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Difference as an essential teacher in a Them-Us international context: Pre-service teachers' reflections on a university township teaching project

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ABSTRACT

This article explores data from a group of British pre-service teachers (PST) following a teaching programme in South Africa. Their reflections are analysed in relation to assertions that such intercultural programmes do little to change hegemonic beliefs about the 'other'. Analysis of questionnaire and interview data suggests that whilst these assertions have some validity, the issues are complex and nuanced. Findings indicate apparent shifts from object-based to relational views of the 'other', though these shifts were not always complete or fully developed. Sitting with uncertainty and discomfort prompted PSTs' critical reflections demonstrating the interactive and dialogic nature of intercultural understanding and provided the pre-requisites for personal and professional development. We conclude that when appropriately orientated, teaching placements in the global South can encourage critical, relational pedagogies, intercultural understanding and a dialectical relationship with difference which can translate into positive shifts in PST beliefs and practice.

KEYWORDS

Pre-service teachers; post-colonialism; othering; teaching abroad; professional learning; intercultural competence; difference

Introduction

Martin and Pirbhai-Illich (2016) highlight the importance of challenging PSTs' hegemonic thinking about the 'other' and the dominant object-based pedagogies which hold sway over education systems, including teacher education, in the global North. They argue that object-based ways of being, knowing and 'colonising logic' (355) perpetuate narratives in initial teacher education (ITE) which continue to divide the world into 'Us' and 'Them'. Similarity and difference are object-based, focussing on pupils, subjects and places as objects in an Us-Them paradigm, rather than relational, focussing on the relational space between people, subjects and places. Martin (2012); Martin and Griffiths (2014); Cook (2008) and Zemach-Bersin (2007) posit that intercultural teacher and PST volunteer programmes tend to reinforce, rather than challenge, forms of imperialist and colonialist thinking and being, which in turn hold sway over their classroom practice.

This small-scale case study focused on a group of PST volunteers who taught for four weeks in South African township and rural primary schools in the province of

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Kwazulu-Natal, as part of an educational partnership initiative facilitated by their UK university. In this paper, we analyse a small sample of qualitative case study data representing the reflections of the PSTs about their experiences. We examine two interdependent elements of their engagement with the intercultural teaching experience. Firstly, its impact on the PSTs' Us-Them thinking about their global Southern hosts and secondly, its consequences for them as aspiring teachers. These two elements are significant since part of the efficacy 'test' for such intercultural teaching programmes resides in their capacity to aid PSTs in drawing on life experiences to positively influence their future practice (Atlan and Farber Lane 2018). Following Hutchison and Rae (2011), we adopt the Jessop and Penny (1999) 'view from somewhere' approach, acknowledging that our analysis does not offer a comprehensive all-seeing empirical view of the topic from everywhere, but neither is it a view from 'nowhere'. As such, discussion of the data provides a launching point from which to extend existing discourse about tessellating concepts of post-colonialism (the cultural consequences of colonialism), othering (ascribing moral inferiority to difference) and object-based thinking (the tendency to objectify the 'other' rather than focus on the relational space between 'self' and 'other'). We build on conversations (Brindley, Quinn, and Morton 2009; Marx and Moss 2011; He, Lundgren, and Pynes 2017; Klein and Wikan 2019) about the value of programmes in which PSTs from the global North undertake teaching placements with partner schools in the global South. Whilst previous studies have explored teaching abroad initiatives from an intercultural learning point of view, the unique contribution to knowledge made by the present study is that the PST reflections and insights are rooted not only in their teaching experiences, but in the immersive experience of living with local host teachers, which influenced shifts in their thinking significantly.

Review of literature

Conceptions, processes and assumptions underpinning global North-South partnerships have been subjected to considerable criticism from a variety of disciplines (Valters 2014; Eyben, Kabeer, and Cornwall 2008; Martin and Griffiths 2012; Downes 2013), through various theoretical lenses (post-colonial theory, theories of power and representations of the 'other'; see Fabian 1983; Sardar 1999; Simpson 2004). Critics cite legacies of colonialism and imperialism, and the perceived ways in which power and politics (Andreotti 2007) in Northern hemisphere development action tends to result in continued exercising of economic influence over societies in the developing world and dependency on previously colonising nations (Durokifa and Ijeoma 2018). Other criticisms include the Eurocentric orientation of development discourse and the tendency of interventions and partnership programmes to position the cultures and identities of global Southern partners as helpless and dependent (Tucker 1999), fostering what Tallon and McGregor (2014, 1406) refer to as an 'innocent paternalism'. There has been widespread criticism of the culture of poverty tourism, or 'Voluntourism', in which global Northern volunteers tend to reinforce status differences by 'othering' (Macallum and Zara 2017) those they have signed up to support, becoming voyeuristic of poverty (Selinger and Outerson 2010) whilst simultaneously bolstering their own employability and online personas through social media posts.

