

‘I’m in a professional twilight zone’: Exploring a migrant teacher’s professional identities construction in the UK

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This article reports the results of a qualitative study which explores the personal and professional identities construction journey of a migrant teacher of English as a second/additional language from Hong Kong, following her arrival in the United Kingdom. Grounded in a theory of language teacher identities and drawing upon Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of dialogue, the study uses narrative methods of inquiry to understand this migrant teacher’s identities construction experiences. Findings suggest that a series of discursive struggles construct the meaning of the identity ‘migrant teacher’ and that these struggles manifest in multiple professional identities construction dilemmas for the teacher. The results contest the deficit positioning of migrant teachers, demonstrating how discursive forces can be marshalled in ways that create new and possibly hitherto unconsidered opportunities for their professional identities construction. Implications for policy makers, school leaders, and other teachers wishing to support migrant teachers are discussed and suggestions for future research considered.

Introduction

Today “the teacher shortage crisis is a worldwide conundrum” (Williams et al., 2022, p.333). In the United Kingdom (UK), teacher recruitment and retention “has reached a crisis point” (Towers & Maguire, 2017). Throughout the past decade the number of qualified teachers in state-funded UK schools has failed to match increasing student numbers (Long & Danechi, 2022). In response, the government launched a teacher recruitment and retention strategy, including looking overseas for teachers (United Kingdom Department for Education, 2019).

In addition to addressing teacher shortages, migrant and refugee teachers – commonly identified as teachers who are working in a country other than that in which they were born and educated (Ennser-Kananen & Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2022) - can offer benefits to host countries. Possessing global experiences and plurilingual skills, they can heighten students’ intercultural awareness and serve as productive role models for minority students (Radhouane et al., 2022). These experiences and skills mean that migrant teachers have been considered bridge builders between schools and migrant students and their parents (Ennerberg & Economou, 2023; Georgi, 2016). Nevertheless, migrant and refugee teachers are frequently positioned in a deficit light (Cruikshank, 2015). Considerable effort has been expended on documenting the challenges they confront, such as being regarded as “foreign” and “novice teachers”, the devaluing of their previous qualifications and teaching experience, differing expectations and values, and limited professional development opportunities (Bense, 2015; 2016; Ennser-Kananen & Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2022; Marom, 2019; Ulla, 2018). As for Chinese migrant teachers employed in Western teaching contexts, many of the challenges they encounter are commonly ascribed to tensions between the home country’s educational culture – based on Confucian-heritage values of

memorisation, repetition, and reproduction (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996) - and the pedagogical environment they encounter in the host country (Zhang & Li, 2010).

Research findings paint a varied picture of the experiences of migrant teachers in the UK. Miller's (2018; 2019) study of six teachers from Jamaica found that participants believed the benefits of teaching in the UK included acquiring additional qualifications and accessing professional development opportunities. However, while these teachers are surviving it is doubtful, Miller (2018) argued, that they are flourishing. Limited promotional opportunities, racially discriminatory requirements for re-training, and the assignment of mundane tasks means that they experience "occupational confinement" (Miller, 2019, p.65).

Some studies use the lens of teacher identity to understand the experiences of migrant teachers. Liu and Li (2023) explored the experiences of two migrant Chinese language teachers working in Western educational settings and discovered that their teacher identities were overshadowed by their vulnerable identities as English language learners. In Australia, Yip (2023) documented the ways in which migrant teachers adjust their professional identities to fit within their new educational environment (see also Yip et al., 2022). In Sweden, migrant teachers add to their teacher identities by adopting those elements of the Swedish teaching role they found valuable. They also experienced identity subtraction as they questioned whether they can secure full time employment as teachers (Ennerberg & Economou, 2021; 2023).

The period immediately before and after arrival in the host country is likely to be one of considerable identity negotiation for many migrant teachers (Bengtsson & Mickwitz, 2022; Cruickshank, 2022; Ennerberg & Economou, 2023). Moreover, these negotiations can occur within unequal power relationships that place most of the requirements for adjustment upon migrants (Georgi, 2016; Rajendran et al., 2017). However, our understanding of migrant teachers' experiences of transitioning between home and host country, and how these experiences shape their personal and professional identities construction, is limited because their stories are under-researched (Ennser-Kananen & Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2022). As Yip (2023) pointed out, to enhance our understanding of the transitional experiences of migrant and refugee teachers more research with teachers in specific regions and educational settings is needed. This paper contributes to this body of knowledge by examining the experiences of a migrant English language teacher from one specific educational setting - Hong Kong - immediately before, and soon after, her arrival in another: the UK. Prior to that, the following section presents the conceptual framework used in this study.

Conceptual framework: Language teacher identities construction

Teacher identity "is the practice of becoming and being a teacher" (Reeves, 2018, p. 4). Becoming and being a teacher occurs as identities are constructed and reconstructed, as people claim, are assigned, contest, and reject identities. A person's identity work refers to this continual self-positioning and positioning by others. Language teacher identities

(LTIs) are complex, dynamic, and involve multiple factors. Barkhuizen and Mendieta (2020) have summarised what they believed to be the key facets of this complicated identities construction process (Figure 1).

