



Research Report

Through Goodness in Learning to Teach: (Student) Teacher Identity Construction

During a Teaching Practicum in Thailand

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Abstract

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The process of learning to teach during the teaching practicum has been described as a difficult experience. Little is known how student teachers pass through this period. Using teacher identity as an analytic lens, the author investigated how two English-major student teachers in a one-year teaching practicum in Thailand constructed their teacher identity while finding ways to get through this struggling period. The data were obtained from interviews, shadowing observations, and artifacts. The findings suggest teacher educators to pay careful attention to different kinds of supports provided for student teachers during the teaching practicum since it is most critical and important time for student teachers to develop their teacher identity.

Key words: learning to teach, language teacher identity, student teachers, goodness, and narrative case study

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

“The story of learning to teach begins actually much earlier than the time one first decides to become a teacher” (Britzman, 2003, p. 26).

In the field of teacher education, teaching practicum has been described as a critical and challenging aspect for student teachers (Anh, 2013; Ferrier-Kerr, 2009; Gebhard, 2009; Trent, 2013). This is because the teaching practicum is an opportunity for student teachers to transfer theory, knowledge, and skills, learned in a teacher education program, into practice (Anh, 2013). The practicum is also a chance for student teachers to learn about themselves, while trying to become teachers (Brizman, 2003).

Since the teaching practicum is critical, it has been used as a research focus for at least five decades. During the 1960s – 1980s, previous studies investigated the teaching practicum by trying to identify the right skills or teaching behaviors for student teachers to master with an attempt to achieve effective teaching, leading to improved performance (Caires, Almeida, & Viera, 2012). In the 1980s, the field of teacher education shifted an interest to examining student teachers’ beliefs about teaching since it became impossible to identify a comprehensive list of skills. 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 a process of acquiring skills, rather it is a process of forming and negotiating teacher identity (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Caires et al., 2012).

Continuing with the recent focus on teaching practicum research, I have attempted to use teacher identity as an analytic lens to examine student teachers learning to teach

(Britzman, 2003; Danielewicz, 2001; Gee, 2001; Kanno & Stuart, 2011). 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 about the teacher identity development project (Schultz & Ravitch, 2013). As a result of framing learning to teach as identity development, the question arises: How do student teachers construct teacher identity during the teaching practicum?

Prior research on teacher identity construction during the teaching practicum has pointed out that student teachers often experienced professional identity tensions (Pillen, Beijaard, & Brok, 2013; Smagorinsky, Cook, Moore, Jackson, Fry, 2004). Pillen et. al. (2013) defined tensions as “internal struggles between the teacher as a person and the teacher as a professional regarding an undesirable situation” (p. 662). The identity development tensions included role change, support, and teaching concept (Pillen et. al, 2013). Additionally, student teachers held rigid views about teaching and themselves, leading to “antagonistic relation” with more experienced teachers (Trent, 2011, p. 529). They were typically engaged in a process of identity development, creating conflicts and challenges during the practicum (Trent, 2013).

It is important to note that most of prior research employed a *pathological lens*, looking at the world through the lens of failure (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). As a result of this lens, teacher identity development has been seen as struggle, challenging, and difficult. For example, Bloomfield (2010) investigated student teachers’ stories of “struggling for voice” during the teaching practicum (p. 221).

Trent (2013) investigated challenges that English-major student teachers encountered during the practicum teaching as they positioned themselves. Anh (2013) examined teacher identity development in the pair-placement teaching practicum as they were engaged in a complex, negotiated, power, and tension relationship.

Through this pathological lens, I argue that these studies magnified the world view of what is wrong, neglected the promise, and lump into the trap of unhealthy research, leading to blaming victims or inaction (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). The field of teacher education, including the Thai context, knows very little about how student teachers go through the process of struggling during their teaching practicum. To shift the perspective from this theoretical trap, I would like to employ a healthier research lens, called *goodness* (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983).