Martin and Griffiths (2014) suggest that volunteer projects do little to change volunteers' attitudes to their partner countries and that the ethical principles outlined by projects are often compromised. Martin (2012); Martin and Griffiths (2014); Cook (2008) and Zemach-Bersin (2007) are among the voices positing that there is a danger of such programmes merely reinforcing 'contemporary forms of imperialism' (Cook 2008, 16) or 'developing a new form of colonialism' Martin (2012, 7). The concern here is that rather than creating greater global North-South relational symmetries, existing asymmetries are widened and hegemonic, object-based thinking about the 'other' becomes further entrenched. Volunteers, according to Zemach-Bersin (2007), merely take 'personal development' from the countries in which they are working, 'harvest[ing] the resource of international knowledge' rather like the colonial powers of the past 'taking' the natural resources of the countries they colonised.

Several studies (Charles 2017; Carrington and Saggers 2008; Marble 2012) however, have highlighted the importance of intercultural experiences in disrupting PSTs' conceptions of self and 'other', suggesting that international programmes can play a role in undermining hegemonic, colonising instincts. According to Charles (2017), experiences of teaching in different cultural contexts have the potential to encourage critical questioning of constructions of teachers, learners, pedagogy and diversity. Others support this view, arguing that opportunities to move beyond entrenched ideas and deficit constructions of the 'other' are essential for the preparation of twenty first century teachers (Clay and George 2000; Marx and Moss 2011). However, as Martin (2012); Martin and Griffiths (2014); Cook (2008) and Zemach-Bersin (2007) assert, such experiences can produce little or no positive change, or encourage precisely the types of thinking, knowing and being that they are intended to challenge. Others have argued that intercultural educational experiences are not always effective in challenging PSTs' constructions of self and other and fail to disrupt colonising discourses (Evans-Winters and Hoff 2011; Gorski 2008). Whilst studies have reported positive outcomes with respect to PSTs' changing attitudes to difference (Walters, Garii, and Walters 2009), the picture is generally mixed, with a significant proportion of research in this field reporting that when pre and in-service teachers travel to marginalised or disadvantaged communities to teach, images of the exotic, helpless 'other' tend to remain intact. According to Krumer-Nevo and Mirit (2012) it is the decontextualising of communities and cultures which helps preserve these colonising views. However, arguments can be made that colonising views *are* challengeable by intercultural experience due to their immersive nature which contextualises such communities. According to Todorov (1984) there are three dimensions between the 'self' and 'other': value judgements, social distance and knowledge. Immersive intercultural experiences naturally reduce social distance and have the potential to challenge both value positions and knowledge states of and between participants.

Findings from these and other studies raise important questions about how PSTs from the global North can engage ethically and fruitfully with less advantaged communities. One significant determining factor posited by Martin (2012) and Martin and Pirbhai-Illich (2016), is the nature of PSTs' epistemological framing of the 'other'; whether object-based or relational, and the presence or absence of reflexive, critical questioning of this framing and its accompanying assumptions. Herein lies a challenge, since epistemological beliefs can be stubbornly difficult to shift. As facilitators of the overseas teaching programme, this prompted our thinking about whether the intercultural global North-South teaching

experience undertaken by the PSTs in the present study is orientated to prompt such shifts or whether it merely intrenches existing colonising logic. In short, whether it is part of the solution, or part of the problem.

The intercultural education partnership

Since 2012, PSTs in the second year of an ITE (Initial Teacher Education) degree programme at the UK university in question, have been selected to travel to South Africa during the summer break. They teach in one of a cluster of township and rural partner schools in Kwazulu-Natal, where the mother-tongue is Isizulu but the official medium of school instruction is English. Partner schools are typical of the township and rural genre, characterised by basic school buildings, limited resources, large pupil-teacher ratios and predominantly transmission pedagogies (PIRLS 2016). Preparation sessions in the UK, facilitated by the university's global centre, over a series of weeks, focused on educational, political and historical contexts of township and rural education, dominant pedagogies, approaches to teaching and professional expectations. This material did not form part of the ITE programme's core content. Following this, the PSTs travelled to South Africa, where after a brief orientation from local school Principals, they began teaching full timetables of primary subjects. For the duration of their four-week placement they lived in pairs with the family of a teacher from their school. During their volunteering period PSTs were visited by a university tutor for pastoral purposes, but were not assessed as the teaching placement did not form any part of their university accreditation. PSTs fell under the usual monitoring processes of the school Principals, which varied widely between schools. This study focused on the views of five of the PSTs who volunteered to participate in 2019.