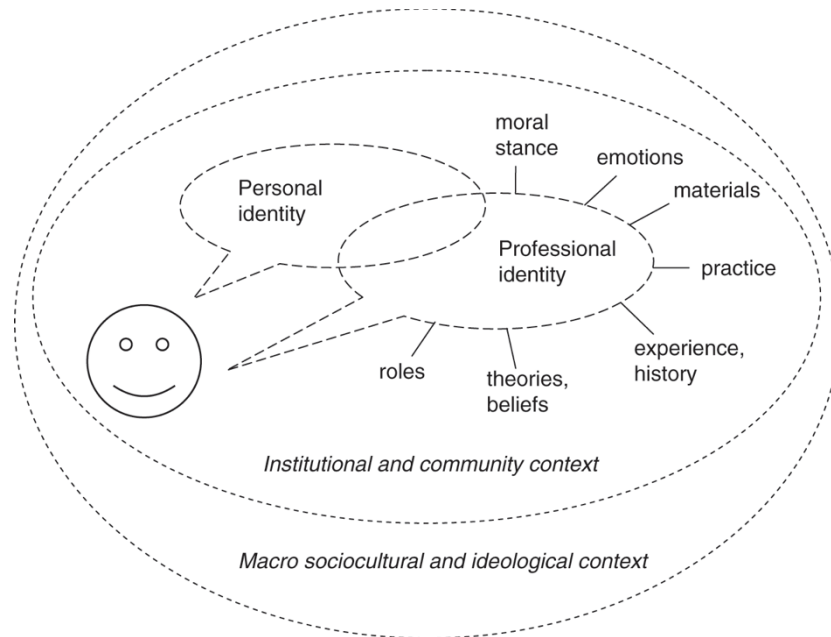


Figure 1: Facets of LTIs (Barkhuizen and Mendieta, 2020)

This depiction of LTIs underscores the ties that exist between a teacher's personal and *professional identities*, reflecting the fact that “who we are as teachers is also who we are outside of clearly distinguishable teacher roles and activities” (Barkhuizen & Mendieta, 2020, p. 5). A teachers' professional identities include the *roles* they take on and have assigned to them, their *beliefs and theories* about language teaching and learning, and their *moral stance*; that is, their values, visions, and the ethical judgements they make. LTIs are enacted through engagement in *practices and activities* of teaching, in the classroom as well as in a teachers' prior history and experiences of becoming a teacher. A person's *emotions*, feelings, and thinking about these practices and experiences are also crucial components of who teachers are. The different ways in which teachers engage with *material settings*, objects, and spaces contributes to the construction of LTIs. LTIs are also constructed partly *in community and institutional settings*, as teachers interact with other teachers, learners, administrators, parents, and the wider community. Finally, understanding LTIs identity work requires recognition of the *societal discourses and ideologies* that exist in the socio-political contexts in which LTIs construction and reconstruction occurs.

To enhance our understanding of the ideological nature of LTIs, this paper draws upon Mikhail Bakhtin's (1981) insights into language and power. This is especially relevant in the case of migrant teachers who, as noted above, can encounter unequal relations of power that afford them deficit identities. For Bakhtin (1981) then, language is socially

situated, produced in time and space, and involving a multiplicity of voices. Being social, language is “ideologically saturated”: meaning-making emerges from the interplay of different, and frequently opposing, perspectives or discourses. However, some discourses – Bakhtin (1981) referred to them as centripetal – are privileged while others, known as centrifugal discourses, are marginalised or silenced. Power relations, then, play out as a struggle between dominant centripetal discourses – seen as normative, natural, and often taken for granted – and marginalised centrifugal discourses that are considered less legitimate and non-normative. Centripetal discourses, because they are culturally centred and legitimated, carry more discursive power than centrifugal discourses in the construction of meaning. It is within the struggle between these different discourses that existing meanings are reproduced or new meanings created. Bakhtin (1981), however, warned of situations in which centripetal forces become so powerful that people who embrace the discourse are unresponsive to other perspectives, an outcome he labelled monologue. In contrast, dialogue which is transformative dissolves old meanings, replacing them with new understandings.

Using the theoretical framework described in this section, the collection and analysis of data was guided by the following question:

How does a teacher of English as a second/additional language from Hong Kong construct her LTIs as a recently arrived migrant teacher in the UK?

Methods

Participant

The participant in this research is Betty (a pseudonym), an ethnic female Chinese who was born in Hong Kong. She identifies Cantonese as her first language and self-reports being fluent in both English and Putonghua. At the time of data collection, she was employed as an administrative officer in a secondary school in a small regional town in the north of England. Prior to her family's migration to the UK in early 2021, she had been employed for approximately 20 years as a teacher of English as a second language in several different Hong Kong secondary schools. Betty is a qualified English language teacher, holding a bachelor degree in English Studies and a Postgraduate Diploma in Education from higher education institutions in Hong Kong. Before relocating to the UK, Betty had never lived or studied outside of Hong Kong for any significant length of time. She gave her reasons for emigration as concerned principally with the educational opportunities she believes the UK can offer her children.

