

Becoming English teachers in Thailand: Student teacher identity development during teaching practicum

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Learning to teach during a teaching practicum has often been described as a challenging experience for student teachers; however, little is known how they overcome the challenges. Using teacher identity as an analytic lens, I investigated how two English-major student teachers in a one-year teaching practicum in Thailand constructed teacher identity. The data were obtained from interviews and shadowing observations. Thematic analysis revealed that teacher identity was developed earlier in biographies. The teaching practicum contributed to teacher identity development in three ways: (1) emotional responses to the practicum shaped identity, (2) practice shaped identity, and (3) symbolic entity as a reminder of being a teacher shaped identity. Additionally, the student teachers overcome challenges through psychological and technical supports from within and outside the schools. The findings suggest that teacher education should give careful attention to the teaching practicum as it contributes to the development of student teacher identity.

Introduction

In the field of teacher education, teaching practicum has been described not only the most influential component of teacher education, but also as among the most critical, important, and challenging experience for student teachers (Cohen, Hoz & Kaplan, 2013; Dang, 2013; Ferrier-Kerr, 2009; Gebhard, 2009; Trent, 2013, 2014). The teaching practicum is an opportunity for student teachers to transfer theory, knowledge and skills, learned in a teacher education program, into practice (Dang, 2013; Gebhard, 2009). The practicum is also a chance for student teachers to learn about themselves and what kind of teachers they want to be (Brizman, 2003; Furlong, 2013; Trent, 2010a).

The teaching practicum has been explored for at least five decades. During the 1960s to 1980s, studies attempted to identify the right skills or teaching behaviours for student teachers to master in order to achieve effective teaching (Caires, Almeida & Viera, 2012). In the late 1980s, interest was shifted to examining student teachers' beliefs as there was much difficulty in identifying a comprehensive list of skills and behaviours. Recently, the focus has changed to investigating teacher identity during the teaching practicum because current studies have pointed out that learning to teach is not merely a process of acquiring skills, rather it is a process of forming teacher identity (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Caires et al., 2012).

Continuing with the recent focus in teaching practicum research, I have attempted to use teacher identity as an analytic lens to examine student teachers learning to teach during their teaching practicum. Britzman (2003) described the notion of learning to teach as "the process of becoming: a time of formation and transformation, of scrutiny into what one is doing, and who one can become" (p. 31). The process of becoming a teacher

involves “when one’s past, present, and future are set in dynamic tension” (Britzman, 2003, p. 31). In other words, learning to teach is regarded as a teacher identity development project (Schultz & Ravitch, 2013). As a result of theorising learning to teach as developing teacher identity, the question arises: How is teacher identity constructed during the teaching practicum?

Student teacher identity

Whilst teacher education in general has been interested in teacher identity, language teacher education in particular has focused on examining teacher identity or professional identity (e.g., Duff & Uchida, 1997; Gu & Benson, 2015; Morgan, 2004; Pavlenko, 2003; Tsui, 2007; Varghese, Morgan, Johnston & Johnson, 2005; Trent, 2010a, 2010b; Yuan & Lee, 2016). The review of literature suggests that prior researchers have explored student teacher identity extensively in general teacher education (e.g., Caires et al., 2012; Lamote & Engels, 2010; Pelini, 2017; Sutherland, Howard & Markauskaite, 2010), but only limited research has focused on exploring teacher identity development during the teaching practicum, especially student teachers in language teacher education (Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Trent, 2010a; Yazan & Percy, 2018). Yazan and Percy (2018) argued that teacher identity in language education stands out as a discrete area because the subject matter is unique, in which the language is regarded as both content and a medium of instruction.

In the landscape of language teacher education, Varghese et al. (2005) summarised that the topic of teacher identity received attention because of the sociocultural turn (Johnson, 2006), which argued for the need to examine language teaching through the study of teachers. It was argued that teachers play a crucial role in the configuration of classroom practices, such as the content they teach, the method they use, or the relationship they maintain with students (Beijaard, Meijer & Verloop, 2004) and other actions outside the classroom (Walkington, 2005). Therefore, in trying to understand language teaching, the first step is to explore teachers as holistic persons, or their identity (Gao, 2012).

