

2017

Emotional Development and Construction of Teacher Identity: Narrative Interactions about the Pre-service Teachers' Practicum Experiences

(Mark) Feng TENG
Hong Kong Baptist University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ro.ecu.edu.au/ajte>



Part of the [Junior High, Intermediate, Middle School Education and Teaching Commons](#), and the [Other Teacher Education and Professional Development Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

TENG, (. (2017). Emotional Development and Construction of Teacher Identity: Narrative Interactions about the Pre-service Teachers' Practicum Experiences. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 42(11). <http://dx.doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2017v42n11.8>

This Journal Article is posted at Research Online.
<https://ro.ecu.edu.au/ajte/vol42/iss11/8>

Emotional Development and Construction of Teacher Identity: Narrative Interactions about the Pre-service Teachers' Practicum Experiences

Mark Feng Teng
Hong Kong Baptist University, Hong Kong

Abstract: Pre-service teacher identity research has directed limited attention to the construction and development of professional teacher identity through narrative interaction. An analysis of narrative interactions among pre-service teachers in the present study explored the ways in which they negotiated emotional flux in the process of training to become a teacher. Overall, findings show that emotional flux and identity change are connected, and hidden 'emotional rules' are embedded in the teaching practicum. The pre-service teachers' negative emotions gradually escalated due to contextual constraints, hierarchical structures, and lack of support from their mentors. This escalation diminished the development of their teacher identity. However, increasing recognition and progress by their students can stimulate pre-service teachers to perceive their assumed roles and reconstruct professional identity. Within the context of exploring this interconnection between teacher emotions and teacher identity, the present study argues that narrative interaction can complement existing knowledge on the subject.

Introduction

Research on teacher identity has emerged as an independent research area in the field of teacher education, and researchers have mutually agreed that the construction, destruction, and reconstruction of teacher identity is fraught with emotions. Emotions, thoughts and actions are the aspects of the models that constitute the teacher-self, and it is self-evident that these aspects form an integral part of the teachers' identity formation while playing a pivotal role in teaching (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). Teaching, per se, is an emotional process (Zembylas, 2005). The classroom teaching sessions provide pre-service teachers with a unique platform to experiment with knowledge obtained during the teaching-learning process and to understand teaching practices on a real-time basis (Bezzina & Michalak, 2009). However, pre-service teachers do experience intense emotions during their teaching-learning process (e.g., Bloomfield, 2010; Timoštšuk & Ugaste, 2010). These emotional obstacles have an impact on pre-service teachers' teaching; learning; classroom management; and interactions with students, school mentors, and students' parents (Grudnoff, 2011). Thus, it is reasonable to recognize the influences from or the contributions of the affective domain—the emotional process of the teaching and learning experience—towards the construction of the teachers' identity (Han, 2016; Zembylas, 2004).

Existing research has contributed to our understanding of the pre-service teachers' emotional ups and downs and identity change, particularly in the context of teaching practicum (e.g., Karlsson, 2013). However, there are still some underexplored issues such as the manner in which the pre-service teachers' positive and negative emotions interact with the construction and destruction of teacher identity in a teaching practicum. Most of the studies on the pre-service teachers' responses to a teaching practicum present the teachers' changes in cognitive, social, and emotional processes of teacher identity construction, but fail to articulate the layers of negative emotions that seem to be involved in the learning process (Yuan & Lee, 2015). Recent educational research documented that the teachers' experiences and displays of negative emotions can affect their work and identity while providing deeper insight into the manner in which their experiences and feelings change (Anttila, Pyhältö, Soini, & Pietarinen, 2016). The present study, focusing on the approach of narrative interaction in the pre-service teacher peer groups as social processes of identifying positive and negative emotions, attempts to convey an in-depth understanding of identities in conversation contexts that require the pre-service teachers to engage in narrative interaction instead of individual narratives.

Theoretical Underpinnings: Emotions and Teacher Identity

A recurring theme in pre-service teacher education is the teacher-self along with two notions that cluster around it: teacher identity and emotion. Teacher identity, which emerges inwardly, is a process wherein teachers construct their own ideas or build practical knowledge about ways to be and act like a teacher. This knowledge was expected to deepen the pre-service teachers' understanding of the qualities required of a teacher and assist with achieving these qualities during the teaching practicum (Gee, 2000; Sachs, 2005). As a notion originated from teachers' participation and practice in their situated professional and socio-cultural contexts, teacher identity was observed to be fluid, unstable, dynamic, and multi-faceted (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004). Rodgers and Scott (2008) conceptualized identity as dependent upon the following four models: (1) identity is formed with multiple contexts: Society, culture, politics, and history; (2) identity is formed while interacting with others; (3) identity is unstable, shifting, and multiple; (4) identity is constructed and reconstructed over time. Based on these models, the development of teacher identity is both unitary and multiple, both continuous and discontinuous, and both an individual and a social process (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011).

Emotions, representing a complex state of feelings that result in physical and psychological changes, form an integral part of education. Emotions are part of the very fabric that constitutes the teacherself, implying that teachers—including pre-service teachers—at various times get angry, love, fear, worry, enthuse, become irritable, doubt, brood, feel proud, joyful, anxious and despondent, and so on. As emotional practitioners, teachers can decide whether to make their classroom exciting or dull by displaying appropriate actions. Strong emotions may motivate a teacher to take actions that he or she would not normally perform. Additionally, pre-service teachers often experience anxiety because of the complexities involved in learning-to-teach and the uncertainty of achieving goals as per expectations (Sutton & Wheatley, 2003).

Previous research on emotions and teacher identity concentrated on specific aspects. First, identity construction and emotions are inextricably linked, informing each other and reframing interpretations of each other. Emotions have acted as filters for informing teachers'

professional and personal identities, and identity has helped direct the course of teachers' emotional decisions, reflections, and reactions. For example, pre-service teachers in China were often found to be in a more subservient role, and the lack of trust and support from the school mentors led them to frustration and irritation, which impeded the development of teacher identity (Yuan & Lee, 2016). This suggested the role of emotions in informing and guiding teacher identity development (Meyer, 2009). As pre-service teachers were often not provided with the skills, attitudes and disposition suited for experienced teachers—resilience, determination, passion, etc. (Timoštšuk & Ugaste, 2010)—this created the complexity of pre-service teacher identity.