Betty was invited to take part in this study based on convenience and intensity sampling (Patton, 2015). This English language teacher was known to me prior to the commencement of the study in my capacity as a teacher educator in Hong Kong. Her participation was therefore based partly on convenience. Intensity sampling also played a role in this teacher's inclusion in the study. Patton (2015) pointed out that research participants can be selected because they represent information rich cases that “manifest the phenomenon of interest intensively” (p. 279). Betty's recent experience of migrating

and seeking employment in the education sector of a foreign country, together with the teaching skills and experience she acquired over an extended period in Hong Kong, means that she is an example of Patton's (2015) intensity sampling.

Finally, collecting data from a single participant is consistent with narrative methods, which have been used to explore teachers' beliefs and experiences (Barkhuizen et al, 2014), including those of migrant teachers (Ennser-Kananen & Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2022). As generalisation to a population is not the aim of narrative analysis (Josselson & Hammack 2021), including a single participant in a study "enables a comprehensive, in-depth exploration of the experiences of that participant in relation to the phenomenon under investigation" (Barkhuizen, 2022, p. 14).

Data collection and analysis

To ensure adequate engagement in data collection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), Betty was invited to participate in three semi-structured interviews held at different times over an entire year. The interviews were conducted in English with duration ranging between approximately 65 and 85 minutes. The initial interview took place two weeks before Betty's departure to the UK and was conducted in face-to-face mode. The second interview, conducted online, occurred six months after Betty had relocated to the UK. When Betty had been living in the UK for a period of 12 months, I arranged to interview her, again online, for the third time. The purpose of collecting data over an entire year was to get as close as possible to Betty's understanding of her experiences as a migrant teacher and to address calls for more longitudinal perspectives on teacher identity construction (Hong, Francis, & Schutz, 2018). A narrative approach to the interview was chosen because stories can reveal the nature of relations between the individual and the social by documenting transformative experiences, such as migration, for example (Maynes et al., 2008). Guided by the research question mentioned above, Betty was therefore asked to describe experiences of her identities construction work as a migrant language teacher by detailing episodes that she considers enabled or constrained her identities work, as well as how, if at all, she was able to overcome constraints.

Data analysis focused on both content and context (Barkhuizen, 2016). Content analysis addressed three interrelated dimensions. The first concerned 'who': who are the characters in the story, including their relationships and their positioning relative to each other. Analysis of content also considered the issue of 'where': what places are involved in the story. Finally, the issue of 'when' drew attention to the time frames involved in the story; past, present, and future. Turning to context, analysis moved beyond the immediate context of the story by considering three interconnected levels of story. The first level, '*story*', focused on the personal; the inner thoughts and emotions of Betty and her interaction with others in their immediate settings. The second level, '*Story*', explored her interaction with institutional members beyond such immediate contexts, such as school teachers and administrators, as well as with institutional policies and practices. Finally, at the '*STORY*' level, data analysis considered the ways in which Betty's stories of identity work invoked more distant systems of meaning embedded within socio-political contexts and that manifest as wider cultural and professional discourses.

Results

This section presents four short stories from the data set. Plummer (2001) pointed out that in reporting narrative research, stories can be “selected on the basis of providing detailed information on key critical experiences” (p. 133). Therefore, the stories presented below describe critical experiences which provided insight into how an English language teacher from Hong Kong constructed and reconstructed her migrant teacher identities in the UK.

Short story one: What about my career?

The first short story, *‘What about my career?’*, is extracted from my interview with Betty shortly before her departure to the UK. It documents an episode of interaction in a restaurant with fellow teachers in Hong Kong in the weeks leading up to her permanent departure for the UK. It is illustrative of the doubt, both on the part of Betty and fellow teachers, about the feasibility of her ongoing LTIs construction in the UK. Yet it also provided a glimpse into the determination that Betty would later reveal to craft new and innovative professional identities as a migrant teacher.

1. Some teacher colleagues
2. that I knew for years
3. just invited me to a goodbye dinner
4. last week
5. so we started to discuss my future
6. and I said
7. I’m going to UK because of the family reasons
8. my children’s education mainly
9. and one of them asked
10. “but do you think about yourself
11. your own career?
12. I think it’s difficult to get a post
13. in a local school in the UK
14. they want local people
15. your qualifications are all here (in Hong Kong)
16. so you’ll have to get the UK QTS (qualified teacher status)”
17. another said
18. “even if you get QTS
19. I think your accent
20. might be an issue
21. it’s very local Hong Kong
22. they want something more British, I suppose”
23. and another point they said
24. was about the teaching style
25. it’s so different there (UK) compared to Hong Kong
26. Hong Kong teaching is often about exam preparation
27. In the UK it’s more student-centered

28. and interactive in the classroom
29. they said I won't be able to adapt to it easily
30. because in Hong Kong
31. I always thought a good teacher
32. is a traditional teacher
33. teacher-led and exam focused
34. so their advice was you won't fit in (as a teacher)
35. so just have an easy life
36. just be a stay-at-home-mum
37. it will give you more time
38. for family matters they told me
39. or they told me maybe do some part time work
40. like in an office or factory or supermarket
41. just to pay the bills
42. but I said as a teacher of more than 20 years
43. that's depressing
44. yes, I heard it's tough (in the UK)
45. I heard stories
46. I'm not the only teacher heading for the exit here
47. so I know I also have to face the challenges they do
48. but on the other hand
49. I've got a lot of experience to offer
50. as a teacher
51. not as a cashier or a factory worker
52. it's a conflict for me
53. most important is that I've been a teacher for about 20 years,
54. teaching is what I do,
55. it's what I know,
56. I've been doing it year after year",
57. and I know here (Hong Kong)
58. I could continue to be a successful language teacher
59. in Hong Kong being a successful teacher
60. was never in doubt for me
61. but if I go (to the UK)
62. it's good for the family
63. but it might not be so good
64. for my career
65. it might be the end of me as a teacher
66. but I want to continue to use my teaching skills
67. to be a teacher, somehow,
68. wherever I am
69. so I was left thinking at that time
70. where am I meant to fit in?
71. am I really doing the right thing going to the UK?

