A Phenomenological Study of Practicum Experience: Preservice Teachers' Fears

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Abstract

This study examines and explores PSTs' fears realised during the practicum period. In order to achieve an in-depth understanding, a phenomenological and holistic approach has been adopted. Data were collected from 22 preservice teachers via reports with open-ended questions on a weekly basis during the whole practicum period. 211 reports were analysed through inductive thematic coding. The analysis led to discrimination of twelve different yet interrelated sources of fear. It is argued that PSTs' fears are learnt and resulted from a perception of threat, uncertainties involved in situations, possibility of deteriorating conditions of the future events and/or anticipatory reflections. The paper also explicates on the protective feature of fear, which is discussed to have a potential to support PSTs' self-development and professional-preparation.

Keywords: practicum, preservice teachers, fears, fear sources

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INTRODUCTION

Practicum of preservice teachers (PST) has long been on the research agenda, dating back to 1960s (Shuman, 1965). Since then practicum of PSTs received considerable research attention. Initial research attempts on practicum focused on the determination of necessary teaching skills that PSTs should acquire to perform effective teaching with an improved student performance (Lortie, 1975). The aims and structures of practicum process in relation to the teacher preparation and paradigm change was another emerging research theme in the field (Zeichner, 1983). Studies, especially after 1980s, were more concerned with teacher actions and decisions during the practicum process in the school settings (Calderhead 1984). PSTs', for example, ideas and thoughts on their own actions/experiences (e.g. images, beliefs and perceptions) were often studied (Hollingsworth, 1989). After 1990s, researchers focused on PSTs' enculturation process within the educational settings (Ashforth & Saks, 1996) and the teacher educators' supervisions (both university and school-based) in supporting PSTs' development (Cohn & Gellman, 1988). Another line of research emerging as from 1990s was related to social and emotional growth (or changes) of PSTs as part of their practicum experience in connection with initial teacher training (Goleman, 1995). These studies attended to such issues as PSTs' adaptations, interactions with members of school community, identity formation, understandings (and utilization) of institutional norms, values, rules and resources (Ashforth & Saks, 1996; McNally, Cope, Inglis, B, & Stronach, 1997; Riedler & Eryaman, 2016). After 2000s, studies on PSTs' practicum experience evolved towards more specific issues such as their needs (e.g., technical and emotional support, technology support, improvement of knowledge base), improvement of teaching skills, changes in PSTs' beliefs and perceptions, interactions with different agents (such as students, teachers, peers and mentors) (Allsopp, DeMarie, Alvarez-McHatton, & Doone, 2006; Eryaman, 2007; Goh & Matthews, 2011; Trent, 2010).

One common finding of such diverse research undertakings is that although practicum has quite an influential role in the lives of PSTs during the process of becoming a teacher, it is recognised that practicum is a rather challenging and stressful endeavour for many PSTs (see Gardner, 2010). Therefore there appears an inclination to study the practicum through the eyes and experiences of PSTs themselves (Grant-Smith & Gillett-Swan, 2017). Studying the lived-in experiences of those who are novices of teaching life has a potential for researchers to better understand and conceptualise this stressful endeavour as practicum creates an environment in which PSTs find themselves in a position to explore the self, others and the new scenarios (Caires & Almeida, 2012). This perspective suggests that becoming a teacher goes well beyond a technical growth (i.e. scientific, procedural and pedagogical) and acknowledges the importance of moral and emotional dimensions of their experiences (Hargreaves, 1998). In this regard, Caires, Almeida and Vieira (2012) point out the significance of "cognitions, emotions and meanings that emerge, to listen to the dilemmas, doubts and fears of the student teachers regarding their teaching practice, as well as their drives, beliefs and expectations about the profession." There appears an agreement that PSTs' fears and doubts realised during the practicum provides an important opportunity for teacher educators in supporting PSTs' technical, emotional and moral growth in the transition period of the teaching profession (Poulou, 2007).

PSTs doubts, fears and dilemmas experienced during the practicum are seen important and hence studied by several researchers, though with some other alternative terms. PSTs' practicum experiences, for example, were analyzed with regard to challenges (Koc, 2012; Tsai & Liu, 2013), concerns (Goh & Matthews, 2011; Poulou, 2007), difficulties (Al-Hassan, Al-Barakat, & Al-Hassan, 2012) and problems (Boz & Boz, 2006). Although these studies make important contributions to our understanding of PSTs' fears, they have some serious shortcomings as well. First of all, the researchers often limit the scope of PSTs' fears often with a focus on teaching (see Goh & Matthews, 2011; Poulou, 2007). Such an approach reflects a reductionist perspective of PSTs' fears to the teaching practice. This ignores, for example, surrounding environment of school ethos and contextual components such as rules, values and communication patterns of different agents. Secondly, data collection tools are often structured vaguely, creating confusion on the part of participants on what to include/exclude in their responses (e.g. Al-Hassan et al., 2012; Boz & Boz, 2006). Thirdly, data

