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Adeline Yuen Sze Goh[a] and Miriam Zukas[b]

[a]Universiti Brunei Darussalam, Brunei; [b]Birkbeck College, University of London, UK

Student vocational teachers: the significance of individual positions in workplace learning

Abstract

In most Initial Teacher Preparation (ITP) programmes, learning in teaching placements is considered to be an important component for providing workplace learning experiences to develop the skills of being a teacher. This paper is based on a bigger qualitative study which explored the learning experiences of a group of in-service student vocational teachers prior to and during their one-year ITP programme in Brunei. The study examined these student teachers' dispositions to learning as revealed through their experiences on different placements during their training. The findings of this paper highlight the importance of the student vocational teachers' roles and positions relative to their teaching placements. Theoretically, the findings also extend Bourdieu's thinking, where existing cultural capital in the form of subject knowledge which is valued in one context does not necessarily help the learning of individuals in becoming a vocational teacher in another context. In addition, the paper argues for a need to reconceptualise in-service teacher education, more specifically, the workplace learning aspect. Lastly, it concludes with recommendations to support these student teachers in their placements through creating more expansive learning environments.

Keywords: Workplace Learning, Teacher Education, Placements, Cultural capital

Introduction

Many studies on vocational and technical education (VTE) and further education teacher training, particularly in the UK, have explored in-service student teachers' workplace experiences in teaching placements (e.g. Lucas and Unwin, 2009; Orr and Simmons, 2010; Dixon et al, 2010; Ingleby, 2010) . An emerging theme in these studies is the discrepancy between in-service teachers' expectations of their teaching placements and their experience. For example, the in-service teachers in Orr and Simmons' (2010) study had to cope with dual identities as teachers and students, which often created tensions in their development. While these studies provide valuable insights into the workplace learning experiences of further education student teachers on placement, they tend to focus on a single placement only, and therefore it is hard to understand fully how the individual teachers' own positions and dispositions relate to different fields (when field is understood as different placements or sites for teaching practice). Therefore this study, which draws on a completed longitudinal study of a group of vocational student teachers enrolled in an initial teaching preparation (ITP) programme, aims to understand the relationship between individuals' positions and learning on different placements (fields). It employs Bourdieu's (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) conceptual tools of field and cultural capital (which is defined here as subject knowledge) in order to explore these questions.

The paper begins with an explanation of vocational teacher training in Brunei which is followed by an account of the ways in which individual learning is understood, in the workplace learning literature. Following this, the nature of study which provided the main empirical evidence is described. This is then followed by presenting the case study account of one individual to illuminate the complexities of becoming a vocational teacher through learning at two placements. The findings,

are then discussed and we conclude with recommendations for the improvement of vocational teachers' workplace learning.

Vocational Teacher Training in Brunei

In Brunei, as in many countries, VTE aims to train individuals for a specific kind of occupation. It generally offers occupational programs to school leavers who have completed their upper secondary education, to prepare them for work. VTE colleges offer a wide range of full-time courses and programs e.g. business studies, computer studies, building and design, hotel and catering management etc. The development of VTE in Brunei is relatively recent. It was first triggered by the economic situation in the late 1950s, when local skilled manpower was needed to replace foreign workers (Ahmad, 1989). Since then, VTE in Brunei has gradually expanded from two trade schools to seven vocational colleges. In Brunei, VTE has historically been seen to be of lower status than academic general education (Jamil, 2000). However, this negative perception has gradually improved and today VTE could be said to be of a similar standing as the academic general education. In part, this is a result of its production of graduates who fulfil industry demands.

There are two routes to becoming a VTE teacher in Brunei. The pre-service training route is a one-year full-time qualification offered to graduates from various subjects. The in-service route is for individuals who have been employed by and have taught in any of the vocational colleges for at least a year. Such teachers are usually recruited after they have graduated from their degree and therefore do not possess any occupational experience. Recently, in order to address this limitation, in-service teachers are required to undertake an industrial attachment, with the intention that they will gradually become competent teaching their vocational subjects. After being employed for at least a year, these teachers then enrol on a one-year full time ITP programme intended for vocational student teachers. It is mandatory that they enrol within three years and before they are confirmed in their teaching post. Both routes require student teachers to be attached to one or two vocational colleges for their teaching placement. Similar arrangements apply to teachers in the general education sector.