Second, there is an interconnection between teachers' professional identities and their sense of agency. This link was determined by the teachers' ability to engage in reflective practices, and achieved through their resistance to the contextual structures and the embedded emotional rules (Lasky, 2005). This sense of agency modifies, refines and reshapes the teachers' understanding toward teaching. For example, if teachers were confronted with various kinds of contextual challenges, or a lack of collegial support, some of them with a sense of agency could actively draw upon a wide range of social positioning, prior experiences, and available resources to enact identities that aligned with their own values, thoughts, and beliefs (Roberts & Graham, 2008). This resonates with "motivation intelligence" as described by Goleman (1998), wherein an effective teacher was able to regulate five basic emotional competences: understanding the most effective way of expressing emotions, coping with one's own moods, empathizing with the emotional states of others, motivating oneself and others, and exercising various kinds of social skills.

Third, previous studies emphasized a need to investigate teachers' beliefs. Teachers' beliefs were found to be rooted in the ways that they perceive the world and life in general, the school organizational structure, and their pre-defined classroom setting. The agency of pre-service teachers was found to be influenced negatively by a lack of adequate professional training, a hierarchical relationship between student-teachers and school mentors, and an unsupportive school managerial leadership (El Kadri & Roth, 2015). This affected their emotional properties, thoughts, attitudes, and actions, and led them to be saturated with emotional struggle and turbulence, and feelings of vulnerability and powerlessness (Bloomfield, 2010). However, teachers' beliefs about students, teaching practice, and educational purpose that teachers bring to their work may help teachers strategically maneuver within constrained school structures (Biesta, Priestley, & Robinson, 2015).

Narrative Interactions in Peer Groups and Formation of Teacher Identity

Narrative interaction, a social process of identifying emotional flux, provided shared experiences, stories, anticipations, and assumptions that proved advantageous for the formation of identities (Bamberg, 2004). The sharing of interactional stories among teachers facilitated the supply of interactional resources in the form of reflections on prior experiences, plans and imaginations about future events (Georgakopoulou, 2006). Within this connection, teacher identities were conceptualized as a complex dynamic system (Henry, 2016) in which the notion of 'being someone who teaches' was made available by cultural discourses and then invoked, negotiated, renegotiated, and resisted in narrative interaction (Wetherell, 1998, as cited in Karlsson, 2013).

Focusing on relations among pre-service teachers, Watson (2007) investigated two pre-service teachers in a one-year teacher qualification program. She used the method of narrative interaction to understand the construction of pre-service teachers' professional identities. Results showed that the pre-service teachers' identities were related to narratives emerging in everyday, mundane contexts. In addition, Watson also claimed that there is much to be learned from research on teacher education that focuses on the pre-service teacher peer group as a social context for reflection, coaching, learning and professional development. In a similar vein, Karlsson (2013) focused on collecting data on outside-of-class interactions of a pre-service teacher with other pre-service teachers. Her study suggested that narrative interaction in pre-service teacher peer groups is an effective method of collecting and analyzing data on the contribution of emotions towards the construction and reconstruction of teacher identity. The employment of narrative interaction offers the advantage of negotiating with emotions among peer groups instead of predominantly focusing on an individual pre-service teacher's experiences and emotional properties.

Overall, studies about using the narrative interaction method for understanding construction of identities highlighted the usefulness of narrative interaction in understanding the pre-service teachers' teaching practices and emotions (e.g., Becker & Quasthoff, 2005). Additionally, research on narrative interaction showed that participants tended to build common ways of "acting, thinking, feeling, and otherwise being in the world" (Ochs & Capps, 2001, p.8).

Method

The central research question that guided the present study is as follows: How was the construction and development of the pre-service teachers' professional identity informed by (related to, shaped by) their emotions during the teaching practicum?

Context and Participants

The data analyzed in this paper was drawn from a small-scale qualitative study of teacher identity and emotion through narrative interaction. Narrative interaction, viewed as a social process of emotional identification, was examined through the application of positioning theory (Karlsson, 2013). This research could result in a new and richly textured understanding of the pre-service teachers' emotional experiences and identity construction in relation to specific school contexts and to enable readers to envision their own stories while considering how they might apply lessons learned from the pre-service teachers' narrative interactions.

The present study was conducted in an English teacher education program at a university in Mainland China. This four-year program's purpose was to prepare qualified EFL teachers for primary and secondary school. It included a combination of coursework and teaching practicum. Students were exposed to a series of English learning courses in the first three years, and were assigned to a ten-week teaching practicum during the fourth year, before serving in a school as a teacher. The teaching practicum was held from October to December, 2015. Two teachers—a teacher from the university and a mentor from the field school where all the participants were teaching—guided and evaluated the students in the teaching practicum.

Data was collected from narrative interaction among the pre-service teachers in outside-of-class conversations, wherein one pre-service teacher, Ning, acted as the main participant.

Ning was selected because she had some teaching experiences and she was known to be willing to reflect on practice and professional development. She volunteered to help with this project. In addition, I had taught Ning for three years prior to this research study and we have been meeting regularly during this time. Ning was familiarized with the central aim of this study, which focused on the manner in which the pre-service teachers made sense of their participation in the teaching practicum through narrative interaction in outside-of-class conversations. Ning was required to bring a recording device to record her conversations with her peers, which took place outside of class. This open approach allowed the pre-service teachers to choose the content of conversation, and make the conversation topics as interesting as the actual conversations. However, caution should be exercised while generalizing the findings concluded from the transcribed sketch of narrative interactions. The ways that the pre-service teachers were supported varied due to differences in school cultures and available resources in the schools. In addition, using a participant as a facilitator should be cautioned against. For example, some pre-service teachers made some comments irrelevant to the theme of the study, which could influence the validity of the data. In addition, having a pre-service teacher as a facilitator may have posed emotional risk to Ning and other students. With this perspective, regular meetings were held with the participants. To avoid possible stress to Ning, who was in a practicum but also had the responsibility of being a facilitator, prompts were not given for requiring guided conversations. I also engaged in personal communication with Ning through informal meetings at the school, through telephone calls, QQ, and WeChat (popular social media platforms in China). This kind of personal communication helped establish rapport with Ning, which could protect her from stress related to being a facilitator while undertaking the practicum. This also motivated her to conduct significant and meaningful conversations with peers. In addition, the school mentor's understanding about this project also protected Ning from any issues regarding her relationship with the school mentor.