'What about my career?' describes an instance of situated interaction (story) in which the protagonists (who) are Betty and several teacher colleagues, who are acting as her informal career advisors. The advice they offer moves this tale to the level of *Story* as it introduces to the narrative, and to Betty's LTI's work, others who are not present in this episode of situated interaction. Nevertheless, we learn that these unidentified others will play a significant role in the emigrating teacher's personal and professional LTI's construction in the UK. Indeed, the power of these others to enable or constrain this identities work is significant. It is argued, for instance, that school leaders are most likely to deny her the opportunity to continue her LTI's work as a migrant language teacher (lines 12-14). On the other hand, those who are likely to provide her with career opportunities lie beyond the field of education: the imagined future identities made available to her include supermarket and factory worker (39-40), for example. These encounters with multiple others - both known and present at the dinner and those unknown and more distant - leave Betty with perceptions of limited agency in terms of her future imagined LTI's construction. Accentuating these possible challenges to her professional agency is the advice she receives to abandon her LTI's work and to take on the identity of "stay-at-home-mum" (36). Nevertheless, Betty is adamant: using the authority of experience (56) she rejects this advice (51). It is, rather, the identity 'teacher' that she claims for herself (53-55), an identity she desires to continue to construct as a migrant teacher (66-68).

'What about my career?' also traverses a range of locations (where) and times (when) that inform Betty's LTI's construction as a migrant teacher. At the most intimate level (story), Betty's LTI's work is the subject of a discussion set in a restaurant and taking place within a limited time frame. This situated interaction, however, is framed by references to this teacher's LTI's work in broader settings that include, locally, Hong Kong (*Story*), as well as the more distant UK (*STORY*). Temporally, this story speculates on Betty's LTI's work in the immediate future (*Story*) by invoking her very long history as an ELT (*STORY*) (42). As it spans these multiple space-time dimensions, we see a series of tensions in her LTI's work. Hong Kong as the setting for past LTI's work is cast in terms of success; she declares herself to be a "successful" language teacher (59). Looking to the future, this LTI's work offers both certainty and continuity. Betty is convinced that if she had chosen to remain in Hong Kong, she would continue to enjoy this personal and professional LTI's achievement (58). In contrast, her future imagined identities work in the UK is shrouded in uncertainty, associated with change, and the risk of failure, leaving her feeling confused, an emotional response evident in the two rhetorical questions which close this story (70-71).

Short story two: Just stick to Chinatown

In 'Just stick to Chinatown', Betty recounts an episode of situated interaction she experienced approximately three months after her arrival in the UK. Exploring possibilities for the continued construction of her LTI's following migration, she sought out advice from an employment agent, an encounter that left her doubting the feasibility of this goal. The story explores experiences that develop further the theme, explored in short story one, of uncertainty over the type of LTI's construction Betty can achieve as a migrant teacher.

1. After getting to the UK
2. I approached an employment agent
3. so I presented my CV
4. with all my Hong Kong qualifications and experience
5. as a fully qualified teacher
6. and as we started talking
7. he said to me
8. it's difficult to get a full-time teaching job
9. in the schools locally
10. they want someone who know the local curriculum
11. for languages
12. they really want native Putonghua speakers
13. but he said you're not a native speaker
14. because I speak Cantonese as my mother tongue
15. which made me sad
16. it seems like linguistic skills are not valued
17. like there is linguistic discrimination
18. in this country
19. even though I can speak Putonghua
20. but he told me
21. to get work teaching full time
22. in a local school
23. I might consider
24. doing a course
25. being a student again
26. at a local university
27. I said "why?"
28. he said "you better get your qualified teacher status (QTS),
29. sooner rather than later
30. to make you locally qualified
31. to make your teaching skills
32. more aligned with UK expectations and practices"
33. I told him that's a real burden
34. financially, time-wise and needs a lot of effort
35. to get accredited here (UK)
36. even though I can teacher here for a few years
37. without QTS accreditation
38. it's just delaying the inevitable
39. so I want to make a decision now
40. about teaching or not in the UK
41. about accreditation or not
42. and another suggestion he mentioned
43. while I'm thinking about
44. going for QTS or not
45. was becoming a part time tutor
46. helping migrants

47. with some basic English skills
48. survival English you can call it
49. so basically
50. at that moment
51. he told me "just stick to Chinatown teaching
52. become a Chinatown language teacher
53. it's an easy life
54. no more need to study"
55. but this is completely not
56. what my qualifications and classroom experience
57. in Hong Kong are all about.