Based on two seminal literature reviews in the field (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Beijaard et al., 2004), the problem of understanding teacher identity is the absence of a clear consistent defining of this concept. Furlong (2013) agreed that “the notion of identity suffers from conceptual pluralism” (p. 69). Teacher identity has been used to refer to in-service teachers, and it has been also used in discussions of student teachers as they do the work of real teachers in the school contexts (Izadinia, 2013). Teacher identity is complicated and multidimensional since it is used in many disciplines, such as anthropology, sociology, psychology, or education (Varghese et al., 2005). To understand teacher identity development, it is important to situate teacher identity in a particular theoretical framework.

In this study, teacher identity is conceptualised as collective stories of oneself as a teacher narrated in contexts. This definition was influenced by the philosophical background of narrative inquiry, in which it theorises that human beings live in a form of stories and these stories could be treated as identity (Connelly & Cladinin, 1999; Kanno, 2000; Sfard

& Prusak, 2005). Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) maintained that “the narratives of teachers about themselves and their practice, as well as the discourses in which they engage, provide opportunities for exploring and revealing aspects of the self” (p. 181). The act of telling narratives provides opportunities for individuals to make sense of their experiences, give explanations to their actions, and reflect on prospective plans (Connelly & Cladinin, 1999).

The connotation of teacher identity involves *current* (Who am I at this moment?) and *imagined* (Who do I want to become?) self-identifications (Beijaard et al., 2004; Yazan, 2018). Self-identifications are inherently multiple (Varghese et al., 2005). This means that student teachers can tell many stories of themselves. Additionally, the self-identifications are deeply rooted in one’s life histories (Furlong, 2003). Student teachers do not enter the teacher education programs like an empty vessel to absorb knowledge and skills; rather they bring their life histories with them into teacher education such as memories of themselves as students, beliefs about teaching, years of informal learning about being a teacher, and image of an ideal teacher (Anspal, Eisenschmidt & Löfström, 2012; Chong, Low & Goh, 2011; Furlong, 2013; Lortie, 1975; Palmér, 2016).

Adopting a professional teacher identity is not simply about identifying oneself with a particular group (Ruohotie-Lyhty & Moate, 2016). Rather, student teachers are actively engaged in the process and they use tremendous efforts, energy, and commitment to identify themselves as teachers. This investment is commonly known as agency, which is defined as “the capacity of people to act purposefully and reflectively on their world” (Rogers & Wetzel, 2013, p. 63). According to Yuan and Lee (2016), agency “is determined by the individual ability to reflect on their professional actions and achieved through their resistance to the institutional structures as well as the embedded emotional rules” (p. 822). Based on this view, agency is exercised individually in context by drawing on personal values, experiences, and beliefs as well as social expectations to influence, make choices, or take perspectives that affects one’s work and professional identity (Ruohotie-Lyhty & Moate, 2016; Sexton, 2008). Prior research has pointed out that agency is strongly related to teacher identity development (Lasky, 2005). Specifically, as student teachers experienced conflicts in developing teacher identity, they find their ways to exercise agency and this exercise affect the development of teacher identity (Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Lasky, 2005; Ruohotie-Lyhty & Moate, 2016; Sexton, 2008; Tao & Gao, 2017).

In the literature on the teaching practicum, previous researchers have described this period as a minefield of emotional, struggling, and challenging experiences (Bloomfield, 2010; Timoštšuk & Ugaste, 2010; Morrison, 2013; Trent, 2010a; Yuan & Lee, 2017). For example, Bloomfield (2010) pointed out that student teachers were struggling during the teaching practicum in terms of biography (being marginalised), emotions (e.g., isolation, resentment, or vulnerability), and institutional structure (power struggle). Beijaard et al. (2004) described the reasons why the teaching practicum experience was portrayed as a challenging period as follows:

Professional identity formation is often presented as a struggle, because (student) teachers have to make sense of varying and sometimes competing perspectives, expectations, and roles that they have to confront and adapt to (p. 115).

While prior research has pointed out evidence of student teachers' challenging experiences in learning to teach during the teaching practicum, limited research has been explored how they overcome those challenging experiences. An inquiry into this line of research will add knowledge to the current understanding. Teacher educators will be able to use the knowledge to design the teaching practicum that is supportive to teacher identity development, as well as to better support student teachers during their teaching practicum experiences.

The present study

Research questions

1. How was the development of teacher identity shaped by the teaching practicum?
2. How do student teachers overcome the challenges of the teaching practicum?