Ethical approval was obtained from the university and the field school before the study commenced. Ethical consideration was also addressed by obtaining signed consent forms from all participants, which contained the purpose of the project, participants' rights regarding withdrawal, and the author's contact information. All the conversations were recorded with the full awareness of the pre-service teachers. The pre-service teachers that participated in this study were females, who were admitted to this English teaching program through examination. They were assigned to a teaching practicum at one of the most respected secondary schools in the area and taught twelfth-grade students. The names of the participants were listed as pseudonyms to preserve confidentiality. Table 1 presents the participants' information.

Name	Age	Place of birth	Gender	Teaching audience	Prior teaching experiences
Ning	22	Countryside	Female	Twelfth-grade students	Two months (Kindergarten teachers)
Chen	23	Countryside	Female	Twelfth-grade students	No
Lin	22	Countryside	Female	Twelfth-grade students	No
Yu	23	Countryside	Female	Twelfth-grade students	No
Bei	22	City	Female	Twelfth-grade students	No
Wei	21	City	Female	Twelfth-grade students	No

Table 1. Detailed information of the participants

Data Collection and Analysis

The present study held in-depth conversations between the pre-service teachers to collect stories of situations related to their teaching practicum experiences. All conversations were conducted in Chinese as participants expressed that they would be better able to express ideas and feelings freely in their native language. Ning was a dominant voice in those conversations, focusing on various kinds of emotion during the practicum. A total of twenty recordings, each lasting from 30-60 minutes, were collected during the teaching practicum. Although the recordings were made on the school campus, the location for the recordings continuously changed, and included cafeterias, the canteen, hallways and classrooms.

All conversations were transcribed and translated by the author. Trustworthiness was ensured by sending both the translated version and the original version to participants for member checking and additional necessary revisions. Enlightened by the theoretical underpinnings on teacher identities and emotions, the collected data was subjected to narrative analysis, interpreting of the pre-service teachers' emotions and identities as the units of analysis. In terms of the process of data analysis, the author carefully reviewed and coded the transcripts of the conversations. Given the focus of the present study (i.e. how the emotional experiences in the field school considerably influenced the pre-service teachers' professional learning and identity development), particular attention was paid to the various emotions (excitement, anxiety, happiness, irritation, disappointment, doubt, disillusionment, joy) that the pre-service teachers experienced during the teaching practicum and how these emotions related to different identities (e.g., 'uncooperative teacher', 'outsider', 'supportive teacher', 'agentive teacher', and 'teacher who lacks confidence'). Consequently, five major themes, which were most representative of the pre-service teachers' emotional experiences and inner thoughts during the practicum, were determined. Being 'at the bottom of the school hierarchy', the pre-service teachers had to repress their negative feelings and adhere to the policies which produced negative emotions with a possible impact on the development of teacher identity. For example, while the pre-service teachers attempted to support their students, they were restricted by the institutional policy which resulted in some negative emotions—e.g., anger and frustrations—as well as creating the identity of an 'outsider' at the school. The five themes were as follows:

- (a) Anxiety: Struggle to become professional teachers when dealing with unruly students
- (b) Disappointment: 'I do not want to accept the asymmetric power relationship'
- (c) Doubt: 'Am I qualified to be a teacher?'
- (d) Disillusionment: 'I do not have a voice'
- (e) Joy: 'Thank you students for all you do'

Following the identification of the five themes, the themes were reexamined in depth through re-reading the original data. Deconstructing, constructing, and reconstructing the social meaning in writing narratives with a focus on the identified themes shed light on the emotional process of the pre-service teacher's identity (trans)formation. The constructed narratives were also shared with the participants, with an aim to validate the data analysis results, as well as gather more insights through further sharing of comments on data interpretation.

Research Findings

Anxiety: Struggle to become Professional Teachers when dealing with unruly Students

The accounts of most pre-service teachers in the teaching practicum revealed the powerlessness that teachers have over controlling ‘unruly students.’ Their thoughts and concerns about ‘unruly students’ might be due to challenges to or doubts about their professional authority over the students. Chinese culture and tradition usually places a strong emphasis on the importance of education and respect for teachers. According to these pre-service teachers, students ceased to be obedient and compliant as those in traditional cultural discourses. Furthermore, the pre-service teachers were put in a position where they were subjected to public censure of their personal and professional behaviors instead of strengthening their professional authority. Given the transition that the pre-service teachers experienced in the teaching practicum, it was not surprising to find in the present study that the perceived challenge of ‘unruly pupils’ loomed large due to the lack of confidence in their teaching abilities, and they often found themselves in marginal or liminal positions, which undercut the assertion of their professional authority (Gao & Benson, 2012). The following conversation demonstrates these challenges:

Ning What do you think about your teaching experience?

Chen I am so nervous because I do not have any prior experience as an English teacher. Moreover, I am not confident about dealing with these naughty students.

Ning Why do you describe them as “naughty”?

Chen Well, they are really naughty. As students, we used to be very dutiful to our teachers’ lecture. But the students nowadays don’t possess the patience to sit attentively through a lecture.

Ning I cannot agree with you more.

Chen The saddest thing is that these students do not believe in my teaching abilities. One of the students even said to me, “Go home and practice more.”