'*Just stick to Chinatown*' begins at the level of 'story', with Betty describing a face-to-face conversation between herself and an unnamed agent (who) regarding her immediate prospects for employment. Relations of power mean that it is the agent who can deny and assign her professional identities (lines 42-52). The consequences of these relations do not, however, seem promising in terms of achieving her professional identities goals. For instance, the agent assumes the authority to stifle her desire to continue constructing her professional identity as a full-time teacher when he confines her to the identity of "part-time tutor".

Spatial aspects (where) also play a part in shaping Betty's identities construction possibilities. References to schools, for instance, shifts the focus of the story beyond the immediate situated interaction between Betty and the agent to the 'Story' level. Significantly for her LTIs construction, her apparent exclusion from educational locales in which her LTIs have been established and sustained (8-9) - namely schools - brings to the forefront of this tale an even more distant spatial aspect to her identities work, one that contrasts Hong Kong with the UK (*STORY*). As seen in '*What about my career?*', the former is a place of considerable LTIs success for this teacher (4-5). The current story has the effect of confirming what was previously suspected: that the latter is a very different space for her LTIs construction, one comprised of barriers and limitations. Spatial aspects of her LTIs construction in the UK are further foregrounded when this narrative later moves back to the 'Story' level. Here, Betty must confront the proposition that her professional identities construction could be associated with a single geographical location - Chinatown - where she would subsequently be identified as "a Chinatown language teacher" (52).

Nevertheless, both spatially and temporally, possibilities that would allow Betty to resume her LTIs construction are explored. Spatially, the possibility of her returning to university and taking on the identity of 'student' is proposed as one means of achieving her professional identities goals (23-26). Doing so, however, means investing additional resources in acquiring QTS (33-35).

Short story three: Identities hidden

Although, as we witnessed in Short Story two, Betty is adamant about attaining the identity 'school teacher', approximately eight months after her arrival she accepted a clerical position in a school near her home. In the final interview, she explained that upon taking up this position she considered it a short-term step while she contemplates her professional identities future as a migrant teacher. Her failure to obtain the type of teaching posts she desires places her "in a professional twilight zone", as she describes it. Short stories three and four document her identities construction struggles and successes within this zone.

1. One day I realised
2. I'm in a professional twilight zone
3. with my career
4. and while I'm thinking about it,
5. I mean to find a job as a teacher
6. or not,
7. to get UK qualified as a teacher
8. or not,
9. so then I decided to take a job
10. a friend told me about
11. a part time job
12. but it's funny
13. Or ironic, I guess
14. Because I actually got back into a school again
15. but it's only basic
16. routine administrative and clerical work
17. nothing exciting or fulfilling
18. for me personally
19. anyway I made a difficult decision
20. or some might say strange decision
21. not to reveal to others
22. at the school
23. my past life
24. my qualifications or
25. my work as a teacher in Hong Kong
26. I was really struggling
27. about whether I should or should not tell them
28. because I wasn't ashamed of telling anyone in Hong Kong
29. that I'm a school teacher
30. I always took pride in it
31. but after I started work
32. one time
33. I was asked by another (administration) staff
34. "what did you do in Hong Kong?"
35. At that moment I had to react

36. I said
37. "I'm housewife from Hong Kong"
38. I said that
39. because if they know my background
40. my experience
41. The other (administrative) staff might not accept me
42. so on the one hand
43. my past professional life
44. as a teacher
45. is hidden
46. as though it didn't exist
47. I just keep this part of me to myself
48. but on the other hand
49. I really want the admin people
50. to think I'm on the same level as them
51. because I didn't want them thinking
52. why is she so qualified
53. as a teacher
54. and now
55. she's in a school
56. but not teaching
57. just being a clerk
58. and the teachers wouldn't accept me either
59. not as a teacher
60. because now I'm just a clerk
61. but I have to admit
62. the whole experience
63. leaves me feeling embarrassed.

'*Identities hidden*' is a personal (who) statement (story) which provides an update on Betty's current professional identities construction. Although implicit reference is made to her professional identity as a teacher (lines 5-7), the main identities work performed in this story is to diminish her contemporary professional identities construction. Linguistically, she achieves this through the choice of terms such as "basic", "routine", and "nothing exciting or fulfilling" (15-17). Later in the story, when other characters enter in the form of her administrative colleagues, we learn that the purpose of this identity concealment is to be positioned by these others as "on the same level as them" (50).

The identities work taking place highlights tensions between identities disclosure and this teacher's assumed right to identities privacy. These tensions are exemplified spatially and temporally in contradictions between Betty's former (when) LTIs in Hong Kong (where) and her contemporary identities work in the UK. At the *STORY* level, the experiences of this language teacher reflect the interplay of a societal discourse that values openness and disclosure (28-30) and one that foregrounds privacy (33-37). For instance, Betty admits struggling between whether she should or should not reveal her qualifications and experience as a teacher (26-27).

Using the expression “one the one hand... but on the other hand...” (42-48) to underline this discursive tension, Betty’s identities work is also cast within a discursive interplay between individualism and community membership within the school (*Story*). Individually, she pays a price for her perceived right to identity privacy: with her teacher identity now “hidden” (45), she is left feeling embarrassed. Yet this privacy also means that she is more likely to be positioned as a legitimate participant in a new professional community of school administrators, an outcome that she believes would be less likely if her teacher identities were to be widely known (39-41). In doing so, she can be seen as rightfully claiming, and being assigned, identities that are associated with such a community. Nevertheless, there is evidence that these identities tensions are not entirely resolved when she declares that “the whole experience leaves me feeling embarrassed” (62-62).