collection usually does not span over the practicum period. Instead researchers tend to gather data on PSTs' experiences either with a one-shot interview (e.g. Koc, 2012), questionnaire (e.g. Tsai & Liu, 2013) or on a limited part of the practicum period (e.g. Poulou, 2007). This situation creates formidable challenges in achieving a holistic and broader understanding of the PSTs' fears. It is perhaps due to similar observations, several researchers argue that studying PSTs' fears with a phenomenological and holistic approach would contribute greatly to a deeper understanding of the complexities, dynamics and idiosyncrasies of becoming a teacher (Caires, et.al., 2012).

With these in mind, this study attempts to investigate PSTs' fears from a phenomenological and holistic perspective. More specifically this study aims to examine and explore PSTs' fears experienced or realised during the practicum period. Adoption of a phenomenological and holistic perspective would, I believe, contribute to an in-depth understanding of the nature, development and sources of fears as well as dynamics practicum process.

METHODS

Context and Participants

In designing this study a phenomenological approach was adopted. Participants of the study were the teacher candidates enrolled in a Turkish language teaching program of education faculty in a mid-sized university in Turkey. In Turkish context, initial teacher preparation programs usually lasts for four years during which enrolees attend subject matter and method courses. In the last year of the program, the teacher candidates complete two separate school experience modules in two semesters (one in each semester). The first one is called School Experience during which teacher candidates are expected to observe and get acquaintance with the school environment. The other module, given in the second semester, is more practical in that teacher candidates are expected to teach at least 20 hours in class under the supervision of the mentor teacher. As a requirement of the course, they also spend at least 6 hours in the placement school every week. The data in this study were collected during the second school placement module in the spring term.

The PSTs were informed about the purpose of the study and the research procedure was explained in detail. Participants were also informed that, if volunteered, they were expected to perform certain duties as follows:

- Filling a form with several open-ended items (see below) weekly on the basis of their experiences and observations in the school

- Handing in the forms on a weekly-basis regularly

- Attending in a one-hour meeting with the university tutor (i.e. the author of this paper) every week

- Not being absent in the placement school more than 20% of the compulsory time

- Making observations in different spaces and places of the school (e.g. canteens, staffrooms, school gardens)

- Keeping an agenda to make notes of observations which could be later used while responding to the open-ended form

At the beginning, from a cohort of 60 teacher candidates, 35 were volunteered. However, later on, some willingly drop out of the study and some did not comply with the expectations and hence being excluded. In the end, the study was completed with 22 students, 13 of whom prepared 10 reports and 12 prepared 9 weekly reports.

Data Collection Tool and Procedure

The data for this study were collected via a form with 9 open-ended items. The questions placed on the form were as follows:

When compared with the last week, in this week:

1. Q1. What have you learned?

2. Q2. What have you realised?

3. Q3. What were you critical of?

4. Q4. What was it that you supported?

5. Q5. What were the things that you started to get feared?

6. Q6. What were the things that encouraged you?

7. Q7. What practice(s) was exemplary for you?

8. Q8. What were the things that you would never do when you become a teacher?

9. Q9. How did you bridge the theory and practice?

At the outset, a meeting was held with the participants to introduce the data collection tool and instructions on how to fill the form were given. The PSTs were strongly advised to draw on their observations and experiences. They were also asked to go out of the classrooms especially during lesson breaks and in their free times; to spend some time in staffrooms for observational purposes; to have conversation with teachers, head teachers, deputies and auxiliary staff. During the weekly meetings, the tutor guide and motivate the PSTs to give detailed descriptions and clarified certain issues raised by the participants.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was structured on inductive thematic coding. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998) code is an abstract representation of phenomenon and coding is the process through which ideas are related to the data which then be used to support the ideas (Richards, 2009). The data analysis process in this study took place with a grounded, data-driven approach to coding and organizing information, eventually leading to emergent themes from the written data.