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) defined goodness as a dynamic and multidimensional construct that challenges traditional research. They argued that researchers who focus on goodness tend to absorb different realities than those who look for failures. Specifically, through the lens of goodness, I investigated student teachers, who pass through the process of struggling, by focusing on how they constructed their teacher identity during the teaching practicum. An understanding of teacher identity construction will be used to inform and inspire the design of the teaching practicum in order to support student teachers to become a member of the teacher community.

Research Questions

To shift away from the pathological theoretical lens, the following research questions were explored:

1. How do student teachers construct teacher identity during the teaching practicum?
2. How do student teachers overcome the difficulties of the teaching practicum?

Purposes of the Study

The purposes of this study were as follows:

1. To examine how student teachers construct and negotiate their teacher identity during the teaching practicum.
2. To investigate how student teachers overcome the difficulties of the teaching practicum.

Significance of the Study

The findings will add to the knowledge base for teacher educators in Thailand, revealing how student teachers construct teacher identity, how they pass through the struggling process of the teaching practicum, and how the teaching practicum impact the process of becoming a teacher. This understanding will influence the design of the teacher education curriculum to support student teachers during the teaching practicum. Additionally, the findings will contribute to a worldwide discussion in attempting to design appropriate a teaching practicum model.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

“People tell others who they are, but even more important, they tell themselves and then try to act as though they are who they say they are”
(Holland, Skinner, Lachicotte, & Cain, 1998, p. 3).

In this chapter, I will review significant concepts, previous studies, and the literature on teacher identity in order to provide the epistemological, theoretical, and methodological lenses for this study. This chapter consists of three sections as follows. In the first section, I will summarize the concept of teacher identity. The second section presents how teacher identity is related to instruction. The last section is specifically for (student) teacher identity construction.

Teacher Identity

Extensive review suggests that the term teacher identity has been used interchangeably to refer to both teachers and student teachers. While it is understandable that this term has been used to refer to student teachers because they are expected to be real teachers, it makes the teacher identity notion complicated to define (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop (2004) pointed out in their review that some studies did not even define the term teacher identity.

Teacher identity is socioculturally constructed, multifaceted, developmental, and negotiated (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Tsui, 2007; Varghese et al., 2005). Previous studies have conceptualized teacher identity from different perspectives, such as psychological, sociocultural, or dialogical stance. The term teacher identity has been

defined as agency, community, activity, emotion, narrative, and discourse (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Izadinia, 2013).

Teacher identity is not static; it is shaped and reshaped by multiple factors (Caires et al., 2012). Furlong (2013) theorized that student teachers are often engaged in the project of teacher identity development as they go through their teacher education programs. This is because student teachers did not enter the teacher education programs like an empty vessel to absorb knowledge and skills; rather they bring their life histories with them (Furlong, 2013). From this perspective, it is legitimate to investigate how student teachers constructed their teacher identity over time and to include student teachers' life histories while examining the process of learning to teach.

Teacher Identity and Instruction

Not only is the field of teacher education in general interested in teacher identity, but the landscape of language teacher education in particular has also focused on language teacher identity (e.g., Clarke, 2008; Duff & Uchida, 1997; Morgan, 2004; Pavlenko, 2003; Tsui, 2007; Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, & Johnson, 2005). Varghese et al. (2005) observed that the field of language teacher education paid attention to teacher identity because of two independent research lines: the focus on teachers in applied linguistics and the sociocultural and sociopolitical dimensions of teaching in teacher education. These two research lines realized the importance to understanding language classrooms as a complex space where teacher identity is intertwined with classroom instructions (Gao, 2012; Varghese et. al, 2005). As a result, to understand language instructions, it is vital to focus on language teacher identity.

The importance of language teacher identity has been discussed in the literature as an important relationship with teacher's practice (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004; Lamote & Engels, 2010). To elaborate, what language teachers do (e.g., lesson planning or choosing content) depends on their teacher identity. Gao (2012) pointed out that teacher identity is vital in determining language teaching vision and practice. In turns, Kanno and Stuart (2011) added that teacher's practices shape teacher identity. Therefore, by studying language teacher identity construction, teacher educators will be able to understand the complexity of classroom instructions and teachers' practices.

