

Pacific-Asian Education

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Abstract

Education faculties in several Australian universities have conducted off-shore practicums, with a view to exposing students to cultural norms different to those they might encounter during an Australian practicum. Such practicums also provide experiences in teaching English to students for whom it is a foreign language. One assumption underpinning international practicums is that they serve to diminish, rather than to reinforce prejudices with regard to the host culture, and 'other' cultures in general. Such assumptions are worthy of scrutiny, given that off-shore practicums are expensive to conduct, financially and in terms of staff time and energy. The study outlined in this paper examined some of the affective as well as the cognitive outcomes for a cohort of six primary education students who undertook a practicum in Bangkok, Thailand, conducted by the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS). Prior to and subsequent to the practicum, students took part in interviews concerning their attitudes, expectations and apprehensions with regard to Thai culture and people. During the practicum, they completed 'encounters forms' profiling conversations they had with Thai nationals, primarily outside of the context of the schools in which they taught. It emerged that although all of the students encountered some negative experiences during the practicum, they were more enthusiastic in their praise of Thai people and culture upon their return than before their departure. More significantly, their accounts of Thai people were more nuanced and contested following the practicum. Implications for the conduct of such practicums are discussed.

Background to the Study

An assumption underpinning overseas practicums is that the cost of such programs is offset by the learning experienced by students over and above the vocational learning gleaned from (local) classroom teaching experience. A similar assumption is that such learning serves as an antidote to, rather than as a catalyst for, prejudices, ignorance or arrogance with regard to other cultures. This study set out to shed light on the nature and extent of intercultural learning sustained by a group of six participants in such an overseas practicum. This is of particular significance given that upon their return, such student/teachers might well be seen as authorities by their peers on subjects such as the 'national culture' of the country concerned, having undertaken in-country experiences.

This paper informs the conduct and processes of multicultural and intercultural practicums as a component of preservice teacher education. The purpose of the investigation is to shed light on the nature of such encounters and their contributions to students' learning.

...that effective intercultural communication requires an understanding of cultural and social norms, that operate in any communication situation.” Intercultural education could be defined, then, as those educational processes and experiences which promote effective intercultural communication. The study under discussion here, however, focused on the circumstances which promoted intercultural *learning*. The European Youth Centre observes that “intercultural education is educational activity which fosters an understanding of the nature of culture, which helps the student develop skills in intercultural communication and which aids the student to view the world from perspectives other than one’s own” (Hoopes & Pusch, cited in European Youth Centre Training Course Resource File volume 3: Intercultural learning, 1991) http://www.tcd.ie/Education/Teachers_Pack/Text_Only/b6/Def06.html (accessed 20/2/03). This project constitutes a study of an ‘informal, or extra-curricular intercultural education’.

A number of researchers and authors (e.g., Derewianka, 1991, 1999; Halliday, 1985; Vygotsky 1978) have investigated the nature and role of language in the context of society as a means to, and as a result and an indicator of, learning. Derewianka (1991) for example contends that texts which have commonality of purpose will also be characterised by common linguistic features. Similarly, the foundation of much of Halliday’s work (e.g., Halliday, 1985) is that form is related to function. Intercultural communication research has demonstrated the importance of the sociolinguistic background of interactants in speech communications (Brick 1991). The study outlined here sought to identify commonality and diversity of expression: the students used to describe their conversations with Thai nationals, as well as patterns common to the conversations in which they partook.

Methodology and limitations

The cohort consisted of six (of about 100) third year preservice primary teachers at the University of Technology, Sydney. While UTS students are encouraged to vary and internationalise their preservice teaching experiences, an international practicum is not a requirement of the students’ preservice education. The students self-selected for this, their fifth practicum, conducted between semesters, in July 2003; participation is contingent upon success in an interview which explores matters such as academic record, the risk of intercultural discomfort, expectations about behaviour. The students have to meet all financial requirements of the two-week practicum. Their peers undertake local parallel practicums.

Except for one mature-aged student, all of the students were within about 18 months’ age of each other, and all live in the relatively affluent ‘north-east demographic quadrant’ of Sydney. All speak predominantly English at home, and none speaks more than a few words of Thai. All but one consider themselves to be (Anglo- or Celtic-) Australian. Most had been overseas before. Two had visited Thailand previously – one on two occasions. The group included one special education student; all others were general primary education students. For a number of reasons, among them the English language ability of the school students, a

secondary school was chosen for the practicum.