During the analysis process two researchers worked together (one is the author and the other is a field expert). At the initial stages, both of the coders worked separately reading and re-reading 211 reports from 22 participants in order to have a grasp of the data. During the repeated readings, both coders took notes of PSTs' fears mentioned in any part of the reports and determined the initial codes. Those found more 'interesting' were taken under close scrutiny. Coders' notes and observations were shared, compared and merged, when appropriate, and hence an outline has been created to analyse the reports. The analysis continued with a detailed examination of a sub-sample. Afterwards, the codes and emergent themes were compiled into a codebook including code definition, inclusion criteria and illustrative quotations. Emergent themes evolving around the codes were refined as the analysis progressed and earlier observations and derived implications were revisited during the full-sample report analysis. To deepen the understanding of participants' fears and their nature, the coders used a constant comparative method across reports (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Hence it could be said that emergent themes and codes were developed through an iterative, reflective and cyclical process. Data analysis process span over some time during which the two coders met periodically. They critically

evaluate the themes, codes and illustrative examples until they reached an agreement and had discussions about the theoretical implications by referring to the data and the relevant literature.

Results

The analysis led to determination of 12 main themes about which PSTs mentioned to have fears. One could see that themes are closely connected and carry a heavy emotional load on the part of PSTs. In what follows, these themes with their dominant and discernable features will be explained with illustrative quotations from the reports. While referring the PSTs, an abbreviation is used to refer to their sequence and report number; for example, PST1R3 refers to the third report of the first teacher candidate.

Fears of Academic Insufficiency

Academic insufficiency is one of the highest reported sorts of fear (by 15 participants). PSTs have fears of not being able to answer student questions while teaching, misleading and misinforming students, not being able to satisfy students with their subject matter knowledge.

PST2R3: This week, the topic of lesson was Jules Verne's life and works…one student asked about one particular work of Verne's…I didn't know it…I feared to give the impression that I am unknowledgeable

When PSTs become aware of the deficiencies in their knowledge base, they start to have concerns of losing professional esteem and being ineffective for the students.

PST6R2: I am afraid to get caught unprepared. Students ask questions and expect satisfactory answers. If you fail to satisfy, then they say "Yeah, OK! We ask another teacher". I wouldn't want this happen to me.

PSTs' fear of academic insufficiency appeared and reappeared in their reports during the whole practicum period.

Fears of Pedagogical Insufficiency

Perception of pedagogical insufficiency is another area of fear for 13 participants. This interestingly parallels to academic insufficiency as well. PSTs have concerns for such pedagogical issues as tailoring the content on student level, selection and application of activities for a successful teaching, deciding on the teaching strategies appropriate to a wide variety of student population, use and selection of instructional tools (e.g. smart boards, teaching materials), grasping and managing student attention and keeping up student motivation. For example, PST20R1 states "I have difficulties to explain…How can I teach? I am insufficient and students don't understand."

PSTs feel that their pedagogical insufficiencies might lead to some negative and irreparable effects on their students. For instance PST10R7 have fears causing to "impede students' academic development" while PST18R5 states "students might loose interest to the subject matter or even to the school." As can be seen PSTs hold real fears of not being beneficial to the students due to lack of pedagogical knowledge. With such awareness, they also declared their intention to improve their pedagogies and try hard to make progress:

PST18R2: Having heard of student questions, I had the impression that I would have difficulties in concretising the notions and concepts…and that concerned me much. But I will fight with deficiencies and aim to improve myself.

Fears Regarding Classroom Management

Majority of the participants (15 of them) mentioned about their fears about classroom management. PSTs' concerns are often centred on discipline problems in classroom, whole class student orchestration, student misbehaviours, uninterested students, exploitation of their good intentions, and not being taken seriously by the students.

PST2R7: I realised that some students don't take me seriously because of my tolerant and understanding approach to them. I had fears to perform a healthy classroom management. I decided to check out the distance between the students and me.

This quotation is exemplary in that most of PSTs are the seekers of constant tuning in establishing the relations with the students. Classroom management has become a real concern for many especially when they realised the mentor teachers' difficulties:

PST11R2: Students were so restless and the class was so hectic I found it difficult to control. I thought it was because I am just an intern here…but when I realised the class behaved the same with the mentor teacher, I felt really helpless…

The classroom management is a complex endeavour for many of PSTs. However, PSTs tend to see the classroom as a 'power domain' and classroom management appear to be interpreted with regard to 'establishing sovereignty.' In this regard PST8R7 notes "I feared being unable to keep my power over the class" while PST6R5 mentions "I am afraid to be seen impotent and uninfluential on the class."

Student-related Fears

The analysis of the reports suggests that most of the participants put students at the centre while describing their fears. As will become clearer, student-related fears are complexly intertwined in PSTs' perceptions. These fears were collected under six categories.

Loosing Student Respect and Affection

13 participants directly and 7 covertly referred to this topic in their reports. PSTs consider it important to get accepted and valued by the students. Deprivation of respect and affection appears to be real sources of fear for many PSTs. In this respect PST8 notes:

PST8R9: I am afraid to gradually and eventually loose students' respects and affection to me…because over time we get monotonous and so our warnings, caveats and advices become uninfluential. Not a feature of good teacher!

