Pre-service teachers’ perspective changes: a transformative learning experience during teaching practice in remote areas

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Abstract

Experiencing unfamiliar environments tends to foster transformative learning. However, limited studies investigate how experiencing contrasting localities fosters transformative learning, such as teaching practice in remote areas by pre-service teachers who are from elsewhere. This study focuses on revealing pre-service teachers’ transformative learning experiences during their teaching practice by investigating the changes associated with their teaching practice and how these changes occur. Using semi-structured interviews, we questioned forty-one pre-service primary teachers about their one-year teaching experiences in remote areas of Indonesia. The findings show that pre-service teachers undergo perspective changes, which indicate a transformative learning outcome. Three elements of the transformative learning process – disorientation, exploring new roles and reflection – are also identified in the data. These three elements of the transformative learning process influence pre-service teachers’ perspectives. This implies that teaching practice in remote areas stimulates pre-service teachers to experience transformative learning.

Keywords: transformative learning; pre-service teachers; teaching practice; remote areas; perspective changes
Introduction

Teaching practice at school is essential to prepare pre-service teachers (PSTs) for the teaching profession (Foncha et al., 2015) and to further develop their capability as a teacher (Abongdia et al., 2015). One framework used to explore the benefits of teaching practice is transformative learning (TL). This theory is rooted in experiential learning (Polyzoi & Magro, 2015). An individual who is significantly engaged in unfamiliar experiences or places might experience TL (Morgan, 2010).

However, more studies explore TL in international contexts such as teaching practice in another country (see e.g. Addleman et al., 2014; Polyzoi & Magro, 2015; Salmona et al., 2015). Limited studies elucidate TL in contrasting localities within the same country, for example, teaching practice in remote areas by PSTs who are from elsewhere.

Our study aims to investigate how experiencing contrasting localities through teaching practice in remote areas fosters TL. According to Senyshyn (2018), TL theory highlights both the outcomes and experiences during the process. Morgan (2010) also adds that the TL outcomes focus on changes. Therefore, this study explores PSTs’ TL experiences during teaching practice in remote areas by investigating the changes associated with teaching practice and how these changes occur.

Teaching practice in remote areas

Teaching practice at school is beneficial for PSTs; it facilitates PSTs to apply the theoretical knowledge they learn during their training at university (Foncha et al., 2015). PSTs can discover whether being a teacher is their passion or not through this teaching experience (Abongdia et al.,
PSTs also have an opportunity to develop their professional identity, such as what kind of teacher they want to become (Buchanan, 2015).

More specifically, teaching practice in remote areas – for PSTs who are from elsewhere – improves not only their pedagogical skills but also social skills (Stacey, 2019). Remote schools predominantly have a close relationship with the local community; PSTs who have teaching practice in remote schools are not only required to be accepted by their pupils but also the local community (Laurie-ann et al., 2011). This demands PSTs to actively integrate themselves into the local environment. Accordingly, this kind of teaching practice is more challenging than having teaching practice in a familiar environment (Autti & Bæck, 2021).

Teaching practice in remote areas is also more challenging than the urban and rural counterparts because remote schools tend to have a low quality of education (Mitra et al., 2008). Lack of teaching resources (Çiftçi, & Cin, 2018), pupils’ absenteeism (Nurhayati & Septia, 2016) and dropping out (Sabates et al., 2013), low parental support (Nugraheni, 2019) and geographical isolation (Febriana et al., 2018) are examples that contribute to this low quality of education. These examples are also the reason that teaching in remote schools is more complex than in urban and rural counterparts (Diwan, 2015).

**Transformative learning and the connection with professional development**

TL is a learning process where individuals transform their existing perspectives into new ones because these do not fit into their new environment or are no longer valid (Mezirow, 1991). Hoggan (2016) describes that TL is a process involving changes in the way learners make sense of their experiences. These significant changes happen as a result of transforming meaning perspectives (Mezirow, 1978a). When the changes involve transforming meaning perspectives, the learning process is holistic. In other words, the learning process will not only involve the
cognitive dimension but also emotional and social dimensions of learning (Taylor, 2009). For this reason, changes in TL are considered as changing as a whole person (Hoggan, 2016).