Materials and methods

The approach used was a single, small-scale instrumental case study (Tight 2017) which focused on one issue: shifts in attitudes and professional practice of a group of PSTs. The case was that of an intercultural teaching programme in township and rural primary schools in South Africa. Case study was considered an appropriate vehicle for developing insights into the issue to support the contesting and refining of theory (Thomas 2016) relating to post-colonial perspectives and intercultural competence. Whilst acknowledging cautions against 'quick, superficial [...] evaluations' of overseas experiences (Streitwieser, Le, and Rust 2012, 17), the intention of this qualitative study was to develop understandings of the PSTs' perceptions (Crang and Cook 2007; Kitchin and Tate 2000) about their own attitudinal and professional shifts. The results provide useful insights into 'telling instances' (Street 2016, 40) that may be used by others in similar situations as a comparative tool, or built upon in larger-scale future studies.

Twelve PSTs participated in the programme in 2019. Whilst 10 of the 12 PSTs completed the pre-questionnaire, this study draws only on matched pre and post data from a sample of five who were available to participate in all elements of the research. All of the five who participated fully were white, female and aged between 19 and 21. The aims and purposes of the research were explained to all PSTs on the programme during their preparation meetings; each gave their informed consent to participate and were aware of their right to withdraw at any time (BERA 2018). The study was approved by the faculty ethics

committee. A pre-placement questionnaire was administered to provide insights into their initial attitudes prior to travelling to South Africa. The questionnaire was qualitative by design and intended to elicit participants' anticipations concerning their relationship to their hosts, school colleagues and pupils, their perspectives on the volunteering activity, how all parties might benefit and be challenged and why they applied to participate in the first place. The questionnaire was conducted one month before the group travelled to South Africa, after their orientation, and provided a contextual backdrop from which to develop the post-placement interview. An analysis of questionnaire responses guided construction of interview questions to probe potential shifts in their thinking about the experience. Questionnaires (rather than interviews) were used to gather pre-placement data because the PSTs were not available for interviews during the three months prior to the trip, as the university term had ended. On their return, each PST participated in a single semi-structured interview, approximately eight weeks after the initiative, in order to allow time to reflect fully on their experience (Brindley, Quinn, and Morton 2009). Interviews ranged in duration from 50 to 75 minutes and were audiotaped and transcribed. The semi-structured interview, a prominent data collection tool in qualitative research, enabled us to access participant's perceptions, meanings and constructions of their experience (Jones 1985). Interview questions elicited participants' post-volunteering reflections on their experience of teaching in township settings whilst living with a host family for the four-week duration of the programme. Interviews drew on themes arising from their pre-questionnaires. The majority of the data discussed in this paper is drawn from the post-volunteering interviews.

Data analysis initially consisted of individual researcher coding of participants' interview responses and identification of emergent themes. Drawing on Ryan and Bernard's (2003) model, we highlighted, circled and underlined the text to indicate different meanings and codes. We subsequently met at a later date (Lincoln and Guba 1985) to share and discuss our individual analysis and integrate consistent units of meaning (Hycner 1985) detected across the data and ensure inter-coder agreement (Thomas and Harden 2008). Key concepts were then refined in relation to the data and organised under the following open codes for the purpose of interpretation and discussion: challenge to object-based colonising logic; learning from uncertainty and discomfort. These headline themes, along with all salient quotations and brief researcher notes were sent to the participants for authentication and confirmation of accuracy (Lincoln and Guba 1985). All utterances from the participants were rich and useful for analysis and interpretation, however the quotations presented in this paper represent the responses which most closely depict the headline themes for the purpose of discussion. Participants are referred to using the pseudonyms Sarah, Maddie, Shirley, Ruby and Lauren.

Results

'Us' and 'them': a challenge to object-based colonising logic

When asked in the pre-volunteering questionnaire what picture they had of South Africa before they went and where they thought that picture came from there were a variety of responses.

Shirley: I did think it would be all these poor people

with this idea coming from

TV, charity campaigns – Children in Need, Comic Relief. There is such a stereotypical image of white English people going out because they need our help.

Other students mentioned similar ideas, coming from films and television.

Maddie: a picture [is] painted by the media of people living in poverty.

Lauren: lots of shacks and huts

In their post-volunteering interviews these PSTs described the challenge to these stereotypical views that derived from living with a host family for four weeks. For example,

Sarah: I think I was expecting it to be a lot poorer. But there was obviously houses that had gates, like proper built.

Shirley: Living with my [host] family definitely changed some of those expectations I'd had though. It's like you see the difference between reality and stereotypes. I mean, I'm not saying there wasn't poverty, but like, some people are definitely .... comfortable as well.

Lauren: (describing the township) There's buildings and supermarkets and it's just like a little city ... it's much more Westernised than I thought originally.