Whatever the reason (e.g. academic, pedagogic, personal) might be, PSTs are afraid to get alienated by students or find themselves in an 'unwanted teacher' position.

PST14R5: I got really scared to be seen as a clumsy teacher…unknowledgeable one... nobody likes then…I'm even afraid to get misunderstood while correcting student fault.

As can be seen, PST14 is much concerned with student acceptance and love that he is not sure whether to correct student faults. There were also others who were not sure whether to warn students when they do something wrong. This is because they think that as a result of continuous warning to students, they might become unwanted or unlovable teachers.

Student Criticism

Another source of fear for the participants was the criticisms of students. Regardless of the issue being criticised, 10 PSTs mentioned that they had the fear of student criticism:

PST17R5: Very much afraid to hear students making critical comments about me…even more scary if their criticisms are towards my personality and physical features rather than my lesson or subject area…I would be very sad if I might feel antipathy to them

PST17's account is also related to student acceptance. It is interesting to see here that teacher candidate held the fear of getting criticised as much as developing antipathy against the students as a result.

New Generation of Students

A surprising source of fear for 12 participants is related to certain features and skills that new generation of students are believed to possess. PSTs emphasise students' swift adaptation capacity to ever-changing technology. Students with this capacity, PSTs believe, have certain skills superior to teacher candidates. Among them, the following skills are the most mentioned: high self-confidence, technological disposition, practical intelligence, creativity, questioning, quick adaptation and openness to the novelties.

PST7R5: Today's students are very clever. They learn from different sources. One day, I'm afraid to become academically insufficient to them.

PST8R3: Students are making the best use of technology and think of unpredictable questions…and in the middle of lesson they ask it without hesitation.

PSTs are afraid to fall short in responding to the needs and expectations of this population. Beneath their fears lie concerns of student acceptance and approval.

Uninterested Students

13 participants referred to this issue in their reports. PSTs noted that some students had no interests to the lessons/schools and that families spoiled their children who hence did not listen to teachers.

PST3R5: I was teaching 8th graders…due to puberty they are ignorant and don't listen. They can get disrespectful as they're spoilt by the families. I'm scared of the future…

PST10R2: So many students…they show interest in everything other than lesson, dislike school, try to sabotage the lesson…there're many of them…

As can be seen from the quotations, uninterested students turn into a source of concern for many of PSTs.

Inclusive Students

In Turkish education system, mainstream classrooms accommodate one or two special need students when required. Four PSTs stated that inclusive students constituted a source of concern for them.

PST1R2: Can I give inclusive students what they really need and deserve? Could I be of any use to remedy their behavioural problems? Could I catch up with them? Could I balance the instruction? These...really scare me!

This quotation is exemplary in that it represents the fears and concerns of many PSTs, who often question their ability to respond to the needs of inclusive students. They considered the inclusion of just one special need student turning the class into a much more complex whole. They question their capacities to handle inclusive students.

Physical and Psychological Harms to the Students

Majority of the participants (14 of them) evidently expressed their concerns on that matter. In this regard they mentioned that they were afraid to break students' hearts, loose their control and use physical violence, get bad-tempered and use insulting language, breach students' personal rights, leave damaging traces, generate school phobia on students and to have negative effects on their education life.

PST10R3: One day, even if unwillingly, I am scared to leave deep scars in students' lives…because the classroom atmosphere is so different…sometimes you get angry and get harsh on them…It could shatter all the confidence, influencing the whole personality.

PSTs state that even if they are unaware of the consequences, such harms could occur unintentionally. Even though it is unwilling, they were aware of the importance of their effects on the students and feared to cause such harms.

Fears about Demand of Profession

Having been involved in the practicum period, teacher candidates start to make more realistic evaluations about the profession itself. Their observations lead them to develop certain insights into the routines of the profession and necessary/relevant qualities.

Teacher Qualities

Observations and teaching experiences gained during practicum lead PSTs to realise certain teacher qualities necessary for the professions. Followings were among the qualities referred to in the reports: conflict resolution, patience, impartiality, compassion, fairness, care, guidance, cautiousness, role modelling, empathy, keeping high expectations and understanding.

PST12R10: I like some students more than others. When I see them, start smiling…In the future there would be some students I'd like more…But what if I loose my fairness and impartiality due to my feelings?

Another participant question his ability to resolve conflictions:

PST17R9: I witnessed a fight in the class…felt extreme discomfort and anxiety as I didn't know what to do. It makes me worry if I face similar situations in the future.