With a holistic learning process, TL provides a broad range of outcomes such as developing individuals’ capabilities, self-awareness and other significant positive changes (Hoggan, 2016). Therefore, TL can contribute to both personal (D’amato & Krasny, 2011; Dorsett et al., 2017) and professional growth (Polyzoi & Magro, 2015).

TL can happen in the workplace (Marsick, 1990). TL that occurs in the workplace contributes to individuals’ work identity (van Dellen & Cohen-Scali, 2015). For example, teachers who have teaching experience with Aboriginal pupils gain new knowledge about Aboriginal people, culture and history that enriches their pedagogical approach (Burgess, 2019). TL might also happen in professional training programs such as teacher training (Snyder, 2008). Experiences like teaching practice at school can facilitate PSTs to experience TL which helps them develop their new identity as a teacher (Auhl & Daniel, 2014). This indicates that TL experiences can promote professional development (van Dellen & Cohen-Scali, 2015).

**The TL processes**

Individuals can engage in the TL process when they experience disorientation (Pennington et al., 2013; Richards, 2015; Senyshyn, 2018; Wiessner & Mezirow, 2000). Mezirow (1991) defines disorientation as “a doubting process in which old meaning perspectives were perceived as inadequate in the face of heightened awareness of inconsistencies within the self” (p. 177). Taylor (2000) describes disorientation as an internal crisis. Disorientation involves experiencing cognitive dissonance (Morgan, 2010) which triggers a strong emotional response (Sokol & Shaughnessy, 2018). Therefore, identifying disorientation can be achieved through individuals’ emotional state; whether they undergo unpleasant feelings and negative emotions or not (Mälkki,
Experiencing disorientation can initiate a transformation process (Mezirow, 1981; Senyshyn, 2018). When individuals experience disorientation, they will learn anything that helps overcome this disorientation (Mezirow, 1990).

Mezirow (1994) states that individuals will undergo a reflection process in response to the disorientation to find a way to manage it. Reflection can be described as a thinking process regarding what is important, what is relevant, what is truthful, the reason for something or the best action to take (Mezirow, 1991). However, Taylor (1994b) explains that individuals might or might not undergo reflection in response to disorientation. He adds that individuals can explore the ways to manage their disorientation without much thought (Taylor, 1994b).

To bring their life back into balance, individuals – both with and without reflection – implement what Taylor (1994b) calls behavioral learning strategies. Meanwhile, Mezirow (1978b) calls these strategies exploration of options for new roles, relationships and actions where individuals try out their new roles in the new environment. During the implementation of these behavioral strategies, individuals learn about their new environment and can be ready to change (Coady, 2013). One example of a behavioral strategy is when individuals stay abroad, they may actively participate in the host culture, such as wearing the local dress (Taylor, 1994b).

**The TL outcomes**

The outcome of the TL process is a change (Morgan, 2010). Barclay-Goddard and colleagues (2012) describe a change in TL as a personal change. Mezirow (1991) claims that the change in TL is a change in the self. Since the TL outcomes focus on a personal change, the TL process
can be called a process of becoming (Dirkx, 1998). Hoggan (2016) explains that the change is not only associated with becoming different but also becoming better.

One of the changes associated with TL is a perspective change (Taylor, 2000). Mezirow (1978a), and Pomeroy and Oliver (2020) state that perspective changes can involve changes in the way we see or think about ourselves. For instance, PSTs become more aware of their own communication style after studying together with international counterparts (Senyshyn, 2018). Mezirow (1978a), and Pomeroy and Oliver (2020) also mention changes in the way we see our relationships with others. One example is PSTs who participate in family events at childcare can develop relationships with pupils’ parents, which increases PSTs’ desire to do their best for their pupils and the parents (Taylor & Kim, 2020). Furthermore, Lundgren and Poell (2016) mention changes in the way we see the world around us are included as a perspective change. A study from Zhu and colleagues (2020) gives an example; TL through teaching practice helps PSTs change their perspective about the teaching profession such as what they should do and what they can achieve as a teacher.

