



# Mobility, place and affect in transnational teacher education graduates' accounts of their first year teaching



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## HIGHLIGHTS

- Beginning teaching involves both mobility and immobility for bonded teachers.
- Overseas-educated teachers in Malaysia faced high expectations when they returned.
- The teachers described grappling with contrasting understandings of best practice.
- The teachers also described 'shifting' personally and professionally.
- Bonded pre-service teachers should be encouraged to anticipate 'return' challenges.

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## ABSTRACT

In this article, we consider how mobility, immobility, embodiment and affect appeared in research with 13 beginning teachers who were 'bonded' graduates of a twinned (Malaysia–New Zealand) teacher education programme. We discuss the teachers' accounts of moving place, and being placed in new schools; 'moving selves', or experiencing a changed sense of self as new teachers; 'moving students', or seeing shifts in students' educational outcomes; and being moved by (responding affectively to) student learning and behaviour. Our study highlights the need in internationalised teacher (and higher) education to pre-empt challenges inherent in moving 'home' or to new places to work.

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## 1. Introduction

The contemporary interest in mobility in the social sciences, including in education, has been described as reflecting a "new mobilities paradigm" (Sheller & Urry, 2006, p. 207) or "mobility turn" (Hannam, Sheller, & Urry, 2006, p. 1). Arguably, neither mobility, nor scholarly interest in it, are new (Bell, Duncan, & Anderson, 2012; Cresswell, 2010); however, the scale and scope of contemporary mobilities (the movement of ideas, people,

materials, capital, and technology between places) is unprecedented (Knight, 2006; Sheller & Urry, 2006). Currently, more than four million higher education (HE) students study outside of their 'home' countries (OECD, 2015). Other forms of HE mobility are reflected in the growth of offshore campuses, and the development of 'twinning' programmes (Madge, Raghuram, & Noxolo, 2015; Waters & Brooks, 2011). Teacher mobility has also increased dramatically in recent decades (Bense, 2016).

Recent literature critiques the valorisation of mobility (Conradson & Latham, 2005; Waters, 2014), while highlighting its value as a framework for thinking "relationally and contextually" in education (Waters, 2016, p. 2, emphasizes original). Critical scholars caution against disregarding immobilities and friction alongside mobilities, calling for research attention to questions of place,

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embodiment, relationality and responsibility in internationalised HE (for example, see Doherty, Patton, & Shield, 2015; Madge, Raghuram, & Noxolo, 2009; Madge et al., 2015; Sidhu & Dall'Alba, 2012; Waters, 2012, 2014, 2016). Collins (2012, p. 297) notes that geographically-focused research in internationalised HE has tended to consider the “broad characteristics” of student movement while paying much less attention to “local articulations of student mobility”. Cresswell (2016) highlights the Eurocentricism of much mobilities scholarship, and argues for the need to recognise that “the encounter between mobility and the world ... happens differently everywhere” (p. 1085). Madge et al. (2015) call for a de-centering of scholarship on educational mobilities, for example, through attention to mobile students as co-constructors of knowledge and “student immobilities” (p. 684). They also suggest a need for “*genuine dialogue*” concerning “best practice” in internationalised education, and the “*quandaries raised*” through internationalisation practices and processes (2009, p. 43, emphases original). Ahmed (1999) highlights the importance of considering human im/mobilities in affective or emotional terms: how people feel in, and in relation to, particular places and spaces.

The imperatives noted above informed our development of a study in 2014–2015 exploring the first year teaching experiences of 13 twinned teacher education programme graduates. The teachers had studied in both Malaysia and New Zealand, and were bonded to teach in Malaysian public schools for five years post graduation. We aimed to explore how the teachers negotiated their transition to teaching, as transnationally-educated teachers. The broader study also included six New Zealand-based graduates, as we did not want to assume that Malaysia-based beginning teachers would necessarily have different experiences than those in other locations. Some parallel findings emerged across the two cohorts, but the Malaysian teachers' accounts were also unique in many respects, due to their employment conditions and teaching contexts. We have written about the New Zealand teachers' accounts of beginning teaching, and compared the New Zealand and Malaysia based teachers' education policy contexts and early teaching experiences elsewhere (Anderson, Young, Blanch, & Smith, 2015; Smith, Anderson, & Blanch, 2016). In this article, we focus specifically on the Malaysian teachers' accounts of their first year working in (mostly rural) Malaysian schools.