Upon such realisations, participants appeared to question their skills, qualifications, proficiencies and capacities in relation to the teaching profession. They also made evaluations as to the extent to which they could live up to the required qualities.

Routines of Teaching Profession

During the practicum, teacher candidates started to personally experience such routines of the profession as standing up long times, talking loudly, standing guard during the breaks and reading exam papers. Such routines and workloads seem to have become a source of concern for some participants (10 PSTs referred to this).

PST4R4: This week I got scared to have varicose…I see that teachers don't have the luxury of sitting down. You stand up all day…it's worrying really.

PST13R4: I got exhausted this week. As continuously talking with high volume, I had the concern of getting aphonic…

As can be seen, PSTs have developed awareness as to the effect of teaching routines on their (health) life and this raises some concerns for them.

Career-related Fears

Some PSTs (8 participants) mentioned repeatedly about this issue. The two important reasons causing concerns for the participants are to find a job and obtain the tenure position. PST16R9 is, for example, passionate about the profession and state "My internship is going quite well and my relation with students is fine. I love teaching...I fear not to find a job position." PST1R9 has concerns about tenure position: "everything starts after you assigned [to job]…you have to prepare reports and things…you're always under close surveillance…to get tenured." Participants' concerns become even more evident in the final reports towards the end of practicum.

Fears Related to Work Place or Working Conditions

10 participants stated work place or working conditions to be a matter of concern. Participants' comments and evaluations vary over the schools that they perform their practicums. Hence PSTs' comments and understanding often remained context-specific in that the professed fears might not be the case if the practicum school was a different one. For instance, one participant doing the practicum in a school located in the city-centre stated her "fears of working in a village school" (PST3R3). Based on the presumption that physical conditions and stakeholders would be much different, she develops a fear of village schools. Another participant (PST1R7) shared his fear of working in a school with more populous classrooms than the ones he was doing the practicum. It is hence observed that the concerns expressed about the working place are often situational.

Parent-related Fears

Some participants (7 PSTs) mentioned that they were anxious about the parents. The stated reasons include: parent pressure for certain practices (e.g. asking to teach for the central exams), adverse effects of information sharing with parents on students, parents in a bad temper, confrontation with the parents, accusing teachers due to protective attitudes to students, parents instructing teachers how to teach, parents interfering in and hence disrupting the class harmony and issuing official complaint to higher authorities.

PST1R8: The mentor teacher hold question-solving session every week for the central exit-exam. Parents are forcing the mentor…I will not accept parent imposition. Because the classroom is my arena, it should be me to decide what to teach…But not with the orders of others. Yet I am afraid of facing problems…parents issuing official complaints about me to the authorities.

> PST19R3: I heard one teacher in staffroom saying "Oh dear! Stay away from the parents"…all others excessively supported him. I think parents bother the teachers much. I'm curious; yet started to fear them.

PSTs' concerns might at times stem from their experiences as in the case of PST1. However, experience-based fears are rather rare. Others, as in PST19, often develop fears (inflicted with prejudices) on the basis of stories heard from the others.

Fears of Burnout Effect

Burnout effect is one of the most cited sources of fear (by 16 participants). Interestingly enough, 6 PSTs mentioned this fear in their first week of practicum period. The participants referred repeatedly to this fear at different times of the practicum period with varying emphasis. PSTs expressed burnout with such terms as loosing interest to profession and/or students, feeling of irresponsibility, negligence, indifference, weariness, dissatisfaction, overly repeated practice, being monotonous, over-familiarization and boredom.

> PST16R1: …having observed mentor teacher and others in staffroom…I'm afraid to distance from the profession…Generally speaking many teachers seemed to me bored and weary, talking unpleasant things about students…

As is seen here, PSTs watch teachers as an outsider and from the first weeks of the practicum, on the basis of their observations, they start to develop fears for the burnout. However, observation is not the only source feeding their fears; they also reflect on the practices and reach a 'logical' conclusion for burnout:

> PST6R5: weariness and dissatisfaction with job fears me much! Everything is fine now. I teach at times but not at other times. But teaching the same things over the years, you could grow weary of it.

Fears of University Mentor

Though not frequent, some 5 PSTs noted their concerns about the university mentor. This is understandable as the mentor observes student teachers during practicum, gives feedback, monitors their development, assesses their performances and makes evaluations as to success or failure.

> PST8R8: I was afraid to hear negative reaction of my supervisor. It would be terrible if he told my mistakes in the classroom environment.