Context and participants

This study was conducted at a pre-service teacher education program offered by a comprehensive university in Thailand, which comprises four years of classes and one year of a teaching practicum. As a teacher educator, it was part of my responsibility to supervise 10 student teachers while they were placed full-time in schools for their one-year teaching practicum. Upon sending an email request for participation to the cohort of 10 student teachers, three participants voluntarily responded to the request. However, Najmee and Niti (pseudonyms) were particularly chosen as the focus in this article because their practicum contexts were different. Najmee was placed in the secondary school level where she had more autonomy, whereas Niti was placed in the elementary school level where he had less independence. By examining only two student teachers, it was not my intention to claim generalisation to other contexts; rather, the richly descriptive stories of the two participants may provide an insight into the complexity of teacher identity development.

Data collection

Since previous studies have pointed out that teacher identity is complicated (Tsui, 2007; Varghese et al., 2005), I wanted to employ a research methodology that was able to capture this complexity. As a result, a narrative case study approach was used. This narrative case study investigates stories of student teachers that they have been developed and (re)told as legitimate sources of knowledge. In this study, the case study approach was integrated to create a boundary of interest (Stake, 1995), and to focus on English-major student teachers only.

To elicit the data, the participants were interviewed twice per person at the end of the one-year teaching practicum. I relied on their memories to recount their experiences during the one-year teaching practicum. The interviews were semi-structured, consisting of several topics: why they entered the teacher education, teacher education experiences, teaching practicum experience, activities they performed at schools, perceptions of themselves as a teacher, how these perceptions changed over time, and how they got through the teaching practicum. These topics were used to guide a conversation in a comfortable, relaxed, and undisturbed environment.

Apart from the interview, I also conducted six shadowing observations per student teacher to learn about their lives at the schools and to sketch the contexts for analysis (Wolcott, 2003). The total period of shadowing observations across the two participants was 42 hours. I asked the participants to identify a typical day at school and followed them, like their shadows, to document their professional lives. I used a small notebook to record observations to prevent distractions. After each observation, I wrote field notes immediately to put my experience into text (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995). The field notes were later expanded for analysis. It should be noted that the expanded field notes were not like a mirror of what happened, but they were influenced by my backgrounds.

Data analysis and trustworthiness

Before analysing the data, the quality of data was maximised. For example, the interviews were transcribed professionally, and I rechecked the accuracy of the transcripts. The field notes were also expanded fully. After that, the data were analysed vertically (within-case) and horizontally (cross-case) (Merriam, 2009). For the vertical analysis, I analyse the entire set of the data within the individual student teachers by using the coding method, consisting of three analysis stages: (1) open coding, (2) axial coding, and (3) selective coding (Saldaña, 2009).

In the open coding stage where the aim was to assign codes to the data with no prior frameworks, I read, reread the data, and identified initial codes. Some examples of the codes were “teaching is a stable job,” “growing up in the family of teachers,” “excitement and worry,” “reality shock,” “school policy,” “school expectations,” etc. In the axial coding stage, I reexamined the open codes and identified the relationships among them to generate categories. In the selective coding stage, I combined the categories into themes by selectively choosing the ones related to teacher identity development. Finally, the results of the vertically three-stage analysis were compared horizontally across cases to examine similarities and differences in teacher identity development. Table 1 details the process of thematic analysis.

Based on the emergent themes identified above, I re-examined the themes again by rereading the original data in order to recheck for original meaning. After that, I composed mini-stories to represent each theme (Cladinin & Connelly, 2000). Through this process, I began to see the storyline of teacher identity development, which was knitted from the mini-stories. To maximise the trustworthiness of the analysis, I kept writing reflections to be aware of my subjectivity. The reflections were used during the analysis to

question the interpretation of the data. After crafting the narratives, I also sent out the draft to the participants for a member checking process. Their feedback was used to revise the narratives in this paper.

Table 1: The thematic data analysis

Codes	Categories	Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Society values teacher • A sense of mission • Job stability • Job opportunity • Inspiring teachers • Growing up in the family of teachers 	Multiple reasons to choose teacher education	Teacher identity is developed based on prior biographies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conception of a good teacher • Image of a teacher by society • Teacher as a responsible agent • Teachers are always teachers 	Prior image of a teacher	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excitement • Ready to teach • Pleasant • Joy 	Positive emotional responses to the teaching practicum	Emotion shapes teacher identity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reality shock • Overwhelmed • Frustration • Powerless • Failure • Afraid • Doubt 	Negative emotional responses to the teaching practicum	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feel like a student • Feel like a teacher • Students called “teacher” 	Self-perception as a teacher	Practice shapes teacher identity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching responsibility • Extra responsibility • First class experience • Performing the real roles of teachers • The first class experience • Commitment to teaching 	The practice of the teaching	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student uniform • Being called “a teacher” • Performing the real teacher’s roles • Understand the nature of teaching 	Causes of different self-perception as a teacher	Symbolic entity as a reminder of being a teacher
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching responsibility • Extra responsibility • First class experience 	The practice of the teaching	