Prior to the practicum, each of the students individually took part in a face-to-face interview and were asked to share their expectations of the practicum, to briefly describe their perceptions of Thai culture, and to indicate if they expected to meet any problems in encountering Thai people and their culture; any misgivings or apprehensions they had about the international practicum. (See Appendix A for a list of the interview questions.)

It needs to be noted here that for convenience, expressions such as “Thai culture” are at times used unproblematically, as if there exists one monolithic Thai culture.

During the practicum, the students were provided with copies of an ‘encounter template,’ and asked to document various linguistic and paralinguistic aspects of conversations they had with locals in Thailand, such as modality, stance and body language of interlocutors etc. (See Appendix B for a copy of the template.) Five of the students furnished completed forms on their return to Australia, providing 24 forms.

Subsequent to their return to university, each of the students was again individually interviewed and asked to reflect on her/his encounters during the practicum, particularly in the light of their previous concerns and expectations in terms of Thai people and culture. (See Appendix C for a list of the interview questions.) In an effort to maximise the students’ willingness to be frank, the interviews were conducted by a researcher who had not accompanied the students on the practicum. Students were also sent a draft copy of this manuscript, affording them the opportunity to clarify or expand on or exclude any of their earlier comments. Interview transcripts were rigorously analysed to identify themes, scatter and cluster in the students’ responses.

Maintaining anonymity was problematic, given the small cohort of six students. An additional problem was the inclusion of only one male student in the group. As a result, all six participants were given pseudonyms which are commonly used for either males or females.

This project also drew on linguistic methodologies such as those outlined above (e.g., Derewianka, 1999; Halliday, 1985) to provide a framework in which data could be collected and analysed. In completing their ‘encounters forms’, students provided information on linguistic features of the conversations in which they had taken part. Features included the modality or assertiveness of the language used, formality, patterns of ‘turn taking’ etc. These encounters with users of English who are not native-speakers highlighted the complex interplay of communication in a cross cultural context.

Findings and discussion

Students’ forethoughts on Thailand and Thai culture and their possible sources.

The students nominated few negative images of Thai people or culture prior to the practicum, and observations arguably conformed to stereotypes. This is not to be critical of the students’ depth of understanding. Indeed, the question begged terse responses, asking students to describe

... welcoming" (Chris). The students who had been to Thailand before appeared to have a deeper and more complex understanding of Thai culture than did the others. Apart from "friendly," Kim's descriptions included, "Hierarchical structure between [social] classes - different classes. Strict - in schooling- more formal than Australia. Willing to help - they will put themselves out in caring for you. High expectations in many areas - for children to perform especially in education." Similarly, Cameron said "They go overboard in trying to please," but added that this didn't apply to the people in the markets. Cameron linked this acquiescent dimension of Thai culture to the influence of Buddhism.

The students also saw vocational and pragmatic advantages deriving from the practicum: "It will be beneficial to me as teacher in helping ESL students- knowing how to deal with them. It will look good on my resumé that I have had experience overseas" said Chris. Kim observed "In the way of my resumé with this experience in teaching. This is not a regular prac. It will relate to my Special Education specialisation in that I'll be breaking down the teaching into basic steps. It will help with the language side of teaching. It will help with the language side - I'm interested in teaching English- literacy and ESL. I work with children with autism - making things simple. Alex was looking forward to "experiencing a different culture, being tolerant, getting understanding and insight, trying new things."

The students recognised the differences between this practicum and a vacation, in terms of the experiences they could expect. Chris expected the practicum to be "a real eye-opener, cultural experience – more interactive than [visiting as] a tourist. Learning about a culture that I know little about. Experiencing their different way of life than I've been used to." Similarly, Kerry was looking forward to seeing "the real culture, not as a tourist. Being a part of the culture," and suggested that tourists returning from Thailand are unconcerned about the culture, saying "you never hear about their culture from tourists when they come back."