(Student) Teacher Identity Construction

Within the literature on teacher identity, previous researchers have investigated teacher identity construction during the teaching practicum and have described this period as a minefield of emotional, struggle, challenging, and difficult experience.

Beijaard et al. (2004) described:

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).

Using the "struggling for voice" framework (Britzman, 2003, p. 20), Bloomfield (2010) pointed out that student teachers were struggling during the teaching practicum in terms of biography (being marginalized), emotions (e.g., isolation, resentment, or vulnerability), and institutional structure (power struggle). Similarly, Timoštšuk and Ugaste (2010) found consistent results that student teachers emphasized failure or success, not what they learned during the teaching practicum. Student teachers also held rigid views about teaching and themselves, leading to "antagonistic relation" with more experienced

colleagues (Trent, 2011, p. 529). They also negotiated different expectations from the university and the school (Smagorinsky, Cook, Moore, Jackson, & Fry, 2004).

Additionally, student teachers often found themselves negotiated tensions while learning to teach (Smagorinsky et al., 2004). Pillen, Beijaard, and Brok (2013) defined tensions as “internal struggles between the teacher as a person and the teacher as a professional regarding an undesirable situation” (p. 662). The review of literature pointed out three broad themes: role change from being a student to a student teacher, expected and actual supports provided for students, and conceptions of learning to teach (Pillen et al., 2013). These tensions that student teachers experienced often lead to emotions, such as frustrations, anger, or helplessness. It was observed that only conceptualizing student teachers learning to teach as tensions limits an understanding of how student teachers get through this struggling tension.

As a result, several researchers have investigated student teachers learning to teach in order to compare with experienced teachers as well as conducted a longitudinal study (Kanno & Stuart, 2011). These studies pointed out stages of identity development. For example, Anspal et al. (2012) investigated student teachers’ narratives about themselves as teachers and pointed out that they went through three stages of teacher identity development: *idealism*, *reality*, and *consolidation*. The first year students had idealized meaning of being a teacher. The second and third year students shifted the change to focus on acquiring knowledge and theory without reflecting upon the meaning of teachers. The fourth and fifth year students were in the process of consolidating their idealized sense of teachers into reality while completing a teaching practicum.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents an overview of the research methodology, consisting of the description of a theoretical perspective, methods, data collection, data analysis, and ethical considerations respectively.

Goodness as a Theoretical Perspective

Since prior research has often described student teachers learning to teach as a struggle, it has been observed that those studies employed a “pathological lens,” looking at the world through the lens of failure (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 8). Through this lens, prior research has often been lumped into the trap of unhealthy research, leading to blaming victims or inactions (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Through this lens, the field of language teacher education, including the Thai context, knows very little about how student teachers get through the struggle period during the teaching practicum (Kanno & Stuart, 2011). As a result, the need to employ a healthier research lens to understand student teachers learning to teach is legitimate.

In education, the theoretical lens of *goodness*, taken from portraiture methodology, was developed by Lawrence-Lightfoot (1983). In 1983, Lawrence-Lightfoot developed portraiture with attempts to blur the boundary between arts and science in order to capture good high-school cultures. Portraiture shares features with other qualitative approaches; however, it is unique in its attempt to document goodness of high schools. Lawrence-Lightfoot (1983) argued that researchers who ask, “what is good here?” tend to

find different realities than those who ask, “what is wrong here?” The term goodness often leads to misunderstanding since it may take literally to mean researching only the good; however, Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) cautioned that goodness is not only an ideal state; it also involves vulnerability and imperfection.