The ITP programme offered by the local university requires that student teachers spend two days a week in their teaching placements. In many countries, the period of teaching placement is an important aspect of the ITP programme. This period provides opportunities for student teachers to learn to become professional members of the teaching community, and in particular to develop their professional identity and to practise their teaching within placements (see Goh, 2013 inter alia). It is also considered a significant element in ITP programmes when crucial formative experience takes place for the student teachers (Dixon et al, 2010). Most of the in-service student teachers return to the vocational colleges where they were teaching prior to entering the ITP programme for their teaching placements. However, the student teachers are also encouraged to seek out different teaching placements for each semester, on the assumption that colleges can accommodate them. During the two days a week placement, the student teachers work under the supervision of their College-based mentor and their university supervisor. Rather than learning subject-specific pedagogy on the programme, these student teachers learn how to draw on generic pedagogy at the university.

Workplace as a site for teachers' learning

Some types of learning can only be gained from context-sensitive participation in workplace practice (Hager and Johnsson, 2009, Winch, 2013). This is because workplaces provide authentic experiences for individuals to learn to operate in appropriate, often demanding conditions. All educational institutions, including VTE colleges, are workplaces. All workplaces are potential sites for learning. Learning in the workplace is embedded in our everyday work practices and learning is implicit in work. That is, there is no temporal separation between learning and social practice. Concurrently, there is no separation between the context, learning and social pratice. Early on, Brown et al (1989) argued that knowledge is situated being, in part, a product of the activity, context and the culture of learning of the context. Subsequent researchers like Lave and Wenger (1991), Rogoff (2000) and Hager and Hodkinson (2009) argue that knowledge is embedded in contexts rather than being an independent entity which is separate from the context in which it is learnt. In Lave and Wenger's words,

> Learning is not merely situated in practice – as if it were some independently reifiable process that just happened to be located somewhere; learning is an integral part of generative social practice in the lived-in world (1991, p.35).

Given the importance of understanding learning as an integral part of social practice in a context, this suggests that workplaces can provide rich and context-sensitive environment for participants.

In the workplace learning literature, learning theorists like Lave and Wenger (1991), Engeström (2001, 2004) and Fuller and Unwin (2003) developed conceptual tools for understanding workplace learning. For example, Lave and Wenger's concepts of 'legitimate peripheral participation' and 'communities of practice' have been used widely as analytical tools to understand learning for newcomers into the workplace. The notion of legitimate peripheral participation provides an understanding of how newcomers learn to become full members, participating in the central tasks of the community. Although these concepts have enjoyed widespread currency within workplace learning theory and research, they have been criticised. For example the concepts have 'many loose ends, not least of which concern key features of the concept of communities of pratice' (Hughes et al, 2008, p.4) and draw on ideas that needs to be systematically developed. Hughes et al (2008) conclude that 'communities of practice' is a rich and potentilly useful concept but requires considerable further development. Fuller et al (2005) are also critical and argue that Lave and Wenger (1991) did not take account of how old timer employees who have achieved full participation continue to learn within the workplace. That is, their theoretical approach overlooked the possibility of having full members who could also be positioned peripherally when having a different role in the same community of practice (Goh, 2014). Bourdieu's concepts of field and cultural capital can be used to address this limitation. According to Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992), within whatever position(s) a person occupies, he or she develops their dispositions. That is, individual actions in any situation are influenced by their habitus, which consists of a battery of dispositions which have been accumulated throughout individual's life experiences. Field works synergistically with the concept of 'habitus'. A field, which is like a game is always in flux. Like the game, the field has rules that are codified as well as not codified and tacit. A field can also be understood using the analogy of the market. In a field, individuals are positioned differently, and unequally within it. These positions are usually determined by the differing amount and types of capital an individual possesses. However, not all capital is of value in the field. That is, capital is relative to the field in which it is used (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Bourdieu (1986) identified economic, social and cultural capitals which he argued were interrelated and exchangeable. For him, social capital roughly equates to who knows you or who you know; this can help an individual to understand and acquire the relevant knowledge needed to

succeed in a field. In contrast, cultural capital amounts to the knowledge, understanding, ways of behaving and attitudes needed to succeed in a field.