There were certain apprehensions about Thailand prior to the practicum, some of which indicated a self-consciousness on the part of the students. Lee observed potential implications of the Thais' unwillingness to complain, saying "I'm concerned that they are such a nice people- if I did something inappropriate they would never tell me. I'm concerned about doing something inappropriate." Even the use of the indefinite article in "such a nice people" is interesting, and appears to position Thais as one entity. Cameron observed that "Thai people might say 'yes' to please when they mean 'no'. This is second hand information. Don't know really ... For example if they say they'll meet you at a certain place they might not turn up." Interestingly, Cameron touched on similarities between Thai and 'our own' culture, saying, "maybe we'll be expected to do more than we're willing to do. We might say 'yes' to something we don't want to do." The students had been advised that as representatives of Australia, the University and of the teaching profession, they might at times have to smile and 'go with the

flow' against their first instincts. Kim was concerned about "People trying to sell when they are pushy - like Vietnam. They might not be happy with - expectations of - our teaching. Clothes to dress appropriately - might easily offend." Kerry was worried about being construed as American, and the risk of intimidating the locals. Kerry, Chris and Alex anticipated problems caused by their inability to speak or understand Thai, with Chris making specific reference to the tonality of the Thai language. Alex spoke of "any misinterpretations of actions like legs crossed [perhaps a reference to the likelihood of causing offence by pointing the soles of the feet at another person, for example by resting one foot on the opposite knee] or touching children's heads. Some ways of acting can be disrespectful. I am nervous about doing the wrong thing."

There were also teaching-related concerns. Cameron observed, "I'm concerned we might be put upon a pedestal while over there. We're only in third year [of our four-year preservice degree]." This perhaps reflects a widely-held view that Thai methods of teaching are traditional and teacher-centred compared to approaches in Australia, and therefore inferior. Indeed, for at least some of the students, teaching was a greater concern than was interfacing with the culture. Others felt concerned that they didn't know what age group they would be teaching, and the prospect of teaching secondary aged students.

Encounters and post-practicum observations

Unsurprisingly, the students encountered both pleasant and unpleasant interactions with Thai nationals during the practicum. Responses to 'negative' circumstances encountered in Thailand ranged from mild irritation to considerable anxiety in some cases. The responses are organised hereunder, following some broad observations, according to a continuum of more positive to more negative encounters.

Typically, conversations with Thai nationals during the practicum were initiated by the Australian students, whether it be asking for directions, buying goods etc. The students often noted that they used stilted English if their first attempt at asking for something was not understood. The 'encounters forms' completed by the students provided the opportunity to specifically address paralinguistic features of conversations. According to these forms, both the Thais and the Australians exchanged nervous laughs at times, and broad smiles were a common feature of the Thais' demeanour, according to several of the students. Communication was at times hampered by ambient noise. In one encounter, Alex said "we were very tired," but didn't elaborate. Presumably, though, this was a significant variable for Alex in the circumstances, even though the encounter was a positive one, with a group of Thai University students who became well known to the Australian students. In other contexts, Lee expressed concerns that the Australians might be taking for granted the generosity of the Thai students. Cameron observed that one man, a self-appointed source of tourist advice, positioned himself in such a way as to impede the students' progress. Only on one reported occasion did an Australian student report initiating conversation of a 'small talk' nature with a Thai national.

observations were more than just a few practicum experiences.

Some expectations did not entirely materialise. Kerry's fears of being mistaken for an American did not come to fruition. One aspect of the Thais' demeanour which impressed Kerry was "just how patient they are with *farangs* [foreigners]." Lee, who had so looked forward to the food, was "over rice" by the end of the tour, and said that on arrival in Chiang Mai "[my room mate] and I ... saw McDonald's and Star Bucks and thought all our Christmases had come at once." For Chris, the only negative was the food: "I don't eat a lot of seafood ... and they have a lot of soups that are made up of animal insides... they'd say 'try it, try it', and I'd say 'I'm quite full'."

The experience gave the students practice in communicating to people whose first language isn't English, and not just in classroom contexts. It also taught them the complexities of this task. Kerry recalled that a conversation soon after arrival in Thailand served to "reinforce that it is not easy to communicate when I have no Thai whatsoever." Similarly, as Alex commented,

it wasn't really me speaking normally, though. Most of the time I would either make grammatical mistakes on purpose because I knew they understood it better, which was probably not the right thing to do, but I would always speak without abbreviations, I'd speak really slowly and clearly so I really wasn't giving them a realistic view on how to speak English. I learnt how to convey messages without using words and without using slang and Australian type language. A lot of actions, I had to do a lot of thinking myself. I was speaking just like they were trying to think [ahead] of words that were more common way to say things rather than I would normally have blurted it out.

At times, though, the Australian students were taken aback by the proficiency of some of the Thais' English. Chris spoke of a forty-something woman who "works in the cafeteria and owns a food store and her English was better than most of the uni[versity] students' and their teachers' who were doing English as a major. We had repeated conversations with her on different occasions. Her English flowed very well and her accent wasn't strong."