Codes	Categories	Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performing the real roles of teachers • The first class experience • Commitment to teaching 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School policy to call “teacher” • School policy to pair with 	Institutional context	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk to mothers • Student’s behaviours • The call to consult from students • Share worries with other student teachers • Talk to mentors 	Psychological supports	Myriad types of support mechanisms
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observe mentor teachers • Flexible • Talk to students about teachers they like 	Technical supports	

Findings

This study revealed that teacher identity was developed prior to attending teacher education as it was reflected in the participants’ biographies. The teaching practicum contributed to teacher identity development in three main ways: (1) emotional responses to the teaching practicum shape teacher identity, (2) the practice of teaching shape teacher identity, and (3) symbolic entity as a reminder of being a teacher-shaped teacher identity. Additionally, while it was common to see the challenges during the teaching practicum, the student teachers overcome these challenges through two types of supports from within and outside the school contexts: (1) psychological supports, and (2) technical supports. The individual narratives below reflect the storylines of their teacher identity development.

Narrative of Najmee

Najmee is a 22-year-old female student teacher, born in the far-away South of Thailand. She immigrated to pursue a Bachelor of Education in Teaching English at a university located in the East. She entered teacher education with a strong determination to become a teacher, which was nested in the constellation of factors such as dream job, professional stability, job opportunity, and helping her hometown. She narrated,

Teaching is a dream job for me because it is a stable profession and the retirement benefits are fully provided. There are also many vacancies in my hometown because we have dangerous situations in our region and few people courageously decide to be a teacher there. I really want to help my hometown, so becoming a teacher has always been my dream. (Interview 1).

Najmee brought these motivations and a simple concept of a good teacher as a person who gets along with students with her into the teacher education. These backgrounds formed her initial teacher identity. When asked what kind of teacher she wanted to be, she

reported that she could see herself as a kindhearted teacher who has positive relationships with students. This teacher identity was partly derived from her impression of her teachers in the secondary school, whom she described as her “idols” to step into the teaching profession.

With a clear goal to become a teacher, Najmee invested her efforts in many teacher education classes. She stated that she was impressed with psychology and philosophy professors because they had excellent teaching techniques and they were well-liked by her classmates. This impression intensified her teacher identity that she developed in prior schooling experiences. After four years in the teacher education program, Najmee’s concept of a good teacher did not change much; she remained thinking that a good teacher is the one who is well-liked by students.

After Najmee received her school assignment for the teaching practicum, she was emotionally overwhelmed. Najmee recounted,

I was so excited, worried, and frustrated about the teaching practicum. Do I have enough English knowledge to teach the students? Will they do what I tell them? Will they respect me? Will I get along with them? (Interview 1).

Thinking about these questions frustrated her even before she started the teaching practicum. This frustration strongly affected her initial teacher identity. During this stage, her conception of teaching changed to the traditional view of teaching in Thailand context, where teacher is the authority of knowledge, who students must respect and follow.

Najmee was assigned to teach English 12 hours per week, and she had six hours of extra responsibilities. Najmee was also required to submit lesson plans to her mentor teacher for approval. At the end of each semester, she had to take a teaching test, which was to be evaluated by a school committee, comprising a school principal, a department head, and her mentor teacher. For Najmee, completing these responsibilities was overwhelming.

On the first day of teaching, Najmee looked at herself in the mirror, checking the appropriateness of her uniform. She was ready to teach her first class. Excited.

Najmee remembered vividly her first class. Failed. She prepared teaching materials and learning activities to make her class fun, but the students did not respond well. Najmee narrated with frustration,

I was well-prepared, and my teaching materials were ready. I had designed fun learning activities for my students. I was so ready to teach. I expected my students to understand the lesson. Yet, I was wrong. The lesson was too advanced for them. They looked at me, totally blank! I found out later that they did not even know the difference between ‘is’, ‘am’ and ‘are’. If they don’t know this basic knowledge, how can I continue my lesson? Fancy materials and fun activities did not matter at all. (Interview 1).