**Objective and research questions**

The objective of this study is to investigate the TL experience in PSTs’ teaching practice in remote areas. To address this objective, two research questions are presented:

1. Which changes occur in pre-service teachers associated with teaching practice in remote areas?
2. How does pre-service teachers’ teaching practice in remote areas influence these changes?
Methods

Research setting

From 2011 until 2018, the Indonesian government had implemented a one-year teaching experience in remote areas called the SM-3T program. SM-3T stands for “Sarjana Mendidik di Daerah Terdepan, Terluar dan Tertinggal” which translates to the graduates teaching in outermost, frontier and underdeveloped areas (The General Directorate of Science, Technology and Higher Education, 2015). The purpose of the program is (1) to give teaching experience in remote areas for PSTs, (2) to solve educational problems in remote areas, and (3) to prepare a professional teacher with insights into Indonesia (The General Directorate of Science, Technology and Higher Education, 2015; Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education, 2015).

This program was integrated into a two-year training for the teaching profession. As such, the training for the teaching profession consisted of the SM-3T program and the PPG program (six months of workshops at university and a six-month teaching experience in urban schools). When PSTs graduate from university, they obtain a bachelor’s degree of education without a teaching certificate. PSTs must participate in teacher profession training to obtain this certificate.

Despite being initiated by the government, the implementation of the SM-3T program was under the responsibility of several universities appointed by the government. The responsibility included (1) online application for the recruitment, (2) a preparatory training, and (3) the placement in remote areas.

The setting for this study was the fifth call of the SM-3T program. We selected three from the seventeen appointed universities to participate in this study. The criteria were that the selected
universities were located on different islands, covered the majority of the target provinces of the program, and were located in different provinces from the target remote areas.

Participants

The participants of the study were pre-service primary teachers from these three universities. Our focus was covering the target remote areas, so we ensured the selected participants’ remote areas did not overlap within the three universities. Sixteen pre-service primary teachers from university A, fifteen pre-service primary teachers from university B, and ten pre-service primary teachers from university C participated in the study.

Overall, forty-one pre-service primary teachers participated in this study. Most participants taught and stayed in different schools and villages across six provinces in Indonesia during the program. The participants’ domiciles were not categorized as remote areas. None of them shared the same ethnicity with the community in their remote area. Based on the recruitment regulation of the SM-3T program, all PSTs were unmarried and were not allowed to marry while participating in the program. They were not allowed to have prior teaching experiences in remote areas, and they must have graduated from the Bachelor of Education within the last three years before they applied to the program (Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education, 2015).

Table 1: Participants’ sample demographic data

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic</th>
<th>M(SD)</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total months of teaching experience before participating in the SM-3T program</td>
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<td>13-24 months</td>
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<td>Malay</td>
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**Data Collection and analysis**

This study used a qualitative research method. “Qualitative researchers focus on the study of social phenomena and on giving voice to the feelings and perceptions of the participants under study” (Marguerite et al., 2010, p. 142). This study used a semi-structured interview which
allowed us to change the order of questions prepared beforehand and to add more questions related to unpredictable issues raised during the interview (Gray, 2004).

We interviewed participants in retrospect which means interviewing them after they finished their teaching practice. Before we began the interviews, an informed consent was signed by participants. Next, face-to-face interviews were conducted; we allowed participants to choose where to do the interviews, either at university or their dormitory. According to Ruane (2005), participants should feel relaxed and supported during interviews in order to be able to explore their stories comfortably. The interview scheme consisted of questions about PSTs’ teaching experiences in remote areas and the changes that occur associated with this teaching practice. We recorded them digitally and took notes.

This study used theoretical thematic analysis in NVivo 11 to analyze the data. In theoretical thematic analysis, researchers analyze in more detail only the aspects of the data in which they have theoretical interest (Braun & Clarke, 2006). We listened to the recordings several times. We also transcribed the interviews verbatim. We coded participants’ events, activities, expressions, unpleasant feelings, and changes. Referring to the TL outcomes and process, we categorized different codes into potential themes, then defined and named these potential themes. During the analysis, we found themes that were consistent across participants deployed in all six provinces.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, we adopted a method predominantly used in TL studies; most TL studies have been conducted using interviews in retrospect (Taylor, 2000). We provided vivid quotes from the participants that represent the themes and had prolonged engagement with the setting and participants. We also described the participants and the setting in detail.
Results

In the following sections we will describe the changes that PSTs underwent, and how the remote areas influenced those changes.