While the focus of this study is on extra-school experiences, the school children in Thailand certainly seem to have won the hearts of the student teachers. Kerry said that in response to a thank you gift from their class, "[my partner teacher] and I ... were both quite tearful."

Interactions with a group of students from the local University featured commonly and positively in the participants' responses. For Alex, the best part of the practicum experience was "getting to know students from the university as well as the school where we had practicum. So it was not just the lessons we taught, it was meeting up with the students to practise English, to get to know them. We both learned from each other." The Thai University students also

reinforced Alex and Chris' notions of a diligent approach to education in Thailand. Chris spoke with admiration of the Thai students who sought the UTS students out for English conversation, and added, "I think I learned a lot about their culture and the way they live through forming those friendships. We spent a lot of time... we went out to dinner, to the markets... just spending time having conversation." Other comments on the Thai University students included "just so lovely. They were so interested in us" (Cameron) and "so positive and nice" (Kim). Lee commented on being overwhelmed by the generosity of the Thai University students, in terms of offering gifts and time.

On the other hand, the secondary school students they taught 'broke this mould' for Alex, who said "the students at the school were quite disrespectful in our experience. From what I'd heard they had such a respectful nature and then I got there and saw the students and I thought 'oh this is terrible they're being rude' but ... then to them it wasn't rude." This bore out my own experience as the students' practicum supervisor. School students would often *wai* a teacher when passing in front of them, by placing their hands together in front of themselves as if in supplication, and bowing. It was not uncommon, however, for students to engage in no conversation during lessons, while the local teachers simply 'spoke over' the noise, sometimes using microphones. Cameron recalled school students running down the hallways screaming while lessons were being conducted. Alex also spoke of a Thai school student who recited during assembly a poem she had written, while the other children and some of the teachers talked loudly among themselves. Lee observed a similar apparent disrespect amongst teachers who chatted while being addressed by the Principal. In her own teaching, Lee observed a tension between following local cultural norms and being the gracious guest in the country, as opposed to obeying instinct, training and experience which dictated that there must be only one voice at a time during whole-class activities. On the other hand, Chris' year seven class "were quite shy ... very shy ... I think it is generally a shy culture from what I could make out." Some of the secondary students have maintained email contact with their Australian teachers, according to Chris. Lee found that the school students were hesitant to ask questions, and attributed this to Asian notions of saving face, in that to ask a question implies that the teacher has explained inadequately.

One incident highlighted a tension in assuming a scepticism with regard to the locals. A man approached Cameron, who was looking at a map, and offered suggestions for shopping, sight-seeing etc. Cameron mused, "Maybe it's a good defence mechanism" and "I thought that there must be a reason that this man was doing this. He just can't be being nice," but then confessed to feeling "so rude" having abruptly terminated the conversation with the man. While this man's language was described as "direct" lacking the pleases and thank yous characteristic of polite conversation in Australia, Cameron discerned that this was "not really impolite" in the context.

There were the usual frustrations of international travel. "Things like the taxis. People who didn't want to understand us or try and got frustrated with us - or I felt frustrated with them, so it was always kind of negative," according to Alex. Cameron expressed scepticism about the bargaining process and market stallholders, who "will try to get as much as they can out of you - charge a ridiculous amount in baht, but [if you walk away] will sell it much cheaper."

hotel, waited 20 minutes, was told the item was unavailable, ordered a different meal, then after another considerable period, was brought the original 'unavailable' dish. Indeed, the students appeared to have an expectation that hotel staff's English would be adequate for what they saw as common situations. Most of the students' recollections regarding the hotel staff and their (in)ability to speak or understand English were critical. On one occasion, however, Kerry reported that a hotel receptionist "was always saying 'sorry'," adding, "I really didn't know why he was sorry, because I had no problem following his instructions." On the other hand, at the beginning of the second week in Thailand, Lee encountered "the first 'rude' Thai I had met." This hotel receptionist "looked stern" as Lee approached. Lee had given laundry to the reception staff on several previous occasions, but the desk attendant on this occasion "was quite certain that it was not possible to have washing done" and gave the impression that the request was an absurd one. Similarly, according to Alex, the hotel staff "didn't want to try [to speak English], and they would talk to us in Thai and we would get frustrated and try and act things out." This contrasted with the Thai University students, "our friends who had really good English always were 'apologising about their bad English. We said it was not bad. They got really embarrassed all the time when they made mistakes or if they couldn't think of the word they were going to say." The students' frustrations with the hotel staff may have been fuelled by the hotel's refusal to accept credit payments.

