Novice nontraditional teacher educators' identity (re)construction in higher education: A Hong Kong perspective

Rui Yuan

Department of English Language Education, The Education University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, China

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

This study explores two novice nontraditional teacher educators' identity (re)construction in different universities in Hong Kong. Drawing on data from in-depth interviews, field observation, and informal communication, the findings demonstrate how the two novice teacher educators, without formal school teaching experience, underwent different identity change trajectories (i.e., from identity conflicts to identity deficits and vice versa), influenced by their personal beliefs and aspirations as well as contextual demands in higher education. The findings provide insights into the under-researched area of nontraditional teacher educators' professional development and offer useful implications on how to prepare and develop effective and committed teacher educators in Hong Kong and similar educational contexts where teacher education is mainly housed in higher education institutions.

1. Introduction

Teacher educator identity has become an emergent research area over the past years in teacher education (e.g., Izadinia, 2014; Swennen, Jones, & Volman, 2010). Identity as a theoretical lens can allow researchers to explore teacher educators' lived experiences, which are central to the continuing innovation and improvement of teacher education (Robinson & McMillan, 2006). For teacher educators, looking into their own identities as the interplay between the external socio-cultural context and their internal sense-making can help build a professional, positive self-image that supports effective teacher education practice and their professional reflections and growth (Dinkelman, 2011).

To date, previous researchers (e.g., Murray & Male, 2005; Wood & Borg, 2010) have paid attention to novice teacher educators' identity change as they transition from school teaching to teacher education in university settings. However, in many educational contexts (e.g., Australia, Hong Kong, Mainland China, and USA) where teacher education is mainly housed in higher education institutions, the past decade has witnessed an increasing number of fresh doctoral graduates who become university-based teacher educators (Mayer, Mitchell, Santoro, & White, 2011; Newberry, 2014). Referred to as "nontraditional teacher educators" (Newberry, 2014, p. 163) with little or no formal school teaching experience, they are recruited mostly due to their excellent research profiles and then practice teacher education in universities, which place a strong emphasis on research competitiveness and international rankings (Yuan, 2015). Different from those who become teacher educators through the traditional route (i.e., moving from school teaching to university-based teacher education) (Murray & Male, 2005), nontraditional teacher educators may lack sufficient understanding of local teaching practice and school systems and culture, and therefore they are likely to encounter challenges in designing and implementing effective and relevant teacher education tasks as well as communicating with pre- and in-service teachers about their learning needs and progress (Yuan, 2015). There is thus a need to explore this emerging group of teacher educators' professional

E-mail address: eryuan@eduhk.hk.

experiences in order to help them cope with contextual challenges and facilitate their continuing development in higher education.

Adopting identity as an analytical lens (Gee, 2001) and following a qualitative case study approach, the present study explores the process of two novice teacher educators' identity (re)construction in Hong Kong. Specifically, informed by an integrated identity framework that focuses on the complex interaction (particularly conflicts and deficits) between individuals' multiple identities (Baumeister, 1986; Higgins, 1987; Markus & Nurius, 1986), the study can contribute to our hitherto limited knowledge of the process of teacher educators' identity (re)construction and shed light on the complex interactions between teacher education and higher education in specific social-cultural contexts. The findings of the study can also generate useful implications on the preparation and development of effective teacher educators to improve teacher learning and quality in Hong Kong and similar higher education settings.

2. Understanding teacher educator identity

Teacher educator identity can be defined as "being recognized as a certain kind of person" (Gee, 2001, p. 99) on the part of the teacher educator himself/herself and by others in their situated institutional and socio-cultural contexts (Yuan, 2017). Previous studies have shown that teacher educators' professional identities are multiple, fluid and complex (e.g., Swennen, Shagrir, & Cooper, 2009). Influenced by their biographies and personal experience as well as a broad range of socio-cultural factors, teacher educators often take on various facets of identity or sub-identities in their professional work, such as teacher, scholar, collaborator, learner and leader (Klecka, Donovan, Venditti, & Short, 2008), and even their teacher identity can be further divided into various dimensions, including school teacher, teacher in higher education, and teacher of teachers (Swennen et al., 2010).

The development of teacher educators' professional identities is accompanied with the accumulation and deepening of their professional knowledge and expertise in specific work contexts (Izadinia, 2014). Only