Understanding the context of workplace learning provides only a part of the whole picture. In order to gain a more holistic understanding of workplace learning, we also need to understand how individuals learn within these workplaces. Workplaces are usually shaped by the individuals within them, just as much as those individuals are shaped by the workplace. In other words, individuals should also be considered when understanding learning within a workplace. As Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2004) put it, 'it is not just that each person learns in a context, rather, each person is a reciprocal and mutually constitutive part of that context' (p.168). These practices are partly influenced by individual biography, which plays a significant part in influencing learning within a context (Hodkinson et al, 2005; Goh, 2013, 2015). However, it is not just these practices and biographies which we need to focus on, but equally important are the positions, dispositions and actions of individual learners in relation to these practices (Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2004).

The extensive literature on workplace learning is more than paralleled by a corpus of teacher development literature. Until recently, however, there had been few studies which considered both vocational teacher development and workplace learning concurrently (Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2005, Broad, 2016). Workplace learning in vocational teacher education, more specifically how individual positions influence learning, is not well-theorised compared to the depth and extent of workplace learning theories in other fields (Hager, 2011; Eraut, 2004). In a recent professional learning series, McNamara et al (2014) discuss how to frame teacher learning in the workplace, arguing that it is important to explore how best to conceptualise and theorise teachers' learning in the workplace in order to generate evidence to inform policy and improve practice. But the purpose of workplace learning for teachers at different phases of their career, more specifically, pre- and in-service teachers is often different. For pre-service teachers, teaching practice experiences provide the opportunity to understand the cultural norms and practices of the nature of teachers' work through induction and socialisation into the community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991). However, for in-service teachers, colleges are places of work as well as of learning and the implications of this have not been fully explored.

The study

Our research explored the learning experiences of a group of in-service student teachers prior to and during their full-time one-year ITP programme in Brunei by examining student teachers' dispositions to learning as revealed through their experiences on different placements during their training.

The study aimed to build understanding of the role of placements in students' learning, particularly with respect to cultural capital and habitus, as well as developing a longitudinal understanding of individuals' learning careers in becoming VTE teachers. Participants were students on the one-year full-time ITP programme. Selection of these student teachers was based on practical and pragmatic guidelines such as being accessible; willing to be interviewed during the time allocated to them and having different vocational teaching areas. Selected student teachers were invited to join the study and fully informed of its purpose, what the study entailed, the duration of the study and who would be involved. They were also made aware that their consent was voluntary and that they were free to withdraw this consent and to discontinue participation in this research at any time if they so wished. They were also assured that whatever they said would be kept confidential. Pseudonyms

were used to protect the anonymity and the confidentiality of all participants. Due to the small sample that was used and the size of VTE in Brunei, we have tried to report in ways that we believe help to eliminate any possibilities of identification. One of the authors was a member of staff involved in teaching this programme. As such, the author had to reflexively (re)position herself as a researcher through periodically reaffirming informed consent with the participants.

In the end, five student teachers participated in all stages of the study. The research consisted of three rounds of data collection: at the beginning of the course, the end of the course and one follow-up six months after the course. Each round of data collection included semi-structured interviews with the student teachers. Depending on when the interview took place, we explored the teachers' initial years of teaching, their learning in placements and their learning after completion of the course. The data was analysed interpretatively (Smith, 1989): initially case studies for each of the research participants, based on the three interviews, were written up in order to develop an understanding of each of the individuals. These case studies were written up descriptively, aiming for a 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973) of each participant. The process of writing these descriptive accounts involved immersion in the first, second and third interview transcripts in order to construct a 'three-dimensional' overview of each of the participant.