Several of the students commented on the brusqueness of some shopkeepers. Cameron recalled "I found some of the shopkeepers rude as they expected me to buy when I didn't want to." At least some of the students found Pat Pong Road (a market and red light district) confronting on several levels. Chris found the goods expensive and the shopkeepers too aggressive. "We did have another person in our group that was called a few names and it was a really horrible place." This same incident was also reported by Kerry, a bystander at the time: two of the other students "had bad experiences in the night markets when some sellers said 'f... you' when they didn't buy. I'm not sure they knew the meaning of what they were saying except that it was a derogatory term" Kerry added. Interestingly, the students to whom this remark was directed did not refer to it in the interviews or encounters forms.

Several of the students travelled independently to tourist destinations in and south of Bangkok after the practicum. Both the male and the female students found themselves confronted by some of the 'seedier' aspects of Thai-western encounters, and of some of the assumptions locals make of western tourists when alone or in pairs. Kerry, for example, recalled with some irritation being solicited by touts for a nightclub, and Kim recalled the presence of "old white men with young Thai girls to have sex with."

One of the female students recounted a less than pleasant incident:

John Buchanan

In the hotel where we were staying there was an internet café and I was sitting at my computer sending emails home. There was a male university student sitting next to me and I could see him looking over at my computer and then he asked me where I was from in poor English. He was very hard to understand and then he just sat there and stood behind me and watched for a while. He then said he wanted to have my phone number. I said I lived in Australia and it was very expensive to call Australia so I really can't give you my number. He then went away although I found it a bit uncomfortable ... I felt less safe because of the lack of communication and I was in a different country in the café by myself at the time. I wondered how long this guy was going to hang around ... and I wondered whether he could read what I was writing. I finished writing my email and went to pay for it at the desk but there wasn't anyone there. I thought that was a bit strange. The doors were locked so she had gone out and locked everyone in. I waited for five to ten minutes and there was only one other person there.

She theorised about this unsolicited attention as follows: "The other [Australian] students didn't have blond hair. But when we were at the airport and someone came to pick us up they would come and want to take my bag first... out of the whole group ... When we were in the university we walked past groups of young men and they would say 'hello, you are beautiful' and 'I love you' and stuff like that." She added that this was much more confronting than behaviour she would face from men in Australia.

From anecdotal evidence some of the students have incorporated their experiences into their subsequent teaching, but to date, no systematic research has been conducted into the extent and nature of this.

Conclusions

The Thai practicum certainly seems to be recognised by the students for its positive contribution to their teaching. Cameron said "I think what made it so great was the fact that I didn't realise how much it would affect my teaching and how much I would get out of it from teaching. It was just such a great teaching experience."

It was also a valuable alternative to simply being a tourist in Thailand, or as Lee put it, "being able to participate in another culture" (emphasis added). Lee also described the experiences as "quite authentic and genuine," adding "I felt we probably learnt more than [our students] did." The practicum also contributed to the students' personal development. In the context of one conversation, Alex observed, "I realised how important it is to stay calm, polite and patient when attempting to converse." More generally, Kerry said of the practicum, "I grew. I got confidence ... The thing I learned most was that I can do things. I can do things that I didn't think I could do. I can do things that I didn't think I could do." While

their power to ensure we had the best day. They succeeded.”

Nevertheless, as stated at the outset, international practicums are costly to conduct, financially and in terms of staff time and energy. More significantly, the students were considerably more willing to be critical of Thais during and after the practicum than they had been beforehand. When the UTS students’ (negative) encounters are seen in concentrated form as in the section above, it could be argued that Australian students should be quarantined from, rather than exposed to, such experiences. Yet, from the content and demeanour of the students’ responses, it seems that the overriding sentiment that they have of Thailand and its people is an affectionate one, and that the friendships formed certainly overrode the negative experiences. This is perhaps best highlighted by the student who reported the most confronting experiences in Thailand, in the internet café, as mentioned above. She summarised her Thai experiences by saying,

I learned a lot about their culture and their religion. We visited a lot of temples and that was really interesting. I guess I learned a lot about their general way of life, their values. And the people that we met were so polite and these people don’t necessarily have a lot of money but they will buy you presents and buy you dinner and pay for taxi fares. I said I could pay for it but they insisted because we were their guests and they said a few times ‘it is our pleasure’.