Having feelings of failure on the first day, Najmee was discouraged. She called her mother to seek advice. Najmee also discussed this issue with other student teachers at the school. These consultations reduced her sense of failure. Additionally, Najmee also had problems with student behaviour during class time. She reported that since the students could not follow the learning activities in class, they started chitchatting. “It was noisy and disturbing,” she said. Instead of disciplining the students, Najmee moved on. When asked why she refused to take control of the classroom, Najmee admitted, “I was afraid that the students would hate me” (Interview 1). This response was aligned with her prior perception of teaching as building relationships.

These overwhelming senses of failure affected negatively on her teacher identity. Najmee did not see herself as a teacher during this stage. She narrated:

I didn't see myself as a teacher at all. The students also did not see me as a teacher. They called me sister! I felt like I shouldn't tell them what to do because I wanted them to know that I could get along with them. I wanted them to trust me. When the students did not pay attention in the class, I just let it go. I really wanted to discipline them, but I didn't know how. (Interview 1).

Based on the quote above, it was evident that Najmee perceived teaching as a relational practice; she wanted to develop positive relationships with her students. During her first semester, Najmee was struggling and overwhelmed.

In the second semester, Najmee was assigned to teach different classes. In that semester, Najmee started to adjust her expectations about the students and her approach to teaching. In the first semester, she planned her instruction based on the prescribed curriculum. However, Najmee changed her approach, selecting content materials appropriate to the students. She tried to put herself in the students' shoes and planned instruction based on their needs.

Najmee still regarded teaching as a relational practice. She continued her approach to teaching as gaining positive relationships with the students. Najmee started to listen and learn about her students. She observed why students liked some teachers and realised that the students wanted to learn with those who were not afraid to be disliked and knew how to gain respect from students. Najmee felt that it was necessary to take control as a teacher.

After changing her approach to teaching, Najmee felt that she was successful in gaining the students' trust. The students were more open to accepting her as a teacher. Instead of calling her sister, the students started to call her *Kru* (teacher). With the label of a teacher, she started internalising the teacher identity. Najmee narrated,

I gradually saw myself as a teacher after my students started to call me *Kru*. When the students didn't submit their homework, I shouldn't just let it go. I have to do something. It is my job to be a teacher, so I have to do my job. (Interview 2).

At the end of the second semester, she realised that she had not phoned her mother to discuss school problems anymore. It might be she had got through this challenging time. It was the start of her journey of resilience. At this point, her concept of a good teacher had changed drastically. Najmee perceived good teachers as the ones who embraced teacher identity, were patient, and sacrificed for students.

Not only had Najmee's perception of herself as a teacher changed during the teaching practicum, but also her understanding of teaching had changed. The teaching practicum helped her understand the complexity and flexibility of teaching. When teaching was not always as planned, Najmee realised that she had to be open and ready for unexpected situations.

When asked how the teaching practicum helps develop teacher identity, Najmee replied immediately,

The teaching practicum helps a lot. Learning to be a teacher from real-life experiences has developed my teacher identity. If I learned only in class, how would I know that students are unique and have different needs? It's like I have a repertoire of unexpected situations and I know how to cope with them. (Interview 2).

In the last interview, Najmee affirmed that she would enter the teaching profession even though she had faced challenging situations during the teaching practicum. "Why?" I asked immediately. "It's just...I want to be a teacher," Najmee answered with a smile.

Narrative of Niti

Unlike Najmee, who entered having a strong determination to become a teacher, Niti decided to enter teacher education because of his mother's influence. When he was in Grade 12, he was reluctant to choose what to study for college. Initially, he knew that he loved English, so he wanted to study at College of Humanities and Social Sciences to pursue an English major. However, his mother wanted him to be a teacher, just like her, so he decided to study an English major at a College of Education. "It's like meeting half ways with my mother," Niti emphasised.

The reason for his mother's expectation to enter teaching was simple. Teaching is a popular profession in his hometown. Niti said lightheartedly, "In my hometown, every family, including mine, has at least one teacher!" It was no surprise to say that Niti was born in the world of teachers, was raised among teachers, and was expected to become a teacher. His vivid memory was always about school. He accompanied his mother to the school since a very young age. This socialisation strongly influenced his initial teacher identity. When asking what kind of teacher he wanted to be, Niti answered without hesitation that he saw himself as an experience sharer. This self-perception was influenced by his concept of teaching (as observed when he was a student) and his teacher education experience.