In order to deal with the unruly students, the pre-service teachers conceived and implemented a set of practices. The pre-service teachers attempted to collaborate with the students to command students’ respect and cooperation. In addition, they created some rules around disruptive behaviors and defined some punishments for inappropriate behaviors. However, their attempts at teaching and managing the class were sometimes compromised by students’ occasional temper tantrums, particularly because of the students’ lack of interest in learning English. Consider the following conversation as an example:

Ning Did you have a good experience with the students?

Lin Not really. I think students often had temper tantrums. They got very angry when I tried to set some rules and impose punishments for their mischievous behaviors in class.

Ning Why?

Lin I think that was because students, nowadays, are in favor of individualism. They want to be different, and they do not like to follow the rules, even if the rules intend their betterment.

Ning Well, temper and tantrums are normal, especially in young students.

Lin Besides behavior, their English proficiency is not good, and they do not seem to have an interest in learning English. This factor irritates me and makes it difficult for me to manage the class.

The pre-service teachers also admitted their linguistic inadequacy might be one of the

factors contributing towards their inability to handle unruly students. This undermined their ability and confidence when asserting their professional authority. In the Chinese cultural context, teachers are often regarded as respectable cultural figures in both professional practices and personal life. According to the pre-service teachers, their lack of professional skills humiliated them in front of their students, and they struggled to overcome the emotional setbacks resulting from such humiliation. This struggle was implied in the following conversation:

Ning Did you get along well with your students?

Yu No.

Ning Why?

Yu I think my English proficiency is not good enough. I really want to do my best in every lesson. However, I often got irritated because I was not able to achieve my goals or meet the standard that I set before class. I always practiced my English lessons before the commencement of the class because I did not want to lose face before my students.

Ning Were you successful in doing this?

Yu Not really. My students were quite interested when I tried to use some simple English words for my lessons, but they failed to understand difficult words. I lacked requisite knowledge to explain the words well. This led them to lose control of their feelings or behaviors. Then I scolded them, and I came across setbacks emotionally, and my relationship with them became worse.

Disappointment: 'I do not want to Accept the Asymmetric Power Relationship'

The pre-service teachers' emotions seemed to be linked to political and institutional settings.

Likewise, the pre-service teachers' emotions appeared to be shaped by the conventions, constraints, and policies of the school in which they taught. Put simply, conventions and policies have embedded rules about professional teaching conduct or expected teaching standards, which guided the pre-service teachers' responses to particular pedagogies. An example of responses is provided in the following conversation:

Ning Are you happy being here?

Bei Well, the environment is good. But the school policy is very strict. The school has a lot of rules for us to follow. For example, we need to check students' attendance in every class, and check students' rooms every night to ensure that they are indoors after 10 p.m. I think teachers would be very tired after completing these routines every day. They would not have enough time to focus on improving their teaching practice.

Ning I totally agree with you. I think the school administrators just expect us to follow the school rules or structures without making any trouble. It is better for us to stay calm, follow the conventions of the school, and keep our emotions inside during this two-month teaching practicum.

The pre-service teachers considered emotions as extremely important factors for shaping their sense of self-esteem and identity. The interactions revealed that the pre-service teachers experienced a sense of guilt and disappointment due to their perceived inability to achieve as per aspirations. They attributed this sense of failure and powerlessness to the lack of emotional and social support from other teacher colleagues. In addition, poor communication with the school mentors was a source of disappointment. Consider the following conversation as an example:

Ning Is your mentor kind?

Chen May be. But I do not actually agree with her teaching styles. In her class, every student was expected to follow her to recite grammar structures and vocabulary. I do not like such teacher-led recitation or traditional teaching drills.

Ning I think I have the same problem. For example, I followed my mentor every morning to the classroom and supervised students' morning reading. My mentor would scold students who misbehaved in the class. I think it hurts students' feeling when they are scolded publicly.

Chen I was very disappointed because it was not conducted the way that I expected. I want to be a good teacher. I want to engage more students in speaking English in my class. But other teacher colleagues said that I am doing something that is in contradiction to the school's emphasis on teaching content knowledge. They insisted that my teaching methods would deprive students from gaining basic knowledge to perform well on future tests.

In addition, the school at which pre-service teachers undertook the practicum used a hierarchical structure and accountability system that determined and limited (in many cases) emotional discourses, and communicated with the pre-service teachers in a hostile manner. In this sense, some pre-service teachers felt that they were dismissed as outsiders. This affected their sense of self-confidence and self-esteem, which led them to question their long-held pedagogy and values. This experience is demonstrated through the following example:

Ning I think I am still new here.

Wei Well, I neither have an arena or a place for expressing my feelings, nor can I speak with my colleagues about how I feel.

Ning Sometimes I need help, but I do not know who I can depend on.

Wei The structure and organization of the school are another problem. For example, I wanted to conduct more outdoor English activities for the students, and when I discussed it with my mentor, she expressed her lack of authority to give the permissions. She said that I needed to write an application letter, and ask every leader in related offices to sign the form to gain permission. Then I found out that one week is not enough to ask permission because many leaders were not available at all times.

Ning This is really a big issue.

Wei I finally found the leaders after almost one week. They declined to sign the form because they did not believe in my ability to organize outdoor activities. They also felt that it was difficult to keep students safe. We are outsiders, anyway.

Doubt: 'Am I Qualified to be a Teacher?'

Throughout the teaching practicum, the pre-service teacher participants were found to have been preoccupied with whether or not they were qualified for the role of a teacher. For example, interactions revealed that Bei felt uneasy about presenting herself as a qualified teacher before pupils. However, this feeling of uneasiness was mainly related to her emotional state, which resulted from the marginal position that she held as a pre-service teacher in her teaching practicum school. For example:

Ning What do you think of being a teacher here?

Bei Actually, I have not been a full-time teacher before, and I was quite worried whether

I was qualified to be a teacher.

Ning Why do you say that?

Bei It was an intersection between being a teacher and a student. The role was different. I am not confident whether I can make a successful transition. I felt extremely nervous each time I taught a class. I did not even dare to look at my students directly during class.

In addition, these pre-service teacher participants were assigned to a separate room with unused textbooks and teaching resources. This physical separation naturally detached the pre-service teachers from the mainstream staff activities and collegial socialization. Therefore, it was not surprising that pre-service teachers had limited interaction with the regular teachers.