There are always different versions of personal stories (Stronach and MacLure, 1997). However, we tried to render the stories of the research participants as honestly and fully as possible through interpreting an adequate understanding of these stories. This might seen to be as an limitation to those researchers of the positivist bent (Feuer et al, 2002) but reseachers like ourselves try to present a version of truth of these individuals which is open to challenge through readings of the evidence provided. However, this requires a depth of evidence and an understanding of complexity which is not always well-served by generalisations. We have therefore decided to provide a rich case study account of one individual in order to examine the research question of multiple placements in which learners are positioned differently. We explore the learning of one student teacher, Helen, who is similar to all the other in-service teachers in this respect, though of course, different in terms of the detail. The other four in-service teachers were teaching vocational subjects such as computer studies and business studies. These teachers had taught in their vocational colleges for at least one year without any occupational experience. Helen's story offers an opportunity to theorise explicitly aspects of teachers' workplace learning.

Helen's story

Helen is a Malay woman in her late twenties at the start of the course. She was teaching a business related subject at a vocational and technical education college for almost four years before enrolling herself into the initial teacher preparation programme. Like most of the other student teachers in the study, she had to take on full responsibility as a teacher when she was recruited initially. The transition period was therefore limited for her to progress towards being full members of the teaching community. Similar to Helen, other student teachers taught at least four years before enrolling themselves in the programme.

Prior to the initial teacher training programme

Helen had a challenging experience when she first started working in the college. As a newcomer, she was immediately given the responsibilities of a full-time teacher in her workplace. She had to teach three classes and was appointed as a group coordinator as well as holding a substantive administrative post where she was in charge of a group of students:

> *It was really challenging because I had one student who was very problematic and required a lot of my attention. This student was mostly absent in class and I didn't know how to handle him. So I had to ask for advice from my colleagues, who are also my friends, in handling this student.... it was really stressful for me. At the same time, I was given two subjects to teach which I needed help.*

Although she had a challenging time, she gained support from her colleagues which assisted her. At the same time, she had to be proactive in asking for help.

> *The previous tutor who taught the subject, was really helpful. Although so, I had to go to him because he would not know what I do not know. We also started doing team-teaching the same subject...It was okay without a mentor because I knew everyone, and I guess everyone was cooperative if you ask for help. As I am a shy person, it took some time for me to open up to people. Some of the tutors, if you don't approach them, they wouldn't help. You need to approach them. After a few months, I tried to get along with the other new teachers. At times we were lost but we would ask the tutors when we were in doubt.*

Helen felt that she didn't need a mentor prior entering the initial teacher preparation programme. Being able to team-teach was one of the ways she learned to teach. She was also assisted by many of her colleagues who were supportive.

Learning at Eastvalley: first teaching placement

As an unqualified teacher, Helen had eventually to enrol herself in an initial teacher training programme. Helen chose to do the first teaching placement at her existing workplace, *Eastvalley* College, for the first semester and the teaching placement at *Westvalley* College for the second semester. *Eastvalley* is a business college, organised around separate departments, which offers only business-related diploma programmes for example, business and finance programme. There are around fifty staff members. This college is one of the two colleges in Brunei, which focuses on one disciplinary subject. It caters for both post-secondary students and mature students. The staffrooms are designed in a way to reflect the organisation of the college where individual staffrooms are clustered around their departments. Helen felt that the organisation of the individual staffrooms was a hindrance to communicate with other staff. However, she made an effort to visit some of the staff in the college to ask for help. At *Eastvalley*, her first teaching placement, she chose to return three times a week although she was only required to be at the placement twice a week. She said she felt responsible for her students' performance as she was their teacher prior to joining the course:

> *I return to my school three days per week [to teach for one subject] if I have the time because I find it difficult, if the students have two tutors teaching the same subject. The students prefer to have one tutor for the same subject.*

At *Eastvalley*, she felt that, from her colleagues' point of view, nothing had changed much from Helen being a full-time teacher to becoming a (part-time) student teacher. Her colleagues viewed her in the

same way. However, for Helen, she now had more time to focus on her teaching compared to being a full time teacher, when she was heavily involved in administrative work.

> *It [being in the course] was a relief in a way. Before [the course] I had to focus on my administrative work, but now I can focus on how to improve my teaching... Being a student, the burden is lighter. So it was easy to concentrate on whatever I wanted to prepare especially for my course, my assignment and everything; also for my class'*

Having taught in the college, she saw herself as a teacher, and also a student teacher depending on her position in relation to the context.