Short story four: Leveraging my linguistic skills

The final short story tells of an incident that took place soon after Betty had taken up the position of school administrator and which led to unexpected opportunities for professional identities construction.

1. One day
2. I was at school
3. and I was told some parents
4. of a student from China
5. were having trouble understanding the teacher
6. in a teacher-parent meeting
7. I thought I could help
8. and I just jumped up suddenly
9. and said “I might be able to help”
10. and I did something totally new and out-of-the box for me
11. I stepped up and did a translation
12. it was totally unexpected and unplanned
13. because I’m usually too shy to do such things
14. and I wasn’t sure
15. if I’d get a good outcome or not
16. whether the teachers and parents would accept me
17. as an admin person
18. getting involved like that
19. I mean going beyond clerical duties (laughing)
20. but it gave me some satisfaction
21. to use my language skills
22. in a way the others found helpful
23. the teacher said to me later,
24. “thanks for doing that (translation)
25. you really saved me a lot of anguish”
26. and surprisingly
27. it was also a satisfying experience for me
28. because later

29. an admin staff
30. who knew what I did said
31. "I wish I can speak different languages
32. it's a great skill"
33. and the vice-principal told me
34. I'm the unofficial Chinese translator
35. for the school
36. I hadn't felt that satisfied at work
37. since leaving Hong Kong
38. in fact, it's like teaching in a way
39. it's like teaching the parents and the teacher
40. teaching some language knowledge to them
41. English and Chinese teaching together
42. and there are several students from China
43. at the school
44. so as I feel some accomplishment
45. but if I'd have told everyone from the start
46. that I'm a teacher
47. they might still look down on me
48. but as an admin person doing that translation
49. they look up to me
50. for being an asset to them
51. and so I'll definitely keep doing this (translation)
52. I know I have to accept the future as uncertain
53. looking ahead
54. I can't know what will happen in the future
55. to me as a teacher
56. well I might even go back to college
57. get a degree in translation (laughs)
58. and I can work anytime anywhere in the UK.

This short story recalls an episode of situated interaction (story) between Betty, a student, his parents, and one of the school's teachers (who). Although the interaction itself is limited to a very short time frame (when) and a specific location (where), Betty's agentive act of stepping forward to facilitate communication between the participants (lines 7-11) shapes her identities work across larger units of space and time. For the first time since arriving in the UK, we witness Betty exercise control over how she positions herself professionally, as well as how she is positioned by others. By embracing change and novelty in her identities work (10-12), she can self-position herself (story) as a provider of linguistic benefits to others (21-25).

This identities work occurring in this short story is significant at multiple levels. First, she describes the experiences reported in this narrative as personally (story) satisfying (26). Although initially uncertain of the outcome (14-19), she is ultimately acknowledged by different school-based communities (*Story*), which she aspires to join, as possessing valuable linguistic skills (28-35): school leaders position her, positively, as an "unofficial

Chinese translator” (34) while school administrative staff express admiration for her linguistic competence (31-33). Salient here is her belief that the success she now enjoys is due in part to her decision not to reveal her teacher identity to others within the school (44-49).

At the *STORY* level, she favourably associates the success she enjoys in the here-and-now as an “unofficial Chinese translator” with her distant LTIs construction achievements in Hong Kong (36-37). This is, then, contemporary identity construction work that Betty unquestionably embraces, an outcome underscored by the emotional rewards she gains from her translator identity: she adds feelings of accomplishment (44) to the satisfaction mentioned above. Although Betty acknowledges the uncertainty surrounding her future identities construction (53-55), this story concludes – on a positive identities construction note – by returning to the *STORY* level with speculation about the transportability of the identity ‘translator’ throughout the UK (58).

Discussion

The research question guiding the collection and analysis of data in this study asks: How does a teacher of English as a second/additional language from Hong Kong construct her LTIs as a recently arrived migrant teacher in the UK?

Betty’s experiences confirm earlier findings discussed above concerning the possible assignment of deficit identities to migrant teachers (Bense, 2016; Cruickshank, 2015; Ennsner-Kananen & Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2022; Marom, 2019). At the same time, the stories reported in the previous section deepen our understanding of the challenges that those who take on the identity of migrant teacher could confront. Drawing on the work of Bakhtin (1981), these stories reveal that Betty’s migrant teacher identities construction is shaped by four sets of discursive forces: certainty - uncertainty; stability - change; openness - closedness; integration - separation. This section discusses these forces and explores how they impact the different facets of this teacher’s LTIs - summarised in Figure 1 – and thus how they construct the meaning of the identity ‘migrant teacher’.