PSTs’ changes associated with teaching practice in remote areas

Based on the analysis of the interviews, we found that all participants underwent perspective changes. We identified three types of perspective change; change in the way participants see themselves, change in the way participants see their relationships with others, and change in the way participants see the world around them.

Change in the way participants see themselves

All participants experienced changes in the way they see themselves. They realized that teaching practice in remote areas made them a better person. All of them described the teaching practice was a meaningful experience.

All participants felt that their personal qualities improved after teaching practice in remote areas. Such teaching practice taught them how to be more patient, considerate, responsible, and independent or self-sufficient. They improved their self-management and appreciated their life more. One example of these personal quality improvements was, “I feel that teaching practice in remote areas changed me. Even my parents admitted that I became a different person after returning home, being more independent. I used to be a cry-baby before participating in this program” (Interviewee 24).

Teaching practice boosted their confidence about becoming a teacher. Although all of them were confident, not all of them committed themselves to teaching in the future. We found one participant was planning to become a storyteller, something she had wanted to do even before
teaching practice. She did not mind returning to remote areas again to become a storyteller. One participant who committed to become a teacher in the future reported,

Before participating in the program, when people asked what I was going to do in the future I was in doubt whether I was going to teach or follow some other professions, but now I will reply confidently that I want to be a teacher.

(Interviewee 1)

From forty participants who would pursue a career as a teacher, more than half of them were willing to be deployed again as a teacher in any remote area across Indonesia as part of “the frontline teacher program”. This is a government program which deploys teachers in remote areas. The rest of the participants were willing to return to remote areas again with certain conditions. Some of them wanted to teach in different remote areas to have new experiences. Others wanted to teach in remote areas in their own province. A small number of participants were willing to teach in remote areas again if they gained permission from their parents. They stated that when they became a fully-fledged teacher in remote areas, they would have to stay a minimum of 5 years and could not move out without government agreement. Due to this, they considered their parents’ feelings and situation.

Furthermore, teaching practice made most of the participants realize that they still needed to improve their teaching skills. One interviewee explained “although teaching practice in remote areas improved my understanding of how to manage the class, it also made me realize that I was still lacking in that area. I still need to keep learning to improve this skill” (Interviewee 20).

Change in the way participants see their relationships with others

All participants experienced this type of change. Almost all participants realized the importance of building relationships with the local community when teaching in remote areas. Relationship-
building improved their understanding of how to interact, blend in and cohabit with people from different ethnicities and cultures. Differences in culture and ethnicities between the participant and the local community influenced these understandings. One participant reported, “Before placement, I used to be afraid of people that differ from me. This placement helped me learn how to communicate with people from different cultures and religions. Now I am more open and can accept diversity better” (Interviewee 18).

Teaching practice also helped almost half of the participants realize that building relationships with pupils in remote areas was not only limited to the classroom. Instead, pupils became more open outside of school hours. One participant shared his experience,

In the beginning of teaching practice, I tried to get close to pupils at school during break time. But it did not work well until I joined them fishing and played with them at the coast. I understood them more when I did so. (Interviewee 17)

Moreover, a few participants reported to appreciate family more. They admitted that living alone during placement, no internet connection, and unreliable mobile signal were the triggers. Consequently, they became closer to their family after returning home. Meanwhile, the remain participants stated that this teaching practice did not influence their relationships with their family back home.

Change in the way participants see the world around them

All participants also experienced these changes. All forty-one participants thought that placement in remote areas was essential for them. Although all participants agreed that this placement was beneficial, not all agreed that teaching practice in remote areas should be compulsory for Indonesian teacher candidates. Those who disagreed argued that this placement should be voluntary due to the difficulty of commuting and living remotely.
Almost all participants improved their understandings of the teaching profession. They realized that teaching should be contextual, based on pupils’ needs and based on pupils’ academic ability. These participants also understood their teaching roles better. For instance, being a teacher in a remote area was not only about teaching pupils but also about educating the local community.