Growing up in a family of teachers and with four years of teacher education, Niti had developed a sense of working in a school environment relatively well compared to other student teachers. He described,

Unlike other professions that will meet with only administrators and colleagues, in the school setting, I will meet with three groups of people: administrators, colleagues, and students. The last group was the most important. I have to pay attention to them. (Interview 1).

With this good sense of working in the school context, Niti felt that he was ready to enter the teaching practicum. He reported,

I thought the teaching practicum would be demanding. I imagined that I would be teaching a lot of classes. I would have a lot of work. And I would have tears running down my cheeks. (Interview 1).

On the first day at school, Niti felt shocked because he was assigned to teach only eight hours a week, which was far fewer than he expected. He described,

I only teach eight hours a week! I was like seriously? My friends at other schools teach 12-20 hours. (Interview 1).

Even though Niti did not have demanding duties, he was still struggling to develop his new teacher identity. At this school, the principal demanded the mentor teacher to be in class with the student teacher at all times. Niti reported that his mentor teacher constantly interrupted the class while Niti was teaching. This was very frustrating for him. He said,

I felt like I was not myself. I mostly followed my mentor's suggestion because I didn't want to get into troubles. When I taught a class, I had to stop many times because my mentor had something to say. Gradually, I felt like I had lost my confidence. I am not sure I am a teacher. (Interview 1).

Clearly, Niti experienced self-doubts caused by others, which could be attributed to the school culture. This self-doubt affected strongly his teacher identity. At this stage, he did not feel that he was a teacher.

On New Year's Day, Niti's mentor teacher disappeared from the school and no one knew where she was. Niti started to regain his sense of self because he had more freedom. He could design classes on his own and with his style.

I started to teach with my style. I brought fun activities for my students to learn from. I thought if the students had fun with English, they would learn. And the feedback was great. My students really liked my activities, so I regained my self-confidence. (Interview 2).

After this transformative moment, Niti started to perceive himself as a teacher. During school activities, Niti was always committed to help his students. He also tutored the students to take a national English test or taught students to dance for special occasions.

When asked what helped him develop his teacher identity, Niti's answer was different from Najmee's. Niti reported that his university uniform had helped remind him that he was a teacher, while Najmee felt that the uniform reminded her that she was a student. Niti explained in the second interview,

If I don't have my uniform on, I think I can do whatever I want. If I put it on, it reminds me that I have to be a teacher. A teacher for my students. (Interview 2).

When asked whether the teaching practicum helped develop his teacher identity as compared to the teacher education, Niti reported that the teaching practicum definitely helped more because it is "real." He met students and he interacted with them daily. Without the teaching practicum, he would not have developed his teacher identity.

In the last interview, Niti was certain that he would enter the teaching profession even though he was not sure that he would enter the teacher education program in the first place. "Why" I asked immediately. "I feel that I am ready to be a teacher."

Discussion

As illustrated in the findings section, it is evident that teacher identity is a useful lens to understand the development of professional learning and experience during the teaching practicum. From the narrative inquiry perspective, I was able to elicit teacher identity development. This indicates that teacher identity is embedded in narratives (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Unlike other perspectives, teacher identity from the narrative inquiry perspective is richly descriptive and details, which could reflect the complicated nature of teacher identity. The findings in this study added to a current understanding of the literature in two main areas: (1) teacher identity development during the teaching practicum, and (2) overcoming the challenges of the teaching practicum.

Student teacher identity development during the teaching practicum

Similar to prior research in other contexts (Britzman, 2003; Danielewicz, 2001; Schultz & Ravitch, 2013; Trent, 2010a, 2010b), this study pointed out that learning to teach in Thailand is also the process of developing teacher identity. Teacher identity was developed earlier in prior biographies (Furlong, 2013). Both Najmee and Niti entered the teaching practicum with an initial teacher identity, developed from their biographies, which served as a starting point to reflect upon the kind of teacher they wanted to be (Beijard et al., 2004; Yazan, 2018). The type of teacher identity in the teaching practicum was mainly imagined and temporal; it reflects the future selves and it is not fixed. The process of developing teacher identity is also agentic in nature (Lasky, 2005; Yuan & Lee, 2016); student teachers will find ways to exercise their agency during the teaching practicum. Two main types of biographies influenced teacher identity: (1) schooling experience, and

(2) family. These two types were consistent with prior studies (Britzman, 2003; Lortie, 1975). Additionally, it was found that the teaching practicum contributed to teacher identity development in three main ways: (1) emotional responses to the teaching practicum shaped teacher identity, (2) the practice of teaching shaped teacher identity, and (3) symbolic entity as a reminder of being a teacher-shaped teacher identity.