Said (1985) identified how colonialism and subsequently post-colonialism, actively developed a binary view of thinking – rich-poor; us-them. This was not only binary but oppositional and hierarchical (Martin 2012). This 'othering' has been consciously or unconsciously brought into relief by charity work and is evident in stereotypical representations in adverts and fundraising campaigns. Whilst the PSTs' image of South Africa had clearly been challenged, it was evident that this 'new view' was being expressed in terms that Martin (2012, 7) would describe as 'focusing on the aspects of the "other" that are the same as "us" with echoes of the civilizing mission.'

However, there were PSTs who recognised the 'differences' but who used these to reflect critically on their understanding of difference. Ruby, for example, referred to the programme preparation for the visit, stating that her understanding of South Africa's apartheid past had framed her expectations and prompted her to reflect on what she experienced.

Ruby (in her pre-questionnaire): I expect to see pockets of deprivation and areas of wealth'

Ruby (in her post-interview): I knew a little about apartheid and obviously I know that things have changed over time, but there was still – especially where we were teaching, being in the township and living in the town – segregation. It's just different here.

Beginning to draw on her historical and political knowledge of the region, Ruby was able to reflect on the reasons for these 'differences'. All PSTs picked up on noticeable differences between the UK and South Africa

Shirley: it's just very different.

Maddie: I kind of noticed how, like, different everything was to the way things are here. I was a bit nervous about the differences to start with. But actually, I learnt it's best to just get involved and ask them. Like, if you're not sure about something, don't feel embarrassed

or worried that you're going to offend because all the people there were so happy to answer my questions about why they did things or why things were done in a certain way.

Maddie was beginning to express ideas suggestive of a shift towards a relational, rather than object-based conception of the 'other'. She understood her learning as being negotiated through interaction with her host family. Other responses concerning differences however, were expressed with less interrogation of existing beliefs.

Shirley: I've developed a deeper understanding of their way of life and that, actually, they're really happy like that. And it was lovely seeing them happy.' She went on 'even though they have less money than us, it's not really a worry for them.

Although this was conveyed in the context of anticipating feeling sorry for her hosts, but actually finding that she did not, and does demonstrate that she is questioning her own assumptions of a causal link between money and happiness, the view of difference conveyed here lacks criticality or reflexivity. Shirley's comments are indicative of a view of difference that extends to one culture being more suited to poverty than another. Klein and Wikan (2019) point out that comments such as these, although framed as admiration, are somewhat naïve and patronising. It could be argued that Shirley's experience reinforced her previously held stereotypes and she was in danger of what Bhabha (1994) describes as a 'frozen narrative,' stuck with an object-based colonising logic and unable to shift towards a more relational frame.

The nature of the interaction and relationship built with the host family was significant in framing PSTs' interpretations of their experience.

Lauren: I think it was more about being in a host family and living the life of someone in a South African family, rather than about being at school. Sort of, like, going to church with them and I managed to go to a funeral at one point! And so, doing things, like, everyday life.

Sarah: telling them things and their shocked faces. And then them telling us things and our shocked faces.

Maddie: I felt honoured to be involved and immersed in another culture. I think that's the biggest thing that I've learnt or taken is that they are letting you in and, you know, letting you see the way things are. So, like, it's quite natural to have questions and I learned not to be worried about asking them. And just, like, how they live is, like, traditional and they keep their roots – which I think is . . . quite lost in our culture sometimes. Like, we don't always think about the way or why we do things or, you know, how – the way things are going is so quick and rapid that, that's kind of – you don't see it here as much. Whereas there you can . . . relate to why they do things and why the way things are, because they're so embedded in the roots of their culture.

Ruby: I don't know that I necessarily felt prepared for quite how deprived some of the areas were. But, I was surprised at – when we went into the township, our host family had both – our host parents had grown up there and their parents still lived there, so we went and visited our Grandma. And went in her house and sat and had tea and watched the TV with them. I really enjoyed being included in my family's daily life, drinking tea and watching TV with grandma.

The reciprocity of these exchanges seemed to be a positive first step in exploring difference dialectically. The PSTs were beginning to make links between people and culture, seeing their hosts as nested in a cultural context and beginning to use this as an explanatory framework for mutual understanding. There was evidence in these reflections of 'the revision of [their] own identity in relation to cultural experiences' (Martin 2012, 20). When working with volunteers, Andreotti (2006) suggests moving them from seeing themselves as 'making a difference', towards 'mutual learning', analogous to a more relational, less hegemonic Us-Them way of thinking and being. In response to the pre-questionnaire statement 'The South African schools need our help' all of the PSTs selected 'Disagree'. When asked why they signed-up for the programme, none of the participants selected the option 'to help those less fortunate', indicating that they did not enter the activity with particularly strong 'making a difference' mindsets. In fact, there is evidence in the interview responses above that 'mutual learning' was a more common framing for their encounters with the 'other' than sympathy or helplessness. What emerges most clearly from these responses is the negotiated, subjective and imperfect nature of any shifts; dependent as they seem to be on the reflectiveness of individual, the dialectical interaction between PST and host and the usefulness of preparatory sessions they attended.