Consequently, the pre-service teachers found themselves in a 'between and betwixt' state at their teaching practicum schools (Cook-Sather, 2006, p.111). For example:

Ning How do you feel about the arrangement set by the school for us?

Yu The school put us together in one separate room, physically separated from other teachers. I am really irritated with this, because it is inconvenient for us to interact with other teachers.

Ning But I heard that it is the traditional custom to place pre-service teachers in a separate room.

Yu But I think regular contact with other teachers would be better. I think that would help us make a smooth transition from being a pre-service teacher to becoming a qualified teacher.

The pre-service teachers also struggled with the problem of split identity. For example, they were struggling to transition between the identities of a would-be teacher and a real teacher. Therefore, they were confused when determining the direction of their future teaching career. It was difficult for them to define or classify themselves as good teachers. For example:

Ning Have you ever thought about being an English teacher before?

Chen I enjoyed a sense of belonging to the English teaching community during the four years of my English learning experience.

Ning Then you must be doing a very good job of being a pre-service teacher here.

Chen Not really. I still need to do more to be as good as a qualified teacher. I wish I could create a fun-filled and pleasant classroom where my students can enjoy learning English.

Disillusionment: 'I do not have a Voice'

The pre-service teachers reported that they could not express their feelings freely, and considered this factor as the reason behind their position at the bottom of the school hierarchy. Put simply, the low status silenced their voices and restrained their emotions in front of both the university supervisor and the school mentor. This made them perceive their roles in the practicum school to be similar to that of an assistant or a sojourner who had very limited agency. This feeling of being spatially and socially marginalized also threatened their legitimate identity as prospective teachers. This threat is described in the following conversation:

Ning How did you get along with your mentor?

Yu She is at the top, and I am at the bottom. I could only listen to her suggestions or requirements.

Ning I think I am in the same situation. Anyway, I am an outsider. Do you think you can

- talk to your mentor about this issue?
- Yu I will not talk to her. I do not want to get a bad result during my final performance in the teaching practicum.
- Ning Will you find a job as a teacher?
- Yu I don't know. It depends.

Although the pre-service teachers possessed a passion and belief in conducting language teaching in the classroom, the strict control exercised by the school mentor influenced their sense of professional autonomy and agency. This also intensified their negative emotions and obstructed the development of their professional identity as a qualified teacher. The practice of subjectification is fundamentally linked to the development of identity wherein emotions are inextricably coupled with certain ways of exercising power, and the pressure of conforming to contradictory social expectations that is exerted by the families of these pre-service teachers. This practice also encoded emotional norms that regulated what pre-service teachers were presumed to feel. In this regard, teachers may have become vulnerable in their efforts to identify cherished beliefs and habits. For example:

- Ning How do you feel about your mentor?
- Wei One thing that I did not like about my mentor was that she would stop my teaching and make comments in class.
- Ning Why did she do that?
- Wei I think she just wanted to assert her professional authority in front of the students.
- Ning I think it would be better for her to provide comments after class.
- Wei Moreover, my parents thought I could become a real teacher in this school after completing the teaching practicum. This stressed me a lot. You know, it is really difficult to become a real teacher after graduation, especially with so many graduates and limited job vacancy.

Additionally, the students were required to sign a guarantee form every weekend, stating their whereabouts and agreeing that the school would not be responsible for any mishaps that they might encounter during the weekend. This frustrated and depressed the pre-service teachers. The pre-service teachers thought the students needed care and love, and forced signing of such guarantee forms might have emotionally hurt the students. This requirement also aroused pre-service teachers' deep concern about the students' welfare at a school where school leaders, teachers, and administrators appeared to care more about the school's fame rather than their ethical and moral responsibility toward the students. For example:

- Ning Did you ask your students to sign the guarantee form every weekend to ensure that what happens during weekends is not associated with the school?
- Lin Can I say no?
- Ning (laughs) Haha.
- Lin I think it is really ridiculous. The school is trying to weasel out of its responsibilities of taking care of its students. I had been a student before, and I know how upsetting it is when school administration doesn't care about its students.

Joy: 'Thank you students for all you do'

Recognition from the students helped the pre-service teachers to overcome the emotional ups and downs. This also motivated them to contemplate the manner in which emotional discourses have distanced them from their desires and installed alternative desires and habits,

which have contributed towards composing their new selves. To this end, the pre-service teachers established functional pedagogical relationships with their students through their own efforts. For example:

Ning What impressed you the most at this school?

Bei I think my students.

Ning I think so, even though they were sometimes very naughty.

Bei Definitely. I dared not deal with the naughty students. Although I had been confused about how to get along with them, I still tried my best to earn recognition from my students.

Ning How do you seek recognition from them?

Bei I tried to remember the names of all my students, and I called each of them by name as a way to show them my respect. I offered to help my students with their extracurricular activities. For example, I helped my students to prepare for the English-speaking contest. I also asked them to write down their expectations so that I would know how to address their individual needs.

The pre-service teachers gradually perceived that the reasons for the passive learning environment could be partly due to the hierarchical structure and accountability system at the school. In fact, the monthly tests that were conducted with the students were one of the methods for gauging and measuring performance of the teachers. Because school policy focused mainly on improving students' test scores, and teachers were not provided much freedom or autonomy in designing and implementing the course syllabus and curriculum, the pre-service teachers were limited to the application of memorization and drills to improve students' test scores. Thus, innovative actions were inhibited. As the pre-service teachers developed a deeper understanding of teachers' dilemmas, they reconsidered their own practices. For example:

Ning How time flies!

Chen Well, I now understand more about the state of teachers in this school. To be honest, I was very surprised at the school's policy on teacher evaluation, which was based on students' test results.

Ning The problem is that students need to undertake tests on a monthly basis.

Chen Under such pressure, teachers will not be able to invest extra efforts towards improving the practical ability of students in learning English as well as their professional development.