After the notion of goodness was introduced to the field of education, several researchers have employed this lens and it was expanded into different iterations. For example, Prabjandee (2014) employed goodness to explore why Thai English teachers decided to enter the teaching profession and what make them stay in the profession. Chapman (2005) integrated this concept to the stance of critical race theory, defining goodness as an empowerment of the practitioners and the researchers. Specifically to this study, the participants were identified as good student teachers who pass through the struggling period. The focus on researching goodness may help language teacher educators understand how student teachers pass through the teaching practicum.

Methods

Participants

Najmee and Niti volunteered to participate in this study. They were purposefully selected because they were willing to participate (Stake, 1995) and they were identified as the ones who had overcome the difficulties of the teaching practicum. Najmee is a 22-year-old female student teacher, born in the South of Thailand, and Niti is a 21-year-old male from the Northeast. They moved from their hometowns to pursue a Bachelor of Education in Teaching English at a university, located in the East of Thailand.

The teacher education programs in Thailand are five years since it is mandatory by the Teacher Council of Thailand. The two student teachers conducted the teaching practicum at different schools. Najmee chose to do her teaching practicum at a secondary school, where she taught middle school students English, while Niti decided to teach at a primary school, where he taught English to sixth grade students. Neither of them had prior teaching experience. Najmee and Niti had to wear the appropriate university uniforms to schools. They practiced teaching from 8 am – 4 pm during weekdays. In choosing the two student teachers, the data obtained in this study were varied in terms of gender and contexts of the teaching practicum.

Data Collection

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

Guided by the narrative case study approach, I interviewed the participants at the end of the one-year teaching practicum. I relied on their memories to recount their experiences during the teaching practicum. The interviews were semi-structured, consisting of several topics: why they entered the teacher education program, teacher education experiences, one-year teaching practicum experience, activities they performed

at schools, perceptions of themselves as a teacher while learning to teach, 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 in a school setting.

Apart from the interview, I also conducted shadowing observations (Wolcott, 2003) to learn about student teachers' lives at school. I asked the participants to identify a typical day at school and followed them, like their shadows, to document their work 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. Artifacts were also collected as supplementary data. The artifacts tell stories of the owner, and it can elicit different types of data (Schwandt, 2007). The collected artifacts were samples of their lesson plans and teaching materials.

Data Analysis

The data set consisted of interview transcripts, field notes from shadowing observations, and artifacts. The interviews were transcribed professionally, and I rechecked the accuracy of the transcripts. To analyze the data, I looked for themes within and across the participants using a coding method. Through the theoretical lens of goodness, I assigned codes to utterances that exemplified the student teachers' journey to resilience and the codes were grouped into themes. Emergent themes across the participants were emotions and tensions in learning to teach, symbolic entity as a reminder of being a teacher, and types of support to resilience. These themes were used

to create a storyline. While analyzing the data, I kept writing reflections to be aware of my subjectivity. Triangulation, thick description, and member check technique were used to enhance the trustworthiness of this study.

Ethical Considerations

All research involving human beings is complicated and messy. Throughout the research process, researchers will encounter ethical dilemmas that they need to make legitimate decisions in order to protect participants' confidentiality and minimize risks to the participants (Punch, 1994). The study attempted to conduct research with ethical considerations. The data were treated confidentiality. The participants understood that they participated voluntarily, and they agreed to use pseudonyms that they came up by themselves throughout the paper. The school's names were not included so it might not be possible to identify the participants. The participants also had a chance to review this paper before publication.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Najmee's Narrative of Learning to Teach

Najmee entered the teacher education program with a strong determination to become a teacher, since teaching is a popular profession in her community. She narrated, "Teaching is a dream job for many people 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." Najmee entered the teacher education program with a simple concept of a good teacher as a person who gets along with students and the students are comfortable being around.

With a clear goal to become a teacher, Najmee concentrated on learning during the teacher education. During the four years of teacher education, she took many classes in three main areas: content classes, pedagogy classes, and educational-foundation classes. Among those classes, Najmee was impressed with psychology and philosophy because the professors, as she reported, had excellent teaching techniques. After four years in the teacher education program, Najmee's concept of a good teacher did not change much. She thought a good teacher is the one who is responsible and who students like.