Learning from uncertainty and discomfort

On the pre-volunteering questionnaire the PSTs were asked to what extent they agreed with the statement 'I consider myself to be a confident person in new situations'. All 5 PSTs responded with either 'Disagree' or 'Strongly disagree', indicating that they all had apprehensions about what they were about to experience. Similarly, when asked to what extent they agreed with the statement 'I am able to manage well when put in challenging situations' only one responded with 'Agree', whilst the other four selected 'Disagree, 'Strongly disagree' or 'Don't know'. When asked in the post-volunteering interviews in what ways they felt they had grown and what they had learned from the experience, common areas identified by the PSTs were: growth in personal and professional resilience, confidence and intercultural understanding.

Shirley: Probably resilience. In terms of – you'd go into school with absolutely no idea what you were going to teach that day. One day we went in and there was only 7 out of about 30 teachers in the staff room. And we went, like, what's going on? And it's because they had all their union meetings on the same day. It was scary thinking I might be asked to teach a class I didn't know, or a subject I wasn't prepared for.

In the above quotation, Shirley uses the term 'resilience' in relation to managing uncertainty, a challenge which presented itself regularly both in and out of school, not only with respect to organisational issues, but also relational ones. These encounters with uncertainty were critical moments in the PSTs development. This description of not always knowing which curriculum subject or classes they would be teaching and when, was a common one, novel compared to their school experiences on UK placements, and illustrative of the independent problem solving which the programme demanded. Ruby identified similar critical incidents in which the context forced her to solve problems, in the moment.

Ruby: A challenge I faced was adapting lessons with minimal resources. You have a lesson out of the text book but I wanted to teach them in a different way and this, sort of, meant thinking and adapting on the spot, making do with what you have. This definitely helped me to develop different ways of explaining things.

Although Ruby described this situation as a challenge, she was able to recognise the benefits in terms of her professional development through the necessity to make in-situ decisions about teaching and learning.

The analysis of data identified that the concept of 'resilience' was inherent in the reflections of four out of the five PSTs in describing their learning and development arising from participation in the programme. Shirley described how developing comfort with relational uncertainty was key in developing her intercultural understanding.

Shirley: I was quite confident anyway, but this has just excelled it even more in terms of confidence in challenging circumstances. My confidence in developing relationships with people that you wouldn't normally has, yeah … boosted. I've definitely developed my understanding of others. So, whereas before I was understanding of people's feelings or situations, I never looked as to the reason why. I'd just think, right that person is that way inclined. Because they are. And I think going out there – because their education system is so different to ours – I was constantly thinking, right, why is it like that? Why is it like that?

The implication here, that being somewhere different and unfamiliar prompted greater curiosity and questioning about systems and people's actions and motivations is significant. Encounters with uncertainty and difference prompted Shirley to consider possible antecedents to people's feelings or perspectives, indicating that she too was beginning to see human dispositions as culturally situated. Similar examples of developments in resilience, confidence and intercultural understanding arising from the dissonance and discomfort of the unfamiliar came from other PSTs.

Sarah: Resilience and problem solving probably are the two big ones for me.

I think it's helped me grow personally and professionally. Personally more – just that it's put you in a new environment and the time being away from home, more than anything.

And confidence is the main thing that I would say, like – I was so, I didn't have a good time on my *[domestic]* placement this year, so I was going into South Africa knocked by that and thinking I couldn't even teach English children, how am I going to teach a class of 60 South African pupils? It was daunting. Adaptability and just being able to think on your feet with minimal resources was really important.

Here again, the personal resilience described was a consequence of being out of her comfort zone and far from the familiar. Professionally, Sarah frames resilience in terms of problem solving through adaptability and on the spot judgment. For Maddie (and her partner), experiencing and overcoming some initially uncomfortable challenges with their host family was a catalyst for growth in confidence and genuine mutual learning.

Maddie: I think, like, definitely an appreciation for other cultures. Like, that was something that – although we had a bit of a tricky time with our host family, like, I just found it so interesting. Like, learning all about the different things that they do. And, sitting around and having tea together at night and talking.

And confidence, definitely. I feel more confident. More confident teaching. And in general, like, going to new places. And being in new situations.'

Sitting with the discomfort of unfamiliarity and managing uncertainties in both professional and personal spheres and acclimatising to novel environments, interactions and expectations prompted significant insights and transformations in the PSTs. Maddie's description of having developed an all-round confidence and Lauren's depiction below of a new-found capacity for moving beyond an ethnocentric position, towards a what might be termed ethno-intersubjectivity is suggestive of fundamental shifts in thinking and being.