Despite the feelings of underachievement, the pre-service teachers experienced joy upon receiving recognition from their students. The joy emanating from such recognition dispelled the anxieties and dilemmas that pre-service teachers had previously felt concerning their relationships with their students at the beginning of the practicum. The recognition also helped the pre-service teachers deal with their negative emotions and contributed towards bolstering the development of their professional identity as a supportive English teacher in the future. Although the pre-service teachers experienced anxiety from their positions as teachers and encountered challenges in dealing with uncertainty, over time and with experience their emotions changed. As the students gained confidence and experience, the pre-service teachers' identity as a teacher was strengthened. For example:

Ning Some of the students are quite lovely.

Lin I think the change in their attitudes made me happy. While some of them might be very naughty, most of them supported my job, and they regard me as a good teacher now.

Ning One of the students wrote a card to me. The card said, “Happy Mid-autumn Day, my dear teacher!” I was so happy.

Lin Me too. My students also gave me some fruits.

Ning Well, that is really good.

Lin I think I have a sense of joy from being a teacher. I really hope I can do more as their teacher. I want to help them improve their test results, and I also want to be their friend. I want to take care of them and support them.

Discussion

This study’s purpose was to explore the role of emotion in the development of the pre-service teachers’ identity. This exploration was conducted by narrative interaction among the pre-service teacher peer groups. Overall, this study demonstrated that the pre-service teachers’ identity development is directly related to their emotions (Lee & Jo, 2016). It was also noted that certain emotional rules dictated teachers’ emotions and subjectivity (Zembylas, 2005). Emotional rules, which prescribe the practices that the pre-service teachers must adopt to meet the expectations for the teacher role, have acted as norms that code, rank, suppress, control, and regulate emotional responses related to conformity and deviance. The pre-service teachers must either perform in line with commonly-acceptable identities or risk being seen as intolerant norm-breakers. Following the former model, they must learn to exercise restraint on their overt habits and morals, and their inner emotions and moods. In view of the complex and contested emotional process of identity construction for pre-service teachers (Shapiro, 2010), the findings of the present study broke new ground in exploring the emotional flux and how this is related to the construction of professional identity.

First, asymmetric power relationships between mentors and the pre-service teachers influences learners’ negotiation of identities in relation to their conflicting emotions, which echoes previous research findings (e.g., Bloomfield, 2010; Sert, 2006). Unequal power relationships between mentors and pre-service teachers, to some extent, leave learners vulnerable to a wide array of negative emotions. In the Chinese cultural context, school mentors often want to maintain their power and status in class, and because of this, listening to the suggestions of novice pre-service teachers seems unprofessional. Hence, the pre-service teachers in the present study were compelled to suppress their discontent and submit their tendency for avoiding disputes, which reconstructed their identities as obedient assistants instead of autonomous teachers in the school.

In addition, the situated school system and entrenched conventional practices also have a bearing on the development of the pre-service teachers’ professional identity. The tightly organized, hierarchical, and collectivistic structure of Chinese society influences these educational practices. In this context, middle school teachers in China tended to adopt a top-bottom method—teacher-centered, textbook-centered, a grammar-translation approach, and exam-oriented instructions—which might have also contributed to the negative emotions of the pre-service teachers. For example, the pre-service teachers in the present study felt under-valued, disappointed and irritated due to the excessive control exercised by the mentors on their teaching practices and their powerlessness to change their status ‘at the bottom of the school hierarchy’ (Yuan & Lee, 2016, p. 17). This situation also led the pre-service teachers to experience a sense of limited teacher agency and psychological exclusion from the field school (Timoštšuk &

Ugaste, 2010). For instance, Wei, a pre-service teacher in the present study, expressed a willingness to negotiate and share insights with her mentor. However, Wei's mentor denied collaboration and tightened control over Wei's teaching practice. Additionally, she shunned Wei's ideas by suggesting that her teaching practices should strictly focus on improving the examination scores of her students. Wei could only resist by disrupting or withdrawing. Therefore, the school teachers' coercive and dominating behaviors led the novice pre-service teachers to struggle, resist, and compromise motivational dispositions and evolvment of identities. The emotional damage increased when the pre-service teachers needed to force their students to complete guarantee forms. This was a devastating experience for Lin, as she was blamed and criticized for not inducing students to sign the document. She was criticized for prioritizing students' freedom and emotional needs rather than enforcing rules that were designed to protect the school's reputation. This experience contradicted Lin's expectations of basic concern by a pedagogical institute and affected the construction of her identity as a caring and supportive teacher. These hidden emotional rules were, to a certain extent, responsible for the pre-service teachers' failure to achieve their roles, aspirations, and expectations of possessing the ideal attributes for becoming a good teacher.

Placed in a separate room from school teachers, the pre-service teachers found themselves spatially and socially marginalized. Although such spatial and social marginalization could have been due to difficulties that the school encountered in accommodating these temporary visitors in their regular staff rooms, this separation could also have had an adverse impact on the identity development of the pre-service teachers. For example, such segregation failed to provide the pre-service teachers with an opportunity to share their inner emotional flux and feelings formed during the teaching practicum with experienced teacher staff. Thus, this produced an implicit impact on their emotional practices. The pre-service teachers' roles seemed to be reduced to that of assistants who were required to perform duties perfunctorily. This role required the pre-service teachers to sit quietly in the office in the absence of any work, which was quite unlike the role of a legitimate and autonomous teacher. This could have thwarted the development of their professional identity (e.g., Shapiro, 2010), thereby leading them to experience an immense sense of loss as a teacher. Additionally, the pre-service teachers were expected to self-manage and self-regulate all negative emotions encountered in the teaching practicum. This was a dispiriting and intimidating challenge, which drove the pre-service teachers to expend a significant amount of 'emotional labor'— a process of managing feelings and expressions—to fulfill the emotional requirements of being a teacher (Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006).