Emotional responses to the teaching practicum shape identity

When student teachers are placed full-time as a real school teacher, their responses to the teaching practicum are inherently emotional. These emotional responses shaped teacher identity development. In Yazan's study (2018), it was found that student teachers experienced various emotion states during the teaching practicum and they learned to regulate these emotions, which was part of their teacher identity development. Similarly, Yuan and Lee (2016) revealed that student teachers' emotions were fundamentally linked to teacher identity. The findings in the current study are consistent with prior research, and further reveal that emotions are deeply rooted in the practice of teaching itself. Najmee and Niti experienced a variety of emotions after the practice of teaching. Both had a strong feeling after they went to teach their first classes, and the feelings were gradually reconciled as they were getting better. The emotion arisen after teaching was used to reflect about the kind of teacher they wanted to be and what they could do better to help their students (Beijard et al., 2004).

Practice shapes identity

Closely linked to emotional response is the practice of teaching. In this study, the student teachers constructed their teacher identity through constant engagement in everyday practices at school (Wenger, 1998). It was the actual practice itself that created a space for student teachers to learn to adapt, resist, and negotiate their own teacher identity (Kanno & Stuart, 2011). By simply have a chance to experiment with what works for their students, Najmee and Niti unconsciously reconstructed their teacher identity. The importance of practice has been acknowledged as a source of identity. Varghese et al. (2005) theorised the term "identity-in-practice," which refers to a type of identity enacted in practice. The two student teachers in this study learned about oneself after they practised teaching. They learned the type of teacher they could be, the complexity of teaching, and the dynamics of relationships within school culture.

Symbolic entity as a reminder of being a teacher shapes identity

This study points out a unique finding, which has not been revealed well in prior research, that the construction of student teacher identity was mediated by a symbolic entity which serves as a reminder of being a teacher. For Najmee, the symbolic entity was the title that students called her, "*Kru*," which translates into "*Teacher*" in English. For Niti, the symbolic entity was the university uniform. Both Najmee and Niti used these symbolic entities to remind themselves that they are teachers and they conformed their behaviors accordingly. The title and the uniform from which they made meaning were important to their teacher identity development. Without the symbolic entities, Najmee and Niti was

not be able to take on teacher identity. The two symbolic entities pointed out in this study were unique in Thailand context. The word “*Kru*” in Thailand carries a certain ideological status, which reflects the respectable quality of the profession. To be called *Kru* in Thailand is a privilege (Prabjandee, 2014).

Overcoming the challenges during the teaching practicum

While it was common to witness student teachers encountering challenges during the teaching practicum (Bloomfield, 2010; Timoštšuk & Ugaste, 2010; Morrison, 2013; Trent, 2010a; Yuan & Lee, 2017), the student teachers in this study were able to overcome the challenges through two types of support mechanism: (1) psychological support, and (2) technical support. For the psychological support, they received it from peers, mentors, and family members. For the technical support, only Najmee received it from her mentor. Her mentor teacher told the students to call Najmee “teacher,” not sister. With the label of a teacher, Najmee started to embody teacher identity and deal with the difficulties of the teaching practicum. It is important to emphasise that simply providing support does not guarantee that student teachers will overcome the challenges during the teaching practicum. It takes willingness to do better, effort, and agency from student teachers. Without these attributes, student teachers will not be able to overcome the challenges. Further, both Najmee and Niti were allowed to have a critical space to learn about themselves as a teacher and adjust their expectations. This critical space is very important in teaching practicum since it helps student teachers to reflect upon the type of teacher they want to be. Teacher educators could point out this space for student teachers to be engaged in while learning to teach.

Conclusion

This study offers an insight into the process of learning to teach during the teaching practicum from a teacher identity development perspective. It was revealed that teacher identity was shaped by emotion, practice, and symbolic entity. Learning to teach is challenging, but student teachers could overcome the challenges through support mechanisms. Teacher educators should pay careful attention to the teaching practicum since it contributed to the development of teacher identity. Future research may examine how to support student teachers during the teaching practicum or how to organise teacher education around practices so that student teachers will have a chance to engage in developing teacher identity.

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