> PST18R10: I wouldn't like to make mistakes in the presence of my supervisor. This thrill gets me nervous…I need to be well prepared. Because his feedbacks…might have been encouraging or discouraging…

As is seen from the quotations, PSTs attach a great importance to their supervisors' comments and feedbacks. They apparently wished to gain mentor's approval and appraisal as well as refrain from the possible criticisms.

Fears of Exam-centred Teaching

Teaching for exam appears to be a real source of concern for some 6 PST. These participants argued that exam-centred teaching had a mere emphasis on cognitive development:

PST10R5: teaching for exam aims at cognitive development…even this happens in a limited way. Emotional and thinking skills should be supported through instruction. But central exams are hard to resist. It forces you and limits your instructional freedom…

Though PSTs are reluctant to teach for exam, they are afraid that they might have to do so:

PST18R3: I am always critical of exams taken the only indicator of achievement. But then, I might have to teach for exam because of parents and head teachers' pressures…

PSTs position themselves against teaching for exam for several reasons; including: this approach creates an obstacle to meaningful learning, emphasises only cognitive dimension of development, ignores students interests and needs, inhibits students' social and cultural participation, leads students to loose track of the actual events, discourages students to develop higher-order thinking skills (such as creativity and critical thinking). Having been aware of such negative effects, they fear to perform such practice due to some external forces as parents' and head teacher's pressures.

Fears of Fictional Events

Interestingly some 7 PSTs noted to have fears about certain events, which could be described as fictional. The term fictional is preferred to emphasise that PSTs' explanations are based on situations, which are imaginary, somehow irrational and extreme.

PST4R2: I am afraid to loose the control of the class and hence slap a student who in turn responds to me in the same way…I am afraid to break out into tears in the middle of the class.

This student teacher's fear is fictive in that she has never experienced such an event, which only exists in her thinking. Even then, this might give a clue as to her worries and anxieties.

PST1R9: I am afraid of students jumping out of window when I am not watching them. The students' ages are 11 but the word suicide is on their mouth frequently.

It is the same with this teacher that she makes up a scenario, which then becomes a source of fear for her. Although such fears are observed 8 out of 211 reports, it is still worth considering as they represent extremist perspectives.

DISCUSSION

The analysis of PSTs' reports provides important insights into the notion of fear. To begin with, PSTs in this study appeared to have developed fears new to them during the practicum period. Of course, the participants might have already held some of their fears expressed in the reports even before their practicum period started (see for example, PST18R3). However, findings clearly suggest that some fears are learnt during the practicum experiences. For instance, fears of parents become existent when PST19 heard stories from the teachers (see PST19R3); burnout effect becomes evident to PST16 as a result of teacher observations in staffroom (PST16R1); and health concerns (i.e. varicose – PST4R4 and aphonia – PST13R4) arose for some PSTs. Hence it is safe to conclude that the practicum period, while helping PSTs get prepared for the profession (Caires & Almedia, 2005), also leads to development of fears new to them. By implication, when PSTs are assigned to a teaching post, hence, they may start the job with the fears (which may turn into prejudices by then) acquired during the practicum.

When the stated fears are examined closely, it will be realised that PSTs' fears were almost always induced by a perception of threat or danger (see also Beck Emery, & Greenberg, 2005). Corroboration of this observation requires a deeper consideration of the stated fears, particularly the ones related to the classroom management. There seems to be a consensus among the researchers that classroom management is a source of concern for PSTs (see Al-Hassan et al., 2012; Moore & Cooper,

1984; Poulou, 2007). It is true that PSTs make every effort to, for example, keep the class or misbehaving students under control. A close scrutiny of PSTs' accounts on this matter indicates that their concerns or fears go well beyond such ostensible management problems. Under the PSTs' fears, there lies a perception of classroom as a power domain (e.g., PST1R8) where he/she is faced with the threat of loosing his/her sovereignty. Hence a failure to manage classroom successfully would also mean failure to establish sovereignty in his/her power domain. In fact, anything that threats their sovereignty within their own power domain constitutes a source of fear. The perceived threat might come from within their power domain such as misbehaving and/or uninterested students (PST10R2) as well as students exploiting teacher tolerance (PST2R7) and the ones sabotaging the lesson (PST10R2). The perceived threat might also come from external sources such as parents (PST1R8) or head teachers pressurising them (PS19R3) or central exams limiting their freedom and forcing certain types of instruction (PST10R5).

It appears that PSTs tend to see protection of their power domain and establishment of sovereignty to be dependent on their academic strengths. PSTs hold the belief that weaknesses in this dimension may harm their professional esteem and this once again constitutes a threat and hence creates a reason for fear. For example, PST2R3 stated that she should not "give the impression that [she is] unknowledgeable" because she "didn't know a particular work of [Jules] Verne". Likewise, PST6R2 mentions that he should not "get caught unprepared" as otherwise students are unsatisfied and ask another teacher. The arguments and observations hitherto suggest that PSTs constantly define and redefine the perceived threats that shape their fears.