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?” Thinking about these questions frustrated her even before she started her teaching practicum.

Najmee was assigned to teach English to middle school students 12 hours per week, and she had six hours of extra responsibilities. In the first semester, she was assigned to work under the school administration office and the school financial office. 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 evaluated by a school committee, which consisted of a school principal, a department head, and her mentor teacher. For Najmee, these responsibilities were 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.”

Having failed 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.

All of them had faced similar problems. Talking to her mother and the other student teachers helped Najmee to reduce her sense of failure. Apart from teaching problems, Najmee also had problems with student behavior during class time. Since the students could not follow the class, they started talking to each other, creating a noisy, disturbing atmosphere. Instead of disciplining 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.”

In the first semester, Najee did not see herself as a teacher, “I wore a student uniform to teach, so I was definitely a student. 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.” 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. She sighed as she reported.

In the second semester, Najmee was assigned to teach different classes. She was also transferred to learn extra duties at the academic affairs office and the student affairs office. 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’ proficiency levels. She did not expect that the students would learn everything she taught, but she changed her expectations of how she

could support her students. In other words, 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 why they did not concentrate on others. She finally realized that students wanted to learn with "good teachers," who were not afraid to be hateful and knew how to position themselves 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 internalizing 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. It is my job to be a teacher, so I have to do my job." At the end of the second semester, she realized that she had not phoned her mother to discuss school problems anymore. It might be she had got through this difficult time. 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 realized 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.”

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.

Niti’s Narrative of Learning to Teach

Unlike Najmee, who entered the teacher education program with a strong determination to become a teacher, Niti decided to enter teacher education because his mother wanted him to be a teacher. Similar to Najmee’s community, teaching is also a popular profession in his hometown. He said lightheartedly, “In this hometown, every family, including mine, has at least one teacher!” Growing up in a community of teachers, Niti had considered leaving this profession.

When he was in 12th grade, he was reluctant to choose what to study for his undergraduate degree. Initially, Niti knew that he liked to study English, so he wanted to enter the College of Humanities and Social Sciences as an English major. However, he started considering a teacher education program because of his mother’s influence. His

mother wanted him to be a teacher, so he decided to study an English major at the College of Education. “It’s like meeting half ways,” Niti emphasized.

As an undergraduate, Niti was interested in classes with professors that liked to share experiences such as educational philosophy or English literature. 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. 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.” With this sense of working at school, 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.”

On the first day at school, Niti felt shocked because he was assigned to teach only eight hours a week. He described, “Seriously? I only teach eight hours a week! My friends at other schools teach 12-20 hours. I imagined that my mentor teacher would be mean, but she was very supportive. I was really lucky.” Even though Niti did not have demanding duties, he was still struggling to embrace his teacher identity. At this school, the principal demanded the mentor teacher to be in class with the student teacher at all times. His mentor teacher constantly interrupted the class while Niti was teaching. He said, “I felt like I was not myself. I mostly followed my mentor’s guidance 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.”

On New Year's Day, Niti's mentor teacher disappeared from school. 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." After this transformative moment, Niti started to perceive himself as a teacher. When there were school activities, Niti was always committed to help his students. He 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, "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." When asked whether the teaching practicum helped develop his teacher identity as compared to the teacher education program, Niti reported that the teaching practicum definitely helped more because he spent more time interacting with real situations. 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.

"Why" I asked immediately.

"I feel that I am ready to be a teacher!"

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSIONS

This chapter summarizes discussions, implications, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research. Each section is presented respectively below.