*In my remote area, it wasn’t only the pupils that called me “teacher” but also the local people. I used this opportunity to teach the local people literacy. This made me realize that being a teacher in remote areas is not only about the school but also the local community.* (Interviewee 11)

Additionally, three quarters of the participants enhanced their understanding of remote settings. They not only understood pupils’ characteristics and the school conditions better but also the community. For instance, one participant explained how teaching practice had broadened her knowledge about schools in remote areas;

*Teaching practice in remote areas made me realize that not all schools in remote areas lack facilities, but they lack human resources. Local teachers were often absent. If the school received annual funding, none of the personnel would know how to manage it.* (Interviewee 3)

Another example is from participants who were deployed in post-conflict areas where they improved their understandings about the community. Interviewee 26 reported,

*I was placed in a remote area where most of the people were former Free Aceh Movement members. Before placement, I was afraid. I thought these people would be scary and violent. In fact, these people were friendly, even more friendly than people in my hometown. They also helped me a lot during placement.*
How PSTs’ teaching practice in remote areas influences their perspective changes

Based on the analysis of the interviews, all participants experienced disorientation, tried out new roles, and reflected on their teaching practice in remote areas.

Disorientation

During teaching practice, all participants experienced disorientation. A discrepancy between participants’ beliefs before arriving in the remote area and the reality they encountered there prompted this disorientation. None of participants came from nor had prior teaching experiences in remote areas. One example of participants’ discrepancy was the difference between their beliefs or values and the reality in remote areas. One participant described:

*I thought all pupils in my placement understood Indonesian even though they spoke the Nias language at home. I remembered when I asked my pupils to take out the books from their bag in Indonesian, they looked confused. I found most pupils could not understand Indonesian. This was shocking and confused me because I did not understand the Nias language.* (Interviewee 18)

Another example of a discrepancy was that the reality was more extreme than they expected, as reported by Interviewee 11;

*When the announcement board showed that I would be placed in West Papua, I knew that my stay there would be difficult. In fact, my stay there was a lot more difficult than I could imagine. When I arrived there, I found the village was very quiet; there were only fifteen families. The village is on a riverbank – where the river is known to have crocodiles – and surrounded by forest. The school only had a principal. The pupils had poor numeracy and literacy skills and difficulty to concentrate because it had been a while since these pupils had a teacher. Every*
teacher who was sent there never stayed long. In the beginning of my stay, I cried a lot. I was thinking could I survive teaching there for one year.

These participants’ disorientation overwhelmed them with negative emotions. Most participants felt anxious, uncertain, shocked and confused. Some participants felt tired, frustrated, upset, angry, hopeless and stressed. A few others even cried during teaching practice. One participant shared his memory, “In the morning, the classroom was full of pupils. When I returned to the class again after break time, I was shocked because half of the pupils had disappeared. Pupils often went home during break time” (Interviewee 3).

Exploring new roles

During teaching practice, all participants also explored what they could do to manage their disorientation and fit into their new environment. This exploration enabled all participants to survive and complete their teaching practice. Firstly, all participants explored their role as a teacher. In this role, all participants tried to solve educational problems that existed in their school. For instance, when they knew pupils were often absent due to helping their parents, some participants gave up extra time to teach outside school hours by adjusting to pupils’ schedule of helping their parents. One participant shared her story, “I taught pupils again at home after school hours since they were often absent” (Interviewee 9).

Almost three quarters of the participants reported teaching differently from local teachers, as they observed that local teachers tended to have low awareness of their duties. They did not rely on only one teaching method to teach pupils; they explored several teaching methods to find the best way to teach the pupils. As what was disclosed by one of the participants,

When I taught science and mathematics, I often asked pupils to work in a group.

Sometimes I need to use an individual approach to pupils who were difficult to
understand the learning materials. I also often asked pupils to study outside the classroom such as observing several kinds of plants. (Interviewee 10)

More than half of the participants taught pupils based on their academic ability. For instance, they focused on teaching literacy and numeracy.