This is certainly a pleasing outcome, but it begs the question as to why it is so. It is possible that this cohort already had high levels of intercultural tolerance. It stands to reason that such people are amongst the most likely to apply for an international practicum. My own knowledge of these people as individuals confirms this theory, as did my observations of their behaviour and attitude to Thais during the practicum. This, in turn, begs the question as to the likely outcomes if a group of individuals who are negatively predisposed to other people and cultures were to take part in such a practicum. Does such an experience serve to polarise people along the intercultural tolerance continuum? Subsequent research may well shed light on this. It was also pleasing to note that the students’ responses were more contested and, paradoxically, more tentative upon return. This is evidence of new learning on their part.

Most pleasing of all, however, was that despite their positive overall attitudes, these students didn’t ‘cling to’ their previous notions of universal, flawless Thai friendliness, but were willing to be critical of individuals whose behaviour confused, irritated or offended them. Could it be that practicums such as these, while they do not necessarily eliminate notions of ‘us and them’, they do serve to recruit more members into the ‘us club’ for each participant, thereby diminishing the number of those one views with hostility and mistrust? Further longitudinal

research may shed more light on this. In the meantime, it appears that we can have confidence in believing that international practicums have substantial capacity to further the cause of intercultural understanding and tolerance, rather than diminishing it.

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Appendix A

Pre-practicum Questionnaire

Beyond gaining experience in teaching (common to any practicum), what do you think will be the main benefits for you in Thailand? In other words, what are you looking forward to most about your time in Thailand?

If you were to use four or five words to describe Thai culture and people, what might these be? Can you categorise any of these words into 'positive' or 'negative' groups? Might some of the words be common to both lists?

Do you think there could be any problems in dealing with Thai locals and Thai culture? What do you think these might be? In other words, are there things you're nervous/concerned about?

Appendix B

Template for “Intercultural Encounters” in Thailand

This is for encounters (eg conversations) with people you know, or assume to be, Thai Nationals.

Date _____

Code _____

1. Who initiated the ‘encounter’?

I / we did _____ The other person / people did _____

2. Were you with other westerners at the time? Yes _____ No _____

3. If so, how many? _____

4. Was / were the other person/people:

The same gender as you? _____ The opposite gender? _____ A mixed group? _____

5. Approximate age/s of the other person/people? _____

6. Did you have a choice in who you spoke to? Yes _____ No _____

7. If yes, any particular reason for choosing this person/these people? _____

8. Where did the encounter take place? _____

9. Any other significant issues (time of day, clothes worn by the other/s, hard to hear (because of language difficulties and/or noise) – was this embarrassing? etc) _____

10. Any particular thoughts about this person/these people before the encounter? (Did you feel nervous approaching them, did they look friendly? etc) _____

- Asking information (of a pragmatic nature eg buying a ticket, asking for directions etc) _____
- Negotiating something (bargaining, organising accommodation etc) _____
- Finding information about Thailand/Thai culture _____
- Making conversation about yourself/Australia _____
- Other? _____
13. Any information about the nature of the encounter? (did anyone interrupt or get angry because somebody else interrupted, give the impression they didn't want to speak, 'invade your personal space', indicate that you were invading theirs etc, were you/they standing, sitting, facing each other, gestures, eye contact etc?) _____
- _____
- _____
14. Did the encounter feature lots of questions _____, or instructions _____, or information _____, or ... _____? Details? _____
- _____
15. Was the encounter really polite ('Would you mind if ...?' etc.) _____ or more 'direct' (eg 'You mustn't ...')? _____ Details? _____
- _____
14. Was it formal _____ or informal _____? (Eg 'gotta', 'gonna', ums, ahs etc.) Details? _____
- _____
15. Were you _____ or the other/s _____ feeling nervous? What makes you say this? (eg ums, ahs?) _____
- _____
16. Were there any 'turning points' in the conversation? _____ Details? _____
- _____
17. How was the encounter terminated, and by whom? _____
- _____
18. Did the encounter reinforce _____ and / or challenge _____ your thoughts about this person, these people, Thai people, Thai culture? How? _____
- _____