PSTs' fears are often concerned with some sort of deteriorating conditions in the future events, which might eventually become unacceptable to them. In this respect, PSTs' stated fears regarding students are eye opening. Some PSTs, for example, held the belief that new generation of students had certain skills superior to themselves such as quick adaptation and openness to the novelties with a special regard to the technological ones (PST8R3). They stated their fears of falling short in responding to the needs and expectations of this population especially in the future (PST7R5). Fears stemming from the worsening conditions in the future events were also stated with regard to uninterested and spoiled students (e.g. PST3R5) as well as physical and psychological harms (e.g. PST10R3).

Beneath the student-related fears, there lies a perception that attaches a great importance to being accepted, respected, appraised and valued. Apparently PSTs would like to see themselves rewarded by the students. Some 40 years ago, Lortie (1975) made similar observations and used the term 'psychic rewards' which refer to the rewards given by students to the teachers when they show affection and joyment for the learning process. The need of psychic rewards was all too apparent for the participants who even tended to take such kind of rewards as an indication of 'being a good teacher' (PST8R9). PSTs' high expectancy of psychic rewards was among the sources that cause pressure and fear.

PSTs' burnout fears are also related to the future events. 16 out of 22 participants somehow mentioned about this issue at different times of the practicum period. Some of the stated fears include dissatisfaction with the job in the future (PST6R5) as well as boredom and weariness (PST16R1) gained over the years. Research studies (e.g. Fives, Hamman, & Olivarez, 2007; Hong, 2010) conducted recently provide evidence of burnout effects beginning as early as the practicum experience. In this respect, Hong (2010) argues that burnout has close ties with professional identity and that burnout could be an effect of PSTs positioning themselves in relation to the teaching profession which might even result in dropout of the profession. Although burnout is not a direct focus of this study, it is interesting to see such a high number of participants mentioning about their fears on this. Fives et al. (2007) provide empirical evidence that student teachers experiencing high guidance show lower levels of burnout. The results of this study and some others (Caires et al., 2012; Ferrier-Kerr, 2009), implicitly or explicitly, point to the importance of support and guidance provided by mentor teachers to the PSTs in preparing them for the job. It is interesting that some participants of this study start to develop fears of burnout through their observations of mentor teachers (e.g.

PST16R1). This situation refers to a phenomenon that deserves further research attention. In addition, design of working support systems to help PSTs overcome their fears of burnout might also be a promising research agenda.

The fear directed to the future events like burnout might also be considered as fear of the 'unknown', which is yet to be experienced and could be comprehended fully only in situ. I believe that the fear of this kind occurs as the PSTs act in territories to which they do not yet belong and are not entrenched. Practicum schools are transitory places where PSTs are accommodated as 'guests' or 'outsiders' who are not 'organic' part of a meaningful whole. I posit that this situation increases the uncertainty on the part of PSTs as they continuously attempt to "acknowledge, interpret and give meaning to rules, values, resources and communications patterns" (Caires et al., 2012, p.164). Meanings and interpretations emerging from PSTs' present observations as outsiders might lead them jump into hasty conclusions as to the fate and shape of future events.

This observation is reminiscent to the ideas introduced by Conway (2001) about the anticipatory reflection of the novice teachers. Conway claims that reflection is about looking backward as well as looking forward. He proposes that a crucial dimension of novice teachers' experience is that, while reflecting, they look towards the future with the knowledge of the past from the perspectives of the present. Being inspired from Conway, it could be argued that fears directed to future events are anticipatory in that they are the results of a complex function of PSTs' reflections ascending to and fro between the past and the future with the viewpoint of the present. PSTs interpret and give meaning to the objects (e.g. practices, communication patterns and resources) of their present observations with the knowledge that they gained in the past and make inferences about (i.e. imaginations and visions of) the future events, eventually feeding their fears. To concretise this argument, briefly consider PST1R8 in which student teacher notes that the mentor teacher is forced by parents to teach for exam (present observation) and he thinks that classroom is teacher's arena and it should be up to the teacher to decide what to teach (knowledge/belief obtained in the past). Yet he is afraid of parents issuing official complaints to the higher authorities (an inferred fear for the future).