Certainty - Uncertainty

Acknowledging the spatial and temporal nature of LTIs, the results of this study highlight the centripetal status accorded to certainty in Betty’s construction of her LTIs over many years within the Hong Kong educational system. For example, prior to her departure from Hong Kong, Betty’s confidentiality positions herself as, in her own words, a “successful teacher for many years...that was never in doubt for me”. The identity ‘migrant teacher’, however, disrupts this identity certainty. ‘What about my career?’ speaks to the uncertainty she experiences over the interaction of the personal and professional in her LTIs construction as she departs Hong Kong. Will construction of the personal identities she mentions – as a family member, for example – be foregrounded at the expense of her professional LTIs construction? How, if at all, is she able to exercise agency in this negotiation between her personal and professional identities within the UK?

These questions bring several facets of LTIs noted in Figure 1 to the forefront of this migrant teacher's identities work. The uncertainty these questions imply force this teacher to reflect and reassess her beliefs about teaching, the theories of teaching she endorses, and the significance of her considerable history of engagement in the practices and activities of teaching. For example, even if Betty can continue her professional LTIs construction in her adopted country, will she be able to draw upon the beliefs and theories about teaching which have served her so well in Hong Kong? What contribution will her long history of engagement in the practices and activities of teaching in Hong Kong make to her LTIs construction work in the UK? Will her values, such as what constitutes good teaching, continue to have relevance in the UK? Finally, the theoretical framework used in this study recognises emotions as crucial to LTIs construction. As a migrant teacher, the foregrounding of uncertainty in her identities work leaves Betty perplexed. The possibility that this work will be terminated is, for her, a depressing scenario.

Stability - Change

Another discursive struggle shaping this migrant teacher's LTIs construction takes place between forces for stability and change. Stability is evident in the teacher's desire to replicate in the UK facets of her teacher identity that were privileged over several decades in Hong Kong. For instance, in 'What about my career?' the centripetal status of stability is salient in her adamant declaration that "I've been a teacher for almost 20 years, teaching is what I do, it's what I know, I've been doing it year after year", as well as the stated desire to "continue to use my teaching skills to be a teacher, somehow, wherever I am". These assertions foreground this teacher's wish to reproduce the history and practices of her LTIs construction in Hong Kong by applying similar teaching knowledge and skills within the host country.

Moving across space and time, when Betty assumes the identity 'migrant teacher' there occurs a juxtaposing of the hitherto centripetal status of stability in her LTIs work with forces for change. Betty's long, stable history of LTIs construction is challenged by questions about what novel beliefs, practices, and activities of teaching will shape the ongoing construction of her LTIs in the UK? Although such questions were unanswerable at the time the situated interaction between Betty and her colleagues took place, as documented in 'What about my career?', the latter were insistent that such changes will overwhelm the efforts of this migrant teacher to continue to construct her LTIs. Later, as Betty takes on the identity 'migrant teacher', these tensions between stability and change are at the forefront of her LTIs work. She is forced to consider acquiring new and different knowledge and skills - through completing additional teacher education programs - that are better aligned with the theories, beliefs, and practices of the UK education system.

Openness - Closedness

The theoretical framework used in this study suggests that LTIs reference in part the inner self; teachers seek to understand who they are and who they aspire or despair to become as individual teachers. At the same time, LTIs are socially embedded; they are constructed, negotiated, and reconstructed with others. The interplay of the inner self and the social reveals itself in two discursive struggles experienced by this migrant teacher. One is a

tension between openness and closedness, which describes what Betty does, and does not, disclose to different participants in her LTIs construction in Hong Kong and in the UK. In Hong Kong, openness about her LTIs has long been a centripetal force in Betty's LTIs construction. Thus, in 'Identities hidden', we witness a strident declaration that, when in Hong Kong, she was never reticent about revealing her teacher identity. Indeed, at that time and place, she took pride in identifying herself, and being identified by others, as a teacher.

As a migrant teacher, the privileging of openness in this teacher's LTIs construction work is contested. Betty's decision to conceal her teacher identities from others in a UK school introduces closedness into this identities work. While the co-existence of multiple teacher selves - including a private and a public self - is possible, for this migrant teacher the relationship between these two selves is one of tension. Returning to the facets of LTIs summarised in Figure 1, this tension is prominent in terms of history: Betty's history of teacher identity construction in Hong Kong now appears to exist entirely within the realm of the private self. As she put it in 'Identities hidden', "I just keep this part of me to myself". As a migrant teacher, she believes there is no obligation to make public her history of LTIs construction. Nevertheless, identities concealment comes at an emotional cost as she is embarrassed by this decision.

Inclusion – Exclusion

As Figure 1 documents, institutions and communities are contexts in which LTIs are constructed and reconstructed. Focusing on this aspect of Betty's experience as a migrant teacher brings to light another identities tension: between the forces of inclusion and exclusion. The struggle between inclusion and exclusion is stark in 'Identities hidden', where this teacher encounters tension between her participation in different – and possibly mutually exclusive - professional communities within the school. For her, this is a zero-sum game: her identification with one community, such as that of school teachers, might be met at the cost of exclusion from another, such as school administrators.