> *I see myself as a student teacher because I am still learning. But in the school, I see myself as a teacher cos' my students see me as a teacher and because I was their [teacher] before. I have taught them in the first semester.*
>
> *Well , for the first semester which is where I used to work, I am familiar with everyone, I guess it was okay which is like...I was teaching a class which started last August...before I came to the course. I was comfortable with the students and the students were also comfortable with me. ...since I know the staff there, it is easier for me to negotiate with them about observing their classes.*

Helen felt that she had to fulfil her role as a student teacher whilst at her workplace:

> *I come to the college to prepare my lesson plans, in case my [university] supervisor came. Before this course, I usually prepare my lesson plans after the class. My lesson plans were really simple. I guess after learning how to do lesson plans, ...I see the class in a different way. Why you are actually there to teach, when compared to before, I didn't understand the importance of lesson objectives...and now I actually understand how it works. I am also observed by my mentor who was my colleague and my supervisor at least twice during my placement.*

Learning at Westvalley: second teaching placement

Helen requested to change her teaching placement in the second semester so she could see the differences in how colleges work. In this teaching placement, she described the learning environment as a close-knit group compared to her workplace. Her existing knowledge of how to teach, learned in her workplace, helped her to establish herself reasonably quickly. She joined the staff room, thus becoming part of the social network and she was able to ask and seek advice from other teachers in the department.

> *'In [second placement], it was a small department and we all share one staff room ...which forces me to interact with them. They were all friendly'*

Due to the close-knit group and having another student teacher who was once a full time teacher in that college with her, she fitted into the group instantly. Helen and the other student teacher were part of the university programme's learning culture and the learning culture of the teaching placement. At the teaching placement, Helen had a mentor whom she met whenever she needed to. During her free time at her placement, Helen did her university assignments. She saw herself as a student teacher here but her new colleagues saw her as a teacher. Even her mentor assumed Helen knew what she needed to teach:

> *I saw myself as a student teacher but people [her colleagues] saw me as a new teacher there. My mentor was new to the subject because the previous tutor, who was teaching this subject was on study leave. So it is entirely a new subject for her. So seeing that I have taught the unit before, she [my mentor] expected me to know more than her.*

She had a rather different experience in her second placement as it was a completely new place for her.

> *I could see the difference compared to my workplace. I was more relaxed in my workplace [Eastvalley] as it was easy for me to talk to my colleagues. However, I was shy and my relationship with my mentor was kind of awkward. If I had any problems with my teaching, she would not be the first one I approach for help. I usually approach other tutors as I am more friendly with them. I think I was more independent in my second placement. In my first placement, my mentor provides more guidance and shared with me student teacher learning approaches.*

Being in two learning placements, Helen saw the differences in the teaching and learning approaches and gained from the different experiences:

> *In Eastvalley, since most of the teachers who I observed have recently completed their teacher training course, I could see they have used different methods of teaching in their lessons. In Westvalley, their lessons were mostly lecture style...Compared to Westvalley, I learned more on how to use the different styles of teaching in the first placement and in the second placement, I learn how to be more communicative with the staff there.*

Westvalley is a vocational college, which offers a range of vocational programmes, a large number of which cater for those who wish to work in the oil and gas industry. The college itself has less than a hundred staff members, with equal number of male and female staff. *Westvalley* also has a business department which offers business-related diploma programmes. This business department is comparably smaller than the size of other departments in the college, with less than ten staff members. Due to the small size and organisation of the department, all staff members share the same staff room, which made it easier for them to communicate and work with one other compared to individual staff rooms at *Eastvalley*. They worked well together forming what Lave and Wenger (1991) would term as a community of practice. Helen's mentor who was the head of department also shared the same staffroom. This provided opportunities for Helen to ask for assistance whenever she needed help. During their free time, Helen and her colleagues would spend time discussing teaching matters. The staff collaborated well with each other.

Helen's experience in the first and second learning placements were different due to the way she saw herself in those placements and how other teachers saw her. In the first placement, she saw herself as a student teacher and also a teacher depending on her position in relation to the context. Over in the second placement which was a new context to her, she saw herself as a student teacher. In addition, although having the subject knowledge to teach, Helen had different learning experiences due to the different practices within each of the placements.