Several PSTs take anticipatory fears to the extreme with some unrealistic events. In order to describe such concerns, the term 'fictional fear' is preferred in this study to emphasise the imaginary and somehow irrational features involved in PSTs' accounts (such as suicidal or physical violence, see PST4R2 and PST4R9). It is noteworthy that such fears are highly individualised and might also be viewed as related to anxiety disorder (Beck et al., 2005). However, such fears also give a clue that some PSTs experience overwhelming emotions during the practicum period. Occurrence of such incidents raises questions as to suitability of this group for the profession. Studies (Caires & Almeida, 2005; Cohn & Gellman, 1988; Fives et al., 2007) provide evidence that well established support systems help PSTs grow as skilful practitioners. On the basis of these findings, it is posited that as PSTs would grow, develop and learn with a constant support from the more knowledgeable others, fears including the fictional ones could gradually fade away. Of course, in some cases, PSTs, even after being assigned to a job position, may continue to suffer from fictional fears; but in those cases professional help might be needed.

In this study, it is observed that practicum constitutes an intense exploration and self-evaluation period for most PSTs with regard to the demand of profession. This observation has close ties with the research on PSTs' reflection-oriented learning, which tends to focus on cognitive development of PSTs (see Hamilton, 1998; Poulou, 2007). In this study, however, it is realised that reflection also functions for the discovery of fears. When the PSTs experience the school and classroom environment with a variety of components, they tend to reconceptualise the 'teacher image' in their mind and the picture of the profession that they have developed. PSTs in this study (e.g. PST12R10 & PST17R9) hold, for example, that teacher should have certain features such as fairness, empathy, conflict-resolution, compassion, care and tolerance, described as "essential teacher qualities" by Tickle (1999). When the PSTs faced with the realities (about, for example, students, parents, classroom), they started to question if and to what extent they hold such qualities. It is through such reflections that PSTs make evaluations of the 'observed' realities of the profession. PSTs' fears about

the demand of profession were almost always connected with uncertainties that they reach about their personalities as potential teachers.

The analysis also suggests that fear has a protective feature with a potential to support development. Having realised their fears, PSTs attempt to protect themselves from the threats or dangers involved in a situation. PSTs' protective attempts are observed to come in three different forms: facing the fears, avoiding or taking pre-emptive measures. PSTs' protective attempts are directed towards personal and professional features, including physical well-beings, professional esteems, autonomies and freedoms. For example, PST13R2 was afraid of aphonia. Hence she decided to avoid talking with a high volume while teaching. PST12R10 realised that she favoured some students and hence held the fear of losing fairness and impartiality. She faces her feeling and questions her approach. PST18R10 was worried about making mistakes in the presence of his university supervisor and to prevent this he decided to make serious preparations, which could be considered as a pre-emptive measure. These observations imply that fears have the potential to serve to PSTs' personal and professional development. Therefore considering the protective and developmental potential of the fears, they do not necessarily refer to an emotional state to be described with negative terms.

Conclusions and Implications

In this paper, PSTs' fears that they realise or gain during their practicum has been studied with a holistic and phenomenological perspective. The results show that PSTs' fears are fed by many (12 of which were documented in this paper) different yet interrelated sources including students, parents, classroom environments, perceived pedagogical and academic sufficiency, work place conditions, conceived pressures (of, for example, parents and central exams) as well as assumed nature and demands of the profession. The analysis also suggests that PSTs develop new fears during practicum, indicating that fears are learnt. It is also realised that fear is a phenomenon concerned with perception of threat and with the possibility of worsening conditions (which might even become unacceptable) in the future events. Unknown features (of the teaching profession), which are yet to be experienced, increase uncertainties on the part of PSTs and this contributes towards fear development. Likewise, anticipatory reflections might also result in fear development on the part of PSTs. Finally it is observed that fear has a protective feature with a potential to motivate PSTs' self-development and efforts to get prepared for the job.

This study with a focus on PSTs' fears contributes to the ongoing discussions on the development of effective preparation programs. Studies on initial teacher preparation programs often aims at technical/cognitive growth of PSTs (e.g., scientific, pedagogic or subject matter knowledge). Relatively less research attention is paid to emotional dimension of such growth (e.g. Hargreaves, 1995; Poulou, 2007). Fears might pose fruitful opportunities to support PSTs' development in that teacher educators and students could have productive discussions on the topics that really concern the candidate teachers. The program content might also be enriched with the topics causing fears to PSTs who hence find an opportunity to face, reflect and even find resolutions beforehand. PSTs' involvement in such a preparation program might even help them to realise some 'unrealistic' expectations and hence might even reduce the dropout rate. Finally, PSTs would benefit from mentor teacher and supervisor (from the university) collaboration in helping to overcome fears. Design of effective support systems to realise this aim could be a desirable research agenda.

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