Lauren: I think, like – this is going to sound strange – not judging people or cultures. Like, not jumping to conclusions, and actually just kind of sitting back for a second and thinking, well, there's a reason why this is done this way. You look at everything from, like, such a – like, your context and your perspective, and – yeah, you learn to kind of sit back and look through other people's eyes about the way things are done. I think that, yeah, not judging people and the way they do things and – that's definitely something that's come out of it.

I think that it's made me more independent. But that sort of links to confidence and stuff. I've definitely become more independent. I'm not afraid to just go and do stuff on my own.

From these perspectives, it would appear that this is one area where Cook's (2008) assertion about the helping imperative of volunteers does not hold true. None of the PSTs framed their growth and learning in terms of what they 'gave' to the schools or that they were there to 'help'. However, perhaps what can be seen here is the 'new form of colonialism' articulated by Martin (2012, 7) with students merely taking 'personal development' from the countries in which they are working, 'harvest[ing] the resource of international knowledge' (Zemach-Bersin 2007, 17). Cook (2008) argues that teaching abroad is viewed as 'a strategy of self-development' with benefits being accrued by the participants rather than the receiving school. All of the PSTs identified gains in personal confidence as a result of the project but this was framed in different ways. Shirley identified confidence in relation to 'developing relationships with people that you wouldn't normally'; Sarah in relation to confidence in teaching when her prior domestic placement experience had not been positive; Maddie focused on her confidence in new situations and Lauren in her confidence in going out and 'doing stuff.' It is possible to interpret this as the programme enabling volunteers to take, but more was being expressed here than just this. There was an appreciation of the factors that led to this growth in confidence that seemed to suggest a longer-term impact on life choices and cultural sensitivities. Maddie explained that her participation in the project had impacted on her capacity for reflection and how she interpreted the world, 'you learn to kind of sit back and look through other people's eyes about the way things are done . . . not judging'. This had led her to 'wanting to know more.' This is a key learning point for such programmes in relation to how learning can be continued; how the historical and political landscape can be further shared with volunteers to aid interpretation of contexts they had experienced. It could be argued that supporting this level of reflexivity through discussion and debate, will equip these future teachers with the skills and knowledge to raise

questions about the legacy of colonialism and ensure that such discussions are a feature of their teaching. A response from Lauren succinctly illustrates how the professional element of the programme prompted shifts in her relational and cultural understanding.

Lauren: I think there is an element of not wanting to feel sorry for the children but I think I got over that quite quickly because, at the end of the day, you were there to teach them and if they were talking over you, you still told them not to.

Lauren's position of viewing the pupils as powerless and in need of sympathy had been challenged by her experience of taking on the role and responsibility of the teacher. The imperative for pupils to learn from her lessons presented a challenge to her initial *(post-colonial?)* sympathetic instincts.

Discussion

He, Lundgren, and Pynes (2017) are among those (Evans-Winters and Hoff 2011; Gorski 2008) who point out that intercultural teaching experiences do not automatically result in growth in intercultural competence, in the absence of reflection as a catalyst. The reflective process of participation appears to have distilled the experience to a degree for Maddie, Shirley, Ruby, Sarah and Lauren. Following Atlan and Farber Lane's (2018) suggestion that teachers' life experiences and dispositions influence their practice, we first considered how the experience appears to have been useful to the PSTs by challenging their thinking, and then how these developments might translate into positive developments in their practice.

Implications for PSTs and their future practice

The most commonly identified area of personal and professional growth arising from the intercultural teaching experience was confidence. This was linked in most cases to a description of the experience demanding considerable resilience. Robust self-confidence arising from experiences of success in challenging circumstances have been documented, by Bandura (1997) for example. However, the PSTs described not only growth in general confidence but specifically in intercultural confidence. Having begun to develop their facility for communication with, open-mindedness about and an understanding of the 'other' is likely to be of considerable value in their future roles and teachers. However, as Bennett (2014) and Knight (2011) point out, experiences are rarely transformational unless accompanied by structured learning processes, implying that the PSTs may not have accessed these insights about themselves without the structured research process requiring them to pause and reflect. It can be seen from the questionnaire and interview data that participants have made shifts in their Us-Them thinking and attitudes to difference. They identified examples of challenge to prejudicial assumptions and it is evident that some of their blunter, more object-based thinking about similarities and differences has been whittled by the experience and structured reflection prompted by the research process. In fact, it is evident in responses that the PSTs have begun to deconstruct colonising legacies in their thinking about their South African hosts and how the global South is depicted generally in the West. This was apparent in their awareness of the sources of some of their prior expectations about South Africa (films, internet, charity

promotions) and reflexive comments acknowledging their own shifts in thinking. Where hierarchical and binary thinking, othering and paternalism emerged in their utterances, it was almost always accompanied by appreciation that the global South is framed unhelpfully and inaccurately in the West, and descriptions of their own learning about this. This was particularly demonstrated by Shirley's realisation that people's perspectives and dispositions are culturally situated and her desire to consider why people are how they are. This cognisance of, and ability to deconstruct, stereotypical and hegemonic framings bodes well for their future as teachers of pupils from varied socio-economic, ethnic, religious or racial backgrounds.

