of practicum. The 'voice' that learners report emerges from their reflection on how naturally they performed, but is also inflected by role model voices they observe, such as that of the supervising teacher. Crucial to this were the opportunities afforded to plan lessons and evaluate their performance, and to receive critical responses from the mentors.

The relational role of the mentor is a significant factor in making a practicum successful. Balancing the twofold expectations – to serve as an experienced role model and a facilitator of practice teachers' professional growth – provides a rich environment for practice teachers to find 'the way' of managing learning and experiencing emotions which intertwine with reflection. Another significant factor – the practicum as a site for trying out ideas (Uzum et al., 2014) – accords, too, with our findings, as shown by Arina, Andrew and Wilson's contrasting experiences of lesson planning. The confidence that comes from supported and successfully evaluated risk-taking is valuable capital. The practicum, then, is best seen as a balance of professional development and skills training. From this balance, an individual's professional frame of practice may emerge (Brown & Lee, 2015).

In terms of application to teaching practice, this study adds to the body of work viewing portfolios as authentic assessment and evaluative evidence for identity-focussed professional learning. These portfolios capture evidence of practice in process, reflecting on and improving teaching, and may serve employment purposes afterwards (Hooley, 2015), hence continuing the identity trajectory. Making teaching visible through collecting teaching-related artefacts also creates context for meaningful learning and reflection (Farrell, 2018), even on such issues as how the teacher may seem to learners, as in Ronie's external visualisation of herself teaching. Our future research plans to investigate how portfolios afford opportunities for experiencing multiple identities: simultaneously learner, teacher, colleague and more.

Portfolios, further, allow practice students and supervising teachers to work collaboratively on a range of tasks. The critical role of this collaboration is clear in leveraging practice teachers' desire to affiliate with the professional community. Era noted a growing appreciation of the profession: "I've long respected classroom teachers as a

profession, but I have even more respect now." Belonging to a potential professional community embodying the practices and discourse of the target profession (Gee, 1991) validated the profession for Era, and others.

CONCLUSION

Our collected responses of 22 practice teachers in relation to their practical learning indicate their realisations of their emerging agency as practitioners and their perceptions of their increased professional capability. Further, they underscore the value of applying theoretical learning from the classroom to professional practice. These results suggest the importance of preparing teachers for discovery, both the usual and the unexpected, in the process of planning, implementing and evidencing practicum work. They also point to new challenges for practicum education, such as the importance of briefing on-site supervisors and the necessity of maintaining timely reflective records as artefacts demonstrating transformative experiential learning. Although the context for the study was TESOL in Australia, the findings and principles unpacked here have broad relevance to vocational programmes delivered in Aotearoa New Zealand and internationally.

Practicum learning affords a fusion of the known and the unknown. The 'safe zone' is what is learnt in the classroom, such as planning lessons, responding to students' questions and selecting engaging activities, while the 'less safe' zone is a place of reflecting in action about initiative and quick thinking in times of being challenged, stumped, confronted, or faced with potential conflict and issues of maintaining face, cultural safety and social cohesion. Our view of the practicum is that the challenge of the unexpected keeps learners inspired in rising to and resolving challenges, continuing their learning journeys within classrooms and the professional community represented by the practicum site.

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