Individual positions relative to the learning contexts

In order to theorise Helen's experiences initially, and to understand such experiences more broadly, we turn to a Bourdieusian analysis. Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2004) claim that individual dispositions, part of students' developing habitus in learning, are partly constituted through

participating in learning contexts. These dispositions within the habitus are also developed through individual life experiences, both within and beyond work. In Bourdieu's own words, habitus is

> '...a system of lasting and transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.18)

This means that individual dispositions are subjective, but also influenced by the objective social structural and cultural factors in which the individual is located. In other words, individual dispositions are strongly influenced by an individual's social position.

In their study of teachers in the UK, exploring the relationships between broader contextual issues and individual dispositions towards learning and career, Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2004) found that the different positions of individuals in relation to the learning context have an influence on their learning. Helen had different dispositions to learning depending on her role in each of the learning contexts: *Eastvalley* as a full time teacher, and both *Eastvalley* and *Westvalley* as a student teacher. Her dispositions to learning arose partly as a result of her position and partly through her biography. Helen chose to return to her college three times instead of the required twice a week. She felt responsible for her students as she understood the difficulty experienced by them if the module was taught by two lecturers. Her dispositions to learning as a student teacher at *Eastvalley* were reinforced by certain practices she had to undertake in order to satisfy the university requirements including preparing lesson plans, observing other colleagues' lessons, finishing her university assignments during her free time and being observed by her supervisor and mentors. Above all, she was given a lighter workload and responsibility compared to when she was a full time teacher.

When she had first started teaching at *Eastvalley*, she had been 'thrown in at the deep end of the pool' (Lacey,1977) where she had to take on full responsibility. This did not resemble Lave and Wenger's (1991) description of legitimate peripheral participation in which newcomers are peripheral to the community of practice and have the chance to learn to become full members through participating in the workplace practices. This concept is useful to understand how new members learn in the community of practice. But it is less helpful in cases like Helen's where she was given full responsibilites of a teacher at her new workplace. She had a challenging time but she was supported by her colleagues whom she had knew prior to joining *Eastvalley.* So the social relationships, rather than the peripherality of the practices, eased her way in to work. In a similar study, Goh (2013) found that social relationships were important in understanding how individuals learn in their workplace. These social relationships could help individuals who are peripheral learn and move towards full membership in a community of practice.

As a student teacher at *Eastvalley*, Helen had an ambiguous position, as she oscillated between the requirement to be an effective teacher and the obligation to learn how to be such a teacher. Although she was a full-time member at *Eastvalley*, as a student teacher, she was positioned peripherally as she was not involved in administrative tasks. Being in the workplace three times a week also changed her workplace practices compared to being a full-time teacher. As a student teacher, she was not given any administrative work to do in order that she could focus on her learning to teach. During her free time at *Eastvalley*, she would focus on doing her university assignments. She would also spend time preparing her lesson plans which was a requirement by the university course. At *Eastvalley*, she also had a mentor who was her colleague, who provided feedback on her teaching. Helen, being a full time member at *Eastvalley*, was positioned peripherally and preferred to

be a student teacher as this role provided her with opportunities to learn to teach. She was both a newcomer and expected to be an expert in her subject area.

At *Westvalley*, a different community of practice, she had to learn the work practices of the new workplace; she also had to learn to work with her new colleagues. Helen's journey in learning to become a member at *Westvalley* was supported by her relationship with another student teacher, who was a full-time member of *Westvalley*, prior to entering the teaching programme. As a newcomer, Helen was peripheral to the school and departmental communities of practice, but she was viewed by her mentor as someone who did not need much help in terms of her teaching due to her prior experience as a teacher at *Eastvalley*. But Helen was looking for more guidance in order to become a part of the new workplace. One of the common misapprehensions, and perhaps especially learning at work, is that learning is only for someone who is new to the work itself, and not necessary for someone who is new to the workplace. In contrast to Helen's story, some experienced workers resent being labeled 'learners' as this implies they are not competent in their jobs (Boud and Solomon, 2003).