To help them get closer to pupils, almost half of the participants played with pupils outside of school hours. They reported that pupils were more open to them after playing together. Some participants also adapted several school cultures to avoid conflict with parents. One interviewee gave an example, “Pupils were often absent when they participated in rituals. Their absenteeism led to school closure. I let them participate in rituals otherwise local people would be angry. However, I told pupils not to be absent for more than three days” (Interviewee 14).

Secondly, almost all participants explored their role as a newcomer. For instance, most of them started to interact and blend in with the local people. “My colleague and I understood that we were in a minority in that remote area. Therefore, during our first days we took a walk and greeted local people one by one. Then, we helped the local community when they had activities in the church” (Interviewee 13). Some participants participated in cultural events such as rituals and ceremonies. “During planting season, I helped local people to prepare the festival. I even participated in Hudoq; it was a traditional dance during planting season” (Interviewee 14). Some others helped local people when they asked for a favor. One interviewee said, “when local people asked us to prepare the rituals, we helped them” (Interviewee 1).

Reflection

In addition to experiencing disorientation and exploring new roles, all participants were engaged in reflection associated with teaching practice. Firstly, almost half of the participants experienced
a reflection during teaching practice. This reflection occurred in response to disorientation. They underwent a thinking process to find a way to manage their disorientation before exploring their new roles.

My pupils found it difficult to understand the lesson. Even if they understood the lessons, they would forget easily. I was frustrated and confused. I had to think hard to find a way to solve these issues, how to make these pupils remember the lessons. (Interviewee 23)

Meanwhile, other participants confronted their disorientation by exploring their new roles directly without being engaged in reflection. They said that they tried to apply several teaching methods that they learned during their four-year study at university or had implemented in previous teaching experiences without much thought. One described, “local teachers were often absent, which left several classes unattended. That made me sad. Therefore, I tried to apply multigrade teaching that I learned at university” (Interviewee 3).

Secondly, one participant was engaged in reflection once he finished his placement. His reflection involved how he made sense of his teaching experiences. Once he returned home, he recalled his one-year teaching experiences and interpreted them so that he could learn from those experiences. Meanwhile, other participants said that they just felt different after returning home, but they did not think about it deeply. When they returned home, they tended to focus on the preparation for the PPG program.

Thirdly, all participants experienced reflection during interviews. We asked all of them to recall their teaching experiences in remote areas. Our conversation stimulated all participants to reflect on and be more conscious about their teaching experience that they had taken for granted. During
this reflection, the participants made sense of their teaching experiences. They recalled which incidents or activities had changed them and what their value was.

During interviews, most of the participants were also emotionally affected. They described their teaching experience passionately. Some participants shared their stories with teary eyes. A few others even cried during interviews when they recalled these teaching experiences. One interviewee explained,

The teaching experiences in remote areas were incredible. I struggled to manage the class, so I explored possible teaching methods to help pupils study well. I think this struggle makes me realize that despite studying for four years at university, my teaching skills are still lacking. I still need to improve my teaching skills, especially in managing the class. (Interviewee 5)

Discussion and conclusion

In general, we found that PSTs underwent perspective changes, experienced disorientation, explored their new roles, and experienced reflection associated with teaching practice in remote areas. According to Taylor (2000), perspective changes are one of the TL outcomes. Meanwhile, disorientation, exploring new roles, and reflection are important elements in the TL process (Mezirow, 1978b). This indicates that PSTs experienced TL during teaching practice in remote areas.

PSTs’ perspective changes and their TL process are discussed further as follows:

PSTs’ perspective changes

Based on the findings, PSTs’ perspective changes do not only mean changing a perspective to different one, but also confirming their existing perspectives. For instance, PSTs confidently
commit to become a teacher after experiencing teaching in remote areas. Hoggan (2016) states that a change in TL does not only refer to becoming different but also becoming better. Our study confirms that perspective changes in TL can include affirming an existing perspective.

Data demonstrates that PSTs experience three types of changes in perspective; in the way they see themselves, in the way they see their relationships with others and in the way they see the world around them. This is consistent with studies from (Lundgren & Poell, 2016; Mezirow, 1978; Pomeroy & Oliver, 2020). This raises a question; can an individual who experiences only one of the three types of perspective change still be considered to have engaged in TL? Further research is needed.