John Buchanan

Appendix C

Post-practicum Questionnaire

- [Ice breaker] What things stand out in your memory as being the best and worst things about the Thai experience?
- [Prompts] Think about a positive conversation/encounter you had. Try and 'replay the video in your mind' and tell me about it.
What were the circumstances? Who was it with? What made it positive?
- Think about another positive conversation (as above – up to three or four conversations).
- Did any of these encounters reinforce or challenge your attitudes to Thai people?
- [Prompts] Think about a negative conversation/encounter you had. Try and 'replay the video in your mind' and tell me about it.
What were the circumstances? Who was it with? What made it negative?
- Again, 3 or 4 if possible.
- Did any of these encounters reinforce or challenge your attitudes to Thai people and/or to the Thai culture?
- Having been back in Australia for several weeks, Thailand now probably looks rather comfortable. Were there any times when you had 'had enough'? [Prompts: perhaps enough of the food, the heat. not understanding the language, bargaining etc.]
- (If not already addressed) Prior to the prac, you said "...". Has this view changed or been reinforced? How/why?

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Notes for Contributors

Pacific-Asian Education is an international refereed journal that addresses issues of curriculum and education within the Pacific Circle region. The journal is interdisciplinary in approach and publishes recent research, report of curriculum and education initiatives within the region, analyses of seminal literature, historical surveys, and discussions of conceptual issues and problems relevant to countries and communities within the Pacific Circle. Papers with a comparative or cross-cultural perspective are particularly welcome.

Guidelines for Submitting Manuscripts

Manuscripts: should be 3000 - 6000 words and preceded by an Abstract of 100-150 words. Intending contributors should submit **three complete hard copies and an electronic copy** (disk or email) of the manuscript to the Editor, and ensure that they retain an electronic and hard copy. Manuscripts should be typed, double spaced and on one side of the page only. Authors' names should be included on the title page but not be on the manuscript. A brief (2-3 line) biographical note about each author should be provided on a separate page and should include full contact details (i.e., postal address, phone and facsimile numbers, email address).

Manuscripts should meet high academic standards and be written in clear English. The use of footnotes is not recommended.

Intending contributors should consult the **Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association** (5th ed.) to ensure that articles conform to the guidelines including the use of up

Findings from existing literature

All education is intercultural in nature. Differences between students' and teachers' age, gender, socio-economic status can be added to those of ethnicity and language. This adds significant variables to the already complex business of teaching and learning. Nevertheless, much of what has been referred to in the literature as intercultural education could equally be termed 'multicultural education', or perhaps more specifically, education in a multicultural context. Verlot and Pinxten (2000) claim that an intercultural education is one wherein "learning in its formal and informal expression starts from the social and cultural diversity existing in society and in the classroom" (p. S8). This research project investigated a situation wherein the Thai school students constituted a relatively homogenous ethnicity (at least to our eyes), markedly different from the ethnic and linguistic background of the (preservice) teachers. The focus is not on the learning of students deriving from each other's cultural experiences and perspectives, but on the learning sustained by the visiting teachers, as they encounter the host culture.

Nozaki and Inokuchi (1996) point to the contested and at times contradictory nature of national and ethnic identities, as opposed to 'essentialist' views which ascribe uniformity to other groups. It is here that theoretical notions such as constructivism (Bruner, 1966) and phenomenography (Marton, 1994) assume their importance, in their attempts to identify multiple, idiosyncratic and emerging perceptions of realities.

This research project built on the work of intercultural researchers such as Said (1978) and Clarke (1997). Said contested that the concept of Asia is a contested construct of western origin. In the Australian context Fitzgerald (1997) investigated psychological and other barriers between Asia and Australia.

Previous studies (Buchanan 1999; Fearnley-Sander, 1997; Halse, 1999; Halse & Buchanan, 1998; Hill, Thomas & Coté, 1997; Ljungdahl, 2002) have built on the work of these and other researchers in the context of international practicums undertaken by Australian preservice teachers in Asian contexts. Common to many of their reports is the pragmatic complexity in organizing such practicums, which in most cases was more than offset by the profound positive intercultural impressions for students, which overrode short-term frustrations. This dynamic was not universal, however. Halse (1999) reported on practising teachers who spent approximately one month on study tours in various destinations in Asia. While most of their informants spoke in glowing terms about their experiences and the contribution these would make to their teaching, one participant reported a very negative and unpleasant in-country experience of India, which was likely to impact unfavourably in terms of its inclusion in her subsequent teaching. It may be, however, that given the passage