The pre-service teachers' professional agency also mediates identity construction and development. For instance, Chen's professional teacher agency was revealed through her positive response to the normative discourses in the field school, and reflections on her own teaching practice. Her teacher agency was influenced by the challenge of managing unruly students. In addition, the pre-service teachers' lack of confidence in professional competence, including their English proficiency and professional knowledge, also had an impact on their agency. However, increasing recognition from the students helped the pre-service teachers to take actions toward the path of self-actualization or 'emotional intelligence' (Salovey & Mayer, 1990, p. 189). This scenario revealed that the pre-service teachers' emotions underwent significant transformation during their learning-to-teach process, although they experienced doubt and irritation in the beginning of their teaching practicum. Pride and joy from being recognized by the students helped the pre-service teachers to monitor their own feelings and

emotions. This recognition steered their thinking and actions towards an appropriate future career selection, which could involve the focus on becoming an official English teacher. This process also implied that the pre-service teachers who possessed 'emotional intelligence' skills regulated emotional properties to stimulate adaptive behaviors. For example, although Chen complied with the surrounding expectations by concealing her emotions and following the mentor's requirements, she discovered ways of adhering to her own beliefs and making mental commitments towards reflective and agentive learning. She achieved this agency by conducting more extracurricular activities for students. Deploying 'tactical compliance' (Roberts & Graham, 2008, p.1401) and 'agentive work' (Miller, 2010, p.286), Chen managed to inject positivity into her teaching practices and regained her motivation and confidence. Overall, the change in the state of the pre-service teachers from disillusionment to joy might be attributed to the recognition that the pre-service teachers received from the students, which led them to construct an 'imagined identity' (Gao, 2012, p.1).

Conclusion and Implications

While the emotionality of learning to teach has remained an under-researched area in the field of teacher education, this study provides a detailed narrative account of how six pre-service teachers negotiated and navigated conflicting emotions in the process of becoming a teacher. It is suggested that the hidden 'emotional rules' embedded in the practicum school could exert considerable influence on their emotional experiences and identity construction. Such understandings can deepen existing knowledge on the complexities of learning to teach for pre-service teachers by taking the centrality of emotions into account.

The present study is not without limitations. First, this study only focused on interactions among the pre-service teachers. Future research can be conducted to create a more complete picture of the pre-service teachers' teaching and learning in the teaching practicum through exploring and analyzing data from their interactions, not only with peers, but also with mentors, school administrators, and university supervisors. This might provide insight into the interactions between different power levels. Second, future research can be conducted with a particular focus on the manner in which the emotional flux plays a role in transferring identity from pre-service to in-service context. Third, recording regular pre-service teachers' reflections would add more data to support reliability and triangulate the statements in narratives. Finally, future research could be better presented to explore the interrelationship between the school mentor and structures and factors identified by the pre-service teachers that have an impact on and influence professional teacher identity.

Nevertheless, some practical implications can be drawn from the present study for the improvement of pre-service teacher education. Primarily, scenarios of possible challenges that the pre-service teachers encountered in the teaching practicum may be used to engage these pre-service teachers in critical thinking and reflecting on strategies that they can implement to manage the challenges in the pedagogical and emotional processes. These critical reflections, to a certain extent, may assist them when looking beyond the contextual conditions underlying the perceived challenge, and taking appropriate actions for managing the emotional flux. Second, pre-service teachers might adapt to the school system and acquire an enhanced sense of resilience to endure their marginalized position by sharing their emotional and affective experiences that result from the teaching practicum and cater to their professional development.

Reflection is an effective means for pre-service teachers to bring their thoughts consciously to their mind, and to discuss creative strategies related to the pedagogy, which can be used to overcome this perceived challenge in the teaching practicum (Gao & Benson, 2012). Third, an emphasis on fostering an open democratic relationship between pre-service teachers and their supervisors and mentors would contribute towards meeting the pre-service teachers' emotional needs, facilitating their teaching and learning, and enabling them to make a smooth transition from a pre-service teacher to an in-service teacher. A few suggestions for positive steps in that direction include allowing pre-service teachers to speak their minds (Ushioda, 2011), focusing on their interests in classroom teaching, engaging them in group learning projects, and seeking their assistance in designing and organizing extracurricular activities. Finally, although it may not be an easy task to transform their mentality and practice in a teaching practicum because of traditional barriers established by deep-rooted school structures, social cultures, and conventions, it is important for the schools to show more appreciation to these novice pre-service teachers. The schools must learn to cherish pre-service teachers as autonomous agents, who contribute different talents and values to the teaching team. This will improve pre-service teachers' professional satisfaction, decrease burnout rates, enhance their perceived competence in understanding appropriate methods that must be undertaken to manage emotional flux, and equip them to help students perform better.

References

- Akkerman, S. F., & Meijer, P. C. (2011). A dialogical approach to conceptualizing teacher identity. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 27(2), 308-319. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2010.08.013>
- Anttila, H., Pyhältö, K., Soini, T., & Pietarinen, J. (2016). How does it feel to become a teacher? Emotions in teacher education. *Social Psychology of Education*, 48(10), 59-63. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11218-016-9335-0>
- Bamberg, M. (2004). Form and functions of 'slut bashing' in male identity constructions in 15-year-olds: 'I know it may sound mean to say this, but we couldn't really care less about her anyway'. *Human Development*, 47(6), 331-353. <https://doi.org/10.1159/000081036>
- Beauchamp, C., & Thomas, L. (2009). Understanding teacher identity: An overview of issues in the literature and implications for teacher education. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 39, 175-189. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057640902902252>
- Becker, T., & Quasthoff, U. M. (2005). Different dimensions in the field of narrative interaction. In U. M. Quasthoff & T. Becker (Eds.), *Narrative interaction* (pp. 1-11). Amsterdam: John Benjamins. <https://doi.org/10.1075/sin.5.01bec>
- Beijaard, D., Meijer, P. C., & Verloop, N. (2004). Reconsidering research on teachers' professional identity. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 20, 107-128. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2003.07.001>
- Bezzina, C., & Michalak, J. (2009). Preparing student teachers for teaching practicum. In A. Swennen & M. van der Klink (Eds.), *Becoming a teacher educator* (pp. 163-171). Dordrecht: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-8874-2_12
- Biesta, G., Priestley, M., & Robinson, S. (2015). The role of beliefs in teacher agency. *Teachers and Teaching*, 21(6), 624-640. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2015.1044325>