We begin by outlining the literature that informs this article. We then introduce the study, describing its context and explaining our methodology. Next we discuss our study findings, focusing on the ways in which place, embodiment and affect emerged in the teachers' references to their teaching work. We conclude by considering how our study might inform new understandings of internationalisation and mobility in teacher education, and HE more broadly.

## 2. Mobility, friction, affect, embodiment and teaching

Mobility can be seen as inherent in all beginning teachers' journeys, since teachers move from their teacher education contexts to take up work in schools. Teachers' experiences of their early professional mobility may differ, depending on multiple personal, organisational, socio-cultural and relational factors, including their earlier practicum experiences, family circumstances, and access to ongoing professional support (see Bense, 2016; DeAngelis & Presley, 2011; Doherty et al., 2015; Goh & Wong, 2014; Gu & Day, 2013; Ronfeldt, 2012). Beginning teachers may experience a sense of constraint if they have little control over where they work, or the kind of teaching work that they are required to do. In a review of literature on coping strategies for adaptation to new teacher appointments, Sharplin, O'Neill, and Chapman (2011) identified an association for teachers between a limited sense of personal control

over their working environment and conditions, reduced job satisfaction, and increased stress. Considerable literature has explored questions of mobility (change, adjustment and transition) in relation to beginning teaching, including on a transnational scale (see Arber, Blackmore, & Vongalis-Macrow, 2014; Goddard, O'Brien, & Goddard, 2006; Goetz, Jaritz, & Oser, 2011; Singh & Han, 2010; Widegren & Doherty, 2010). Much less has considered questions of ‘friction’ (Cresswell, 2014), or teachers' embodied experiences of place/being placed in particular schools (Somerville, Plunkett, & Dyson, 2010).

In this article, we consider beginning teaching in relation to mobility, affect, and embodiment. The article is a response to recent literature calling for attention to questions of relationality and responsibility in accounts of internationalised higher education (Madge et al., 2009), and highlighting the value of considering teachers' work in relation to place and space (Somerville et al., 2010). We see mobilities scholarship as offering a lens through which to consider the relational processes associated with internationalised teacher education (after Larsen, 2016), including teachers' sense of “*becoming through mobility*”, and of “*form[ing] and transform[ing] space*” (Adey, 2006, pp. 79–80, emphasis original). Following Cresswell (2010), we consider the “*entanglement of physical movement, representations, and practices*” (p. 18) that the teachers' accounts revealed, through attention to three aspects of mobility: “the fact of physical movement”; “representations of movement” (how teachers spoke about movement in their accounts of beginning teaching); and teachers' “*experienced and embodied practice of movement*” (p. 19) - how they negotiated new professional roles as transnationally educated teachers. We also consider how the teachers' mobilities impacted on others, specifically, their students (following Adey, 2006; Waters, 2016).

At the same time, we wish to problematise a reification of mobility in relation to internationalisation, and the use of binary logics such as mobility/immobility and international/local. With this in mind, we draw on Cresswell's (2014) notion of ‘friction’ to consider how “context and the particular” intersect with and shape mobilities in specific ways (p. 113). Specifically, we consider how embodiment, place and affect emerged in our research data (after Madge et al., 2015). We use the term ‘affect’ after Ahmed (1999), who argues for the importance of “*talk[ing] literally about*” mobility or “*migrations*” (p. 333): how movement *feels* and is experienced by different bodies in specific localities (also see Cresswell, 2010). Ahmed (2004) notes an etymological connection between affect (emotion) and (im)mobility, explaining that:

The word ‘emotion’ comes from Latin, *emovere*, referring to ‘to move, to move out’. So emotions are what move us. But emotions are also *about* attachments, about what connects us to this or that. The relationship between movement and attachment is instructive. What moves us, what makes us feel, is also that which holds us in place, or gives us a dwelling place (p. 27, emphases original).

In considering affect in relation to teaching, we also draw on the work of Hargreaves (1998, 2001) who conceptualises teaching as inherently affective, relational work. After Zembylas (2003, p. 233), we see attention to affect as facilitating rich insights into teachers' “*becoming*”: their negotiation of the interplay between structure and agency, and their development of (or struggle to develop) “*emotional affinities with others*” in new teaching contexts. By considering mobility, friction, affect and embodiment in relation to the teachers in our study, our aim is to produce a complex, “*politically relevant, [and] emphatically human*” research account of the teachers' experiences of beginning teaching (Thien, 2005, p. 450).

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