Whether these shifts represent the sort of epistemological transformation that Martin (2012) and Martin and Pirbhai-Illich (2016) deem necessary is harder to discern. Whilst participants demonstrated degrees of critical self-awareness and a determination to make sense of encounters through relationship, their discourse, on-the-whole, remained seasoned with object-based vocabulary, even after their visit ('I think I was expecting it to be a lot more poor. But there was obviously houses that have gates, like proper built'). This may be inevitable, since ontological and epistemological shifts are life-long processes, not single events (Jokikokko and Uitto 2016). This finding correlates with findings from other studies, such as Auld, Dyer, and Charles (2016), that PSTs' experiences continued to be mediated by stereotypes and perpetuating colonial practices even after three weeks teaching in remote communities in Australia. Similarly, Klein and Wikan (2019) study of Norwegian PSTs on placements in Namibia, found that whilst participants showed more openness towards 'otherness' after the programme, changes in attitude were not comprehensive and ethnocentric attitudes towards aspects of Namibian society persisted, even after their visit. Aman (2013) somewhat pessimistically argues that interculturality, as experienced on university initiatives, rather than discouraging, actually tends to reproduce the very Us-Them colonising logic that it seeks to oppose. There is certainly evidence of that in the present study, that the experience of living and teaching with their hosts has initiated a process, but that it is a work in progress for all participants. Brindley, Quinn, and Morton (2009) noted that 'teach abroad' programmes are characterised by both consonance and dissonance, highlighting that whilst they can unintentionally reinforce stereotypes, international teaching experiences can cause PSTs to 'stop and ponder' (531) about a range of aspects, including cultural differences and pre-existing beliefs about them. It is likely that the combination of being far from home, in a contrasting location and without daily comforts and routines, along with the challenges of teaching, gave the PSTs the intellectual and emotional space to 'stop and ponder' and distil the new experiences they encountered, as they sat with both the familiarity of one another and the unfamiliarity of their surroundings. Analysis of a similar PST programme by Stahl et al. (2020) concluded that experiences with dissonance and isolation can prompt questioning of values, beliefs and position. This experience has the potential to enhance PSTs' intercultural understanding and positively inform their relationship to difference as they move into a profession which demands a commitment to developing self-knowledge, identity formation, interpersonal communication and empathy. Teachers working in culturally, ethnically and linguistically diverse schools need confidence to learn about the populations they teach by talking to pupils and parents about cultural or religious practices and requirements. They may be required to take extra steps to communicate and form trusting relationships with parents who may not be confident English speakers.

Intercultural confidence developed whilst living and teaching in South Africa may prove to be an early career catalyst for such practices, helping the participants to forge a positive, productive and undaunted relationship with difference.

Host families featured regularly in the PSTs' responses and it was clear that reflections on their expectations about South Africa, their experiences of teaching and encounters with difference were influenced significantly by having lived with a local family. Some of the most notable challenges for them generally, as well as to their preconceptions about South Africa, and in particular its people, came from interactions within the home. Interestingly, the challenge appears to have been reciprocal, with PSTs reporting that they confronted host family members on issues such as gender roles and engaged in discussion about cultural similarities and differences. Klein and Wikan (2019, 99) emphasise that during such global teaching programmes, Western students interacting with local people on a regular basis, and avoiding 'all-white student enclaves' lessens the risk of 'othering'. This is evident in the present study, where some PSTs formed dialectical relationships with their hosts and school colleagues based on mutual enquiry and learning (Andreotti 2006). Local family hosting appears to be the aspect of the programme least susceptible to encouraging hegemonic knowing and being in PSTs. The family home was the site with most potential for relational symmetry and fostering of functional (rather than dysfunctional) relationships with difference. However, despite their apparent success in cultivating relationships with host families and school colleagues, varying degrees of 'outsider' status were described by all participants, at home and school. They did not speak or understand Isizulu, the first language of their pupils, colleagues and hosts, and as the only white people working in the township they were aware of standing-out as novel and different. It is likely that their own experience of being 'different' influenced their shifting thinking (consciously or unconsciously) about colonising discourses. Discomfort arising from this may have contributed to the relational symmetry the PSTs eventually achieved with their host families and teachers. Whilst colleagues in schools and host families may have positioned them as experts and imbued them with status due to coming from the global North, the PSTs reported feeling anything but expert or a sense of status. On the contrary, depictions of insecurity and inadequacy were present in pre and post data sets suggesting that for the PSTs the experience was characterised by the disorientating contradictions of confidence and doubt; high and low status; centre and margins.