To summarise, the results of the study contribute to our understanding of a migrant teacher's identity construction experiences by confirming the findings of some earlier research. Betty's short stories underscore the personal and professional identity uncertainty and vulnerability migrant teachers confront as described by previous studies (Cruikshank, 2022; Roy & Lavery, 2017; Yip, 2023; Yip et al., 2022). However, the results move beyond identifying the challenges facing migrant teachers. They extend understanding of the LTIs construction experiences of these teachers by bringing to light the specific, situated discursive forces they may encounter. Specifically, the spatial-temporal perspective taken in this paper uncovers discursive shifts in Betty's LTIs work when she takes on the identity migrant teacher. The centripetal status of the discursive forces of certainty, stability, openness, and inclusion which underpinned her previous LTIs work in Hong Kong is contested in the UK. The supplanting of these forces by others which were marginalised or silenced throughout her LTIs work in Hong Kong - uncertainty, change, closedness, and exclusion – imposes emotional costs on Betty: in different spaces and times she reports feeling conflicted, confused, and embarrassed. Also laid bare by this study are the resulting identity dilemmas – between revealing and

concealing, between achieving stability and the need to change as a teacher, and between being included or excluded from professional communities - that such shifts in the forces for identities construction subsequently impose upon Betty.

Betty's experiences of LTIs construction challenge the deficit positioning of some migrant teachers. She agentively marshals previously marginalised discursive forces to open new, and hitherto unconsidered, professional opportunities. As seen in *'Leveraging my linguistic skills'*, this migrant teacher uses the concealment of her prior teacher identities, and acceptance of possible exclusion from a professional community of teachers, to explore change in her professional identities work within the setting of a single school. She accepts uncertainty as one part of her migrant teacher identities work. This makes possible novel identity construction opportunities within the school. Through accepting and deploying uncertainty, change, closedness, and exclusion in her professional identities construction work, Betty achieved a certain degree of satisfaction.

Although Betty's migrant teacher identities construction involves multiple discursive struggles, this should not be taken to imply that she should, or could, seek their resolution. Finalising construction of the meaning of 'migrant teacher' by silencing some voices risks becoming monologue, meaning that one discourse becomes so dominant that all other voices are muted and meanings enter a state of "inertia" or "calcification" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 344). It is this observation that motivates the following suggestions for supporting the identities work of migrant teachers as they transition into the host country.

Promoting migrant teacher identities construction

Supporting migrant and refugee teachers' identities construction as they journey into the sociocultural and education landscapes of host countries can represent one part of a response to international concerns over teacher recruitment and retention (Trent, 2019). This support should begin with communication. Bakhtin (1981) conceptualised dialogic communication in terms of struggle and tension, from which meanings can be potentially co-constructed. One practical step in realising this communicative potential is to conduct workshops for newly arrived migrant teachers and other interested stakeholders with the aim of exposing, as was done in this study, the presence of such tensions and exploring their implications for their individual identities construction. This communication can contest centripetal deficit views of migrant teachers by acknowledging alternative discursive forces that could be harnessed, as Betty does, to make room for alternative meanings of the identity 'migrant teacher' that move beyond deficit perspectives.

These workshops could be attended by migrant teachers with varying lengths and types of migratory experiences from different home countries. Other stakeholders - school-based teachers and school leaders - should also be invited to attend the workshops to share their narrative accounts, revealing their experiences of working with migrant teachers. The involvement of these stakeholders offers them opportunities to more fully and critically understand the discourses that shape their own views of migrant teachers, to appreciate the lived realities of these teachers and to recognise their need for support as they pursue their identities construction ambitions in host countries. This narrative sharing can lead to identification of multiple situated discursive forces, beyond those identified in this study,

that enable and constrain migrant teachers' identities construction. This identification is a first step towards resisting those forces that assign deficit identities to these teachers. Given the limitations of short-term programs for teacher professional development (Trent, 2011), a goal of these meetings would be to foster the organic establishment of long-term mentoring relationships between more experienced stakeholders and newly arrived migrant teachers. Such relationships are valuable in assisting these newcomers to develop a positive teacher identity and to initiate and sustain social networks (Ennerberg & Economou, 2023).

Conclusion

Clearly, Betty faces challenges in her current and future LTIs construction as a migrant teacher. Nevertheless, her accomplishments offer hope for her imagined future identities construction in the field of education within her adopted homeland. The sharing of experiences such as this could help other migrant teachers recognise and navigate the situated discursive tensions they confront, creating potentially empowering resonance.

This study has limitations that should be acknowledged. Although consistent with narrative methods of inquiry, the LTIs construction experiences of an individual migrant teacher were explored over a relatively short time period within a single educational context. Future studies should add to this data base by adopting a longitudinal approach. This would involve the researcher tracing over extended time periods the identities construction work of multiple migrant and/or refugee teachers from diverse geographic, socio-cultural, and linguistic backgrounds who migrated to different educational settings. Methodologically, the exclusive use of a semi-structured interview to collect retrospective data is also a limitation of the study because it fails to capture the dynamic nature of meaning making: the meanings of identities such as 'migrant teacher' emerge, are negotiated, accepted, contested, and possibly rejected partly during communication with others. Therefore, real time interactions of migrant and refugee teachers with other stakeholders should be collected through classroom observation, for example. Finally, there is no suggestion that the discursive forces identified in this study represent an exhaustive list. The research agenda suggested here would therefore be helpful in answering questions such as how do the discursive forces that shape the meanings of terms such as 'migrant' and 'refugee' teacher change, if at all, over time, that is, beyond the initial year of their arrival in the host country and whether additional and/or alternative discursive forces to those discussed above shape the experiences of migrant teachers from a diverse range of home countries.

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