- Bloomfield, D. (2010). Emotions and ‘getting by’: A pre-service teacher navigating professional experience. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 38, 221–234.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1359866X.2010.494005>
- Connelly, F. M., & Clandinin, D. J. (1999). *Shaping a professional identity: Stories of educational practice*. London: Althouse Press.
- Cook-Sather, A. (2006). Newly betwixt and between: revising liminality in the context of a teacher preparation program. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 37(2), 110–127.
<https://doi.org/10.1525/aeq.2006.37.2.110>
- El Kadri, M. S., & Roth, W. M. (2015). The teaching practicum as a locus of multi-leveled, school-based transformation. *Teaching Education*, 26, 17–37.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10476210.2014.997700>
- Gao, F. (2012). Imagined identity of ethnic Koreans and its implication for bilingual education in china. *International Journal of Bilingual Education & Bilingualism*, 15(3), 1-11.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2011.636146>
- Gao, X. S., & Benson, P. (2012). ‘Unruly pupils’ in pre-service English language teachers’ teaching practicum experiences. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 38(2), 127-140
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02607476.2012.656440>
- Gee, J. P. (2000). Identity as an analytic lens for research in education. *Review of research in education*, 25, 9–125. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1167322>
- Georgakopoulou, A. 2006. Small and large identities in narrative (inter)-action. In D. Schiffrin, M. Bamberg, & A. de Fina (Eds.), *Discourse and identity* (pp.83–102). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511584459.005>
- Goleman, D. (1998). *Working with emotional intelligence*. New York: Bantam Books.
- Grudnoff, L. (2011). Rethinking the practicum: Limitations and possibilities. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 39, 223–234.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1359866X.2011.588308>
- Han, I. (2016). (Re)conceptualization of ELT professionals: academic high school English teachers’ professional identity in Korea. *Teachers and Teaching*, 22(5), 586-609.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2016.1158467>
- Henry, A. (2016). Conceptualizing teacher identity as a complex dynamic system: The inner dynamics of transformations during a practicum. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 67(4), 291-305. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487116655382>
- Isenbarger, L., & Zembylas, M. (2006). The emotional labor of caring in teaching. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 22, 120–134. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2005.07.002>
- Karlsson, M. (2013). Emotional identification with teacher identities in student teachers’ narrative interaction. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 36, 133–146.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2012.686994>
- Lasky, S. (2005). A sociocultural approach to understanding teacher identity, agency and professional vulnerability in a context of secondary school reform. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 21, 899–916. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2005.06.003>
- Lee, O., & Jo, K. (2016). Pre-service classroom teachers’ identity development in learning to teach physical education. *The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher*, 25(4), 627-635.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s40299-016-0290-5>
- Meyer, D. (2009). Entering the emotional practices of teaching. In P. A. Schutz & M. Zembylas (Eds.), *Advances in teacher emotion research* (pp. 73–91). Dordrecht: Springer.
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4419-0564-2_5

- Miller, E. (2010). Agency in the making: Adult immigrants' accounts of language learning and work. *TESOL Quarterly*, 44(3), 465–487. <https://doi.org/10.5054/tq.2010.226854>
- Ochs, E., & Capps, L. (2001). *Living narrative: Creating lives in everyday storytelling*. London: Harvard University Press.
- Roberts, J., & Graham, S. (2008). Agency and conformity in school-based teacher training. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 24, 1401–1412. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2008.01.003>
- Rodgers, C. R., & Scott, K. H. (2008). The development of the personal self and professional identity in learning to teach. In M. Cochran-Smith & S. Nemser- Freiman (Eds.), *Handbook of research on teacher education. Enduring questions in changing contexts* (3rd ed.). (pp. 732-755). New York & London: Routledge.
- Sachs, J. (2005). Teacher education and the development of professional identity: Learning to be a teacher. In P. Denicolo & M. Kompf (Eds.), *Connecting policy and practice: Challenges for teaching and learning in schools and universities* (pp. 5–21). London: Routledge.
- Salovey, P., & Mayer, J. D. (1990). Emotional intelligence. *Imagination, Cognition, & Personality*, 9, 185–211. <https://doi.org/10.2190/DUGG-P24E-52WK-6CDG>
- Shapiro, S. (2010). Revisiting the teachers' lounge: Reflections on emotional experience and teacher identity. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 26, 616–621. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2009.09.009>
- Sutton, R. E., & Wheatley, K. F. (2003). Teachers' emotions and teaching: A review of the literature and directions for future research. *Educational Psychology Review*, 15(4), 327-358. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1026131715856>
- Timošćuk, I., & Ugaste, A. (2010). Student teachers' professional identity. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 26, 1563–1570. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2010.06.008>
- Ushioda, E. (2011). Motivating learners to speak as themselves. In G. Murray, X. Gao, & T. Lamb (eds), *Identity, motivation and autonomy in language learning* (pp. 11–24). Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Watson, C. (2007). Small stories, positioning analysis and the doing of professional identities in learning to teach. *Narrative Inquiry*, 17(2), 371–389. <https://doi.org/10.1075/ni.17.2.11wat>
- Wetherell, M. (1998). Positioning and interpretative repertoires: Conversation analysis and post-structuralism in dialogue. *Discourse & Society*, 9(3), 387–412. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926598009003005>
- Yuan, R., & Lee, I. (2015). The cognitive, social and emotional processes of teacher identity construction in a pre-service teacher education programme. *Research Papers in Education*, 30, 469–491. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02671522.2014.932830>
- Yuan, R., & Lee, I. (2016). 'I need to be strong and competent': a narrative inquiry of a student-teacher's emotions and identities in teaching practicum. *Teachers and Teaching*, 22(7), 1-23. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2016.1185819>
- Zembylas, M. (2004). The emotional characteristics of teaching: An ethnographic study of one teacher. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 20, 185–201. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2003.09.008>
- Zembylas, M. (2005). *Teaching with emotions: A postmodern enactment*. Greenwich: Information Age.