At both *Eastvalley* and *Westvalley*, Helen was considered as an expert in her subject and was seen as someone who did not need much guidance by her mentors. Bourdieu argues that cultural capital can help a person to succeed in a field where cultural capital is valued. In this study, this was not the case. Having cultural capital (knowledge of the subject) in Helen's workplaces did not support her learning to become a teacher – it impeded her because it was assumed that she knew what she was doing. She would have preferred to be regarded as more marginal in order to be able to develop her learning. In contrast, student teachers in Hodkinson and Hodkinson's (1999) study projected a demeanour whereby their colleagues would view them as colleagues rather than student teachers. These preservice student teachers wanted to be treated as qualified teachers rather than labelling themselves as novices. They also voluntarily increased their teaching commitment in order to be accepted as a member in their colleges. However, in the case of inservice teachers like Helen, she was already a member at *Eastvalley*. She was in a much better position at *Eastvalley* than any other new teachers in terms of her social capital. She also saw herself as a student teacher at *Westvalley* but did not attempt to take on more commitment than that which she had initially been tasked to do. She fitted in well with her new placement through the support of her friend, another student teacher, who was once a full time teacher at *Westvalley*.

Thus, we argue that cultural capital is not the only aspect that should be considered, when understanding how individuals learn in a learning context. In this case, it is the individual's role and position in relation to the workplace which is important (see Goh, 2014 *inter alia*). In other words, the dispositions to learning are influenced by the roles and positions of individuals in the workplace. As discussed earlier, individual dispositions to learning are also influenced by biography (Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2004). Each individual will only exert their actions based on what the opportunities or possibilities that they could see, which Hodkinson terms 'horizons for learning'.

Although positioned marginally, Helen continued to learn to teach, echoing other research findings (e.g. Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2014; Fuller and Unwin, 2003; Goh, 2014) where individuals continue to learn, even when they have achieved full membership in their respective learning contexts. However, Helen was not able to optimise the learning opportunities that her position as a student teacher could provide. At *Eastvalley,* Helen had difficulty in adopting an identity as a learner as she was viewed as a full time teacher. Helen experienced similar experiences in *Westvalley* where colleagues there viewed her as a new teacher, who did not need much help as they knew she was a full time teacher at *Eastvalley* prior to entering the initial teacher preparation programme. As Giddens (1991) suggests, individual identity is partly self-constructed and partly

ascribed by others. However Helen would have preferred to be viewed as a newcomer who needed support to learn to teach. Her mentor at *Westvalley* treated her as an expert teacher in her field, rather than someone who was new, and needed help to learn to teach. This restricted her ability to develop her pedagogical and subject knowledge which had been her original aim on the teacher training programme. Thus, having cultural capital which is valued in one learning context might not necessarily assist in one's learning. We argue therefore that individuals' positions in relation to the learning context have a significant influence on their learning.

Reconceptualising workplace learning for inservice teacher education

In this paper, we have focused on using Bourdieu's concepts of field and cultural capital in order to understand Helen's learning to become a teacher in different contexts. As discussed before, Helen's roles shifted from a full time teacher to a student teacher both at *Eastvalley* and *Westvalley*. The shift of roles inevitably affected Helen's position within the learning context as she was positioned marginally where she did not have the full responsibilities of a teacher. Utilising Bourdieu's concepts, because she had already been a teacher of business subjects there, Helen had the cultural capital which would assist her to thrive better at *Eastvalley*, her primary workplace. She was able to negotiate her responsibilities at *Eastvalley* easily, compared to the reports of other in-service student teachers such as those in Orr and Simmons' (2010) research.

Helen's story highlights the significance of individual positions in relation to the learning context. At *Eastvalley*, she had valued cultural capital, and a marginal position, whilst at *Westvalley*, she was a newcomer who was also positioned marginally. In both circumstances, Helen continued to learn but her story hints at the challenge experienced at *Eastvalley* and *Westvalley* as she was viewed as a teacher. Her learning at both colleges were also influenced by her interactions with her mentors and colleagues. Thus, in order to understand our research findings, Bourdieu's ideas need to be extended; that is, having cultural capital valued does not necessarily mean individuals will succeed in the learning context. Instead, it is the position or role of the student teacher which needs to be considered. Even within the same learning context, learning is influenced by the roles and practices of each individual, (Goh, 2014).