In the findings, PSTs changes in the way they see themselves involve becoming aware of their own strengths and weaknesses as a teacher. This means that PSTs experience self-awareness which supports a study from Greenhill and colleagues (2018) that perspective changes include self-awareness. Awareness of their strengths enhances PSTs’ confidence, while awareness of their weaknesses urges them to learn more to become a better teacher. Our study points out that TL contributes to confidence improvement and prompts individuals to become lifelong learners.

**PSTs’ transformative learning process**

Related to the TL process, findings demonstrate that PSTs’ disorientation occurs not only due to a contradiction between belief and reality, but also when reality is more extreme than expected. According to Samenow et al. (2013), experiencing a contradiction between belief and reality is a trigger for disorientation. Our study describes another trigger for disorientation; a more extreme reality than expected.
While almost half of the PSTs undergo a reflection process in response to disorientation – followed by exploring new roles – other PSTs explore their new roles directly without first reflecting. This result supports Taylor’s statement (1994b) that individuals might or might not be engaged in reflection while dealing with disorientation, but contradicts Mezirow’s statement (1994) that reflection always occurs in response to disorientation. Furthermore, some PSTs are engaged in reflection more than once. They – who are engaged in reflection while dealing with disorientation – experience reflection again to make meaning of their teaching experiences. These two findings indicate that TL has flexibility in the process and occurs differently from one person to another.

Based on the findings, PSTs were engaged in the reflection of making meaning process stimulated by the conversation between PSTs and researcher. This supports Gray’s statement (2004) that interviews open up an opportunity for participants to reflect on their experiences. This also indicates that the opportunity for PSTs to make meaning of their teaching experiences is increased when it is stimulated. Based on Taylor’s explanation, dialogues can become the medium for reflection to occur (2009). Our study suggests that TL in a making meaning process hardly occurs naturally and should be facilitated.

In addition, our findings reveal that PSTs were emotionally engaged during the interviews, which proves that teaching experiences in remote areas have strong emotional influences on PSTs themselves, which is what Mezirow (1991) expects from a TL experience. This means that identifying whether an experience has TL potential or not can include observing the participants’ response towards the experience.
Limitations

Despite promising results, this study has at least three important limitations. Firstly, it only explores PSTs’ changes in perspective as TL outcomes. There are other changes that are not covered in this study. TL outcomes are not only limited to perspective changes. Behavior changes and skills development are other examples of TL outcomes (Hoggan, 2016). Therefore, it would be valuable for future studies to explore other changes that occur as result of TL experiences. Secondly, this study focuses on describing PSTs’ disorientation experience during teaching practice. It is possible that PSTs begin experiencing disorientation before placement, which is not investigated in this study. Thirdly, interviews in retrospect allow PSTs to be more conscious of their teaching experiences that they took for granted. However, the information obtained depends on PSTs’ report. Researchers did not witness what happened during their teaching practice. For this reason, such study should include observation alongside interviews in retrospect.

Practical Implications

Our study highlights that teaching practice in remote areas can successfully foster PSTs to experience TL. This indicates that remote settings are conducive to TL. We recommend adult educators opt for remote areas as a setting for TL experiences in professional development. Our study also emphasizes that experiencing contrasting localities even within the same country can prompt TL. Our study proves that experiencing different cultures can be done within the same country. Therefore, teacher educators and adult educators – who would like to facilitate their students in experiencing different cultures – need not only rely on experiences in foreign countries. Instead, they can seek contrasting localities within the same country. We recommend using this study as an example and reference.
Our study indicates that the TL process involves both cognitive and emotional experiences identified through disorientation and reflection. Aitken (2015) claims that “professional learning is emotional and cerebral” (p. 15). Our study shows that PSTs’ reflection in making meaning is more likely to happen after being stimulated by interviews. To ensure that PSTs undergo reflection and can manage their disorientation, a facilitator is necessary. A facilitator in TL plays a role as a supporter (Mezirow, 1990) and a guide (Meyer, 2009) to help learners to overcome their disorientation and experience reflection.

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