Trilokekar and Kukar (2011) and Olsen and Hagen (2015) suggest that experiences such as this can positively influence teachers' capacity to empathise with minority ethnic, English as an Additional Language (EAL), looked-after and newly arrived pupils in their home countries. The potential for enhanced cross-cultural understanding appears strong here and it is possible that empathy will move the PSTs towards a more dialectical approach to difference with, and between, the pupils they teach; moving beyond merely 'celebrating diversity' towards 'fruitful exploration of difference' and allowing difference to be the 'essential teacher' (Martin and Pirbhai-Illich 2016, 368). In describing the relational tradition of knowing and being, Martin and Pirbhai-Illich (2016) posit that knowledge of self develops through moments of relation to difference. Deeper understanding of self, one's culture and identity are revealed through interactions with the other. There is evidence among the reflections of the PSTs that the experience of living and teaching in South Africa revealed things about themselves as well as about their hosts

from which mutual learning might grow. This of course is a process, and as such will require considerable reflection and effortful enactment since, as Wong (2016) notes, teachers' beliefs and practice can be stubbornly static and resistant to change. They may need courage, since teacher openness to learning from encounters with difference can present a challenge to the status quo in schools according to Messiou and Ainscow (2015). Based on responses in the post-experience interviews however, there is reason for optimism. Developments in cultural insight and sensitivity have the potential to significantly strengthen their practice in diverse school communities, with minority ethnic and minority linguistic pupils and it is likely that the PSTs will carry some increased relational practices, enhanced self-knowledge and understanding into their interactions with pupils. Apparent in the participants' responses was evidence of their own insecurities and risk taking, along with realisations about the possibility of their own on-going learning. This has the potential to translate usefully into the classroom where an appreciation of the experience of learning, an understanding of risk and challenge as antecedents of learning and cognisance of mechanisms of learning are essential. Following their immersive shared experience with the 'other', the potential exists for the development of a pedagogy in which the trainees 'learn about, learn with and learn alongside' (Pirbhai-Illich 2013, 83) their pupils rather than simply teach *to* them.

Enlarged views are evident in the PST responses. Firstly, that people and culture are not reducible to 'single stories' (Adichie 2009) or interpretations. Secondly, that people, environments and culture interact and developing understandings of one necessitates understandings of the others. Finally, that intercultural understanding is interactive, dialogic and negotiated. Drawing on Todorov's (1984) three dimensions of the relationship between the self and other: value judgements, social distance and knowledge, it is evident that proximity to the 'other' has challenged and adapted the PST's value judgements, and that they have been able to develop knowledge personally, culturally and professionally of what was initially other.

Limitations and future research

This article draws on a small sample of data primarily for the purpose of furthering discussion about the efficacy of short-term intercultural global North-South teaching programmes and their potential to challenge global Northern PSTs' thinking about 'Otherness' and difference. The scale of the data set makes generalisations impossible. Nevertheless, the results highlight the need for further larger scale research with the following foci. Firstly, only five volunteers were involved in this study and they were self-selecting. A larger, more comprehensive longitudinal study following PSTs who undertake such programmes into their first year of teaching would elicit valuable insights into the sustainability of any attitudinal and pedagogical changes that arise. Secondly, as Jessop and Penny (1999, 217) pointed out 'the act of re-representing the stories and voices of others is not a neutral exercise' and we acknowledge the situated and subjective nature of our interpretations. This is not to negate any value which may arise from them, but we accept that the data was analysed through the situated prism of our positions as university lecturers in the global North. Awareness of this has prompted us to think and act with heightened reflexivity about the various positions we hold in relation to this research.

Conclusions

It is our conclusion that whilst it is 'impossible to exclude power and power relations from global partnership discourse and practice' (Downes 2013), intercultural education partnerships have the potential to produce a nuanced, situated and positive reframing of Us-Them narratives for participating PSTs. Global North-South intercultural teaching programmes can be a productive site for critical, relational pedagogies and fruitful engagement with the 'other' for PSTs. We acknowledge however, that the waters here are opaque and that no programme of briefing and debriefing can be predictable enough to avoid the necessity of developing comfort with uncertainty and challenge; nor should it, since the sometimes difficult and messy business of engaging with Us-Them concepts is perhaps a necessary step if difference is to be 'an essential teacher' (Martin and Pirbhai-Illich 2016, 369). Reflections on the data highlight a nuanced perspective on post-colonial theory, whilst not ignoring the legitimate concerns about how intercultural global North-South partnership is theorised in the Western academy, as object-based and rooted in colonialism. We are optimistic that programmes such as this can place PSTs at a nexus of culture and pedagogy from where potentially transformative personal and professional pedagogical developments, and enlarged views of the 'other' can emerge.

Disclosure statement

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