There is an interrelationship between workplace affordances and individual dispositions in relation to workplace learning opportunities (Billett, 2002; Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2005). Billett (2002) argues that social practices are the result of the reciprocal process of how workplaces afford participation and how individuals elect to engage with these practices. Workplace affordances are the result of the historical-cultural practices, and factors within and beyond the workplace that constitute the practices within it (Billett, 2002). Orr and Simmons (2010) found that the availability of these affordances and how the student teacher is developed depended on the structure of the college, both within and beyond the institution. Within *Eastvalley* and *Westvalley*, the identified workplace affordances include interaction with mentors and colleagues, establishment of learning relationships, and interaction with students. Compared to *Eastvalley*, Helen's story indicated there were better workplace affordances at *Westvalley* with more interactions with colleagues, due to the smaller sized department. These affordances affect individuals in ways that contribute to the development of their identity. Concurrently, individual agency in recognising and responding to these opportunities is influenced by their biography (Hodkinson et al, 2004). Helen's first few years of teaching at *Eastvalley* helped establish her position as a teacher, so as a student teacher, she did not need to learn to 'fit in'. At *Westvalley,* Helen fitted in quite easily with the help of her friend. As Orr and Simmons

(2010) argue, 'learning to 'fit in,' is not, however, the same as learning to teach well, although learning, meaningful or otherwise, is taking place' (p.199). Although there was organisational support for developing student teachers in both workplaces for example through giving them fewer responsibilities, there was also a lack of recognition of their role as student teachers. Indeed, this lack of recognition inevitably influenced the support given by mentors and colleagues in the aspect of learning to teach.

From the discussion above, there is a need to reconceptualise the workplace learning of inservice teachers. As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, workplace learning is an important aspect of teacher education, both for pre-service and in-service education. In this paper, the findings have shown that the idea, which Murray et al (2014) strongly argue for, of spending more time in the placements does not necessarily equate to better quality learning for these student teachers. Murray et al (2014) argue that such constructions of teachers' learning proposes a superficial linear process of improvement, and a simplistic view of the relationship between the narrow constructions of practice and students' learning. Murray et al (2014) then argue for a different construction of workplace learning which mirrors those of Engestrom's (2001) expansive theory as learning is complex, changeable, unpredictable, and expansive in nature.

Conclusion : Improving the workplace learning of student teachers

The aim of the paper was to understand the relationship between student teachers as individuals, their experiences and different placement experiences, using Bourdieu's conceptual tools of capital and field. Data from the study highlights two important points: firstly Bourdieu's theoretical thinking needs extending when utilised for understanding this research data. He argues that having the right cultural capital which is valued in the learning context will usually help individuals to thrive and succeed. However, although Helen had the cultural capital in the form of subject knowledge, her dispositions to learning were affected by her position as both a student teacher and a previously experienced teacher. That is, she was viewed as a full-time teacher who did not need guidance.

Fejes and Kopsen's (2011) study on vocational teachers in Sweden illustrates that participation in and movement across communities of practice is important for shaping their identities. Beyond focusing on the participation in the different communities, Bourdieu's habitus suggests that understanding Helen's disposition in each of the communities is also crucial, and largely depends on the positions of Helen in relation to the context when understanding learning. Hence, it is not just participating in the different communities that shapes the vocational identity of teachers. It is about the interplay between individual dispositions and the context. Helen, being positioned as a student teacher at *Eastvalley* and *Westvalley*, had the chance to participate in the workplace activities which contribute to the development of her identity as a vocational teacher. She was able to compare the workforce affordances offered by the two placements. Hence, this offers the opportunity to extend her professional identity through 'boundary crossing' into different placements.

It is evident, from researchers (e.g. Murray et al, 2014) that workplace learning for pre-service and in-service student teachers needs to move beyond training modes of apprenticeship and transmission models. On the other hand, the organisational structures in most colleges or placements, which frame the learning environment for teachers, should place emphasis on the benefits of creating expansive learning environments. By doing so, these environments could potentially improve the workplace learning of these student teachers (Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2005). Following this, there should be a recognition of 'teachers as learners' whereby, mentors and colleagues would need to be

clear about their supporting role. Equally important is to encourage student teachers to maintain their own learning toward more expansive end of the spectrum (see Fuller and Unwin, 2003).

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