Discussions

This study employed (student) teacher identity as an analytic lens to understand learning to teach during the teaching practicum and to investigate how student teachers get through this struggling period of time. I shifted a theoretical perspective from a pathological lens to goodness, trying to focus on the resilience and be open to imperfections and vulnerability (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Goodness in learning to teach was evident in the journey to resilience of how student teachers overcome the difficulties of the teaching practicum. During this journey, student teachers had to deal with overwhelming emotions and tensions in learning to teach (Bloomfield, 2010) by using symbolic identity as a reminder of being a teacher and various support.

Similar to prior research (Britzman, 2003; Danielewicz, 2001; Furlong, 2013), this study points out that learning to teach is a process of identity formation. During this period, Najmee and Niti constantly reflected upon their teacher identity, asking themselves how they could help their students, work with them, or gain their trust. Consistent with previous studies (Tsui, 2007; Varghese et al., 2005), the findings revealed that student teacher identity construction during the teaching practicum is messy, complicated, and time-consuming. In this study, the student teachers constructed their

teacher identity through constant engagement in everyday practice at school (Wenger, 1998), which conflicts with their years of observations, a recollection of teacher image, or initial expectations during their childhood experience. Further, the construction of teacher identity was mediated by a symbolic entity as a reminder of being a teacher. For Najmee, the symbolic entity was the title that students used for her, *Kru*. For Niti, the symbolic entity was the university uniform, reminding him that he was a teacher. This symbolic entity resulted from sociocultural reference. In Thailand, to be called *Kru* and to dress like a *Kru* describes certain appropriate behaviors that individuals are supposed to do.

Student teachers completed the teaching practicum with support mechanisms, such as support from peers, mentor teachers, and family members. The types of support were psychological and technical. For the psychological support, the two student teachers received support from peers, mentors, and family members. For the technical support, only Najmee received this from her mentor at the school. 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 emphasize that both Najmee and Niti were allowed to have critical space to learn about themselves as a teacher. Niti had the chance to be himself after his mentor teacher left the school. He had more freedom to learn about himself as a teacher. Teacher educators could point out this space for student teachers to be engaged in.

Even though learning to teach during the teaching practicum is challenging, the teacher education programs can support student teachers during this period. We can place other student teachers at the same school and emphasize the relational nature of the teaching practicum. We can also help student teachers reflect upon an image of a teacher

that they brought into the teacher education program. By raising student teacher's awareness that they did not come into the teacher education program as an empty vessel, student teachers might start forming a teacher identity readiness to enter the real world of teaching. This simple, yet powerful, practice may facilitate the teaching practicum experience for student teachers.

The findings in this study add to the knowledge base for teacher educators, revealing how student teachers construct their language teacher identity and how they get through this struggling time. An understanding of teacher identity construction may influence the design of the teacher education curriculum to support student teachers during the teaching practicum. Future research may look into how to support student teachers during the teaching practicum or how to organize the teacher education curriculum around practices so that student teachers will have a chance to engage in the forming of teacher identity as a front stage project.

Implications

Even though learning to teach during the teaching practicum is challenging, the teacher education programs can support student teachers during this period. We can place other student teachers at the same school and emphasize the relational nature of teaching practicum. We can also help student teachers reflect upon an image of teacher that they brought into the teacher education program. By raising student teacher's awareness that they did not come into the teacher education program as an empty vessel, student teachers might start forming an identity readiness to enter the real world of teaching.

This simple, yet powerful, practice may facilitate the teaching practicum experience for student teachers.

The findings in this study add to the knowledge base for teacher educators, revealing how student teachers construct their language teacher identity and how they pass through the struggling period. An understanding of teacher identity construction may influence the design of the teacher education curriculum to support student teachers during the teaching practicum. Future research may look into how to support student teachers during the teaching practicum or how to organize the teacher education curriculum around practices so that student teachers will have a chance to engage in the forming of teacher identity as a front stage project.

Limitations

The data in this study were naturally self-reported, so it was not possible to identify actual behaviors. This study also relies on the participant's memory, recalling their experiences during the teaching practicum.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should recruit more participants. Longitudinal study, such as following student teachers from year one to year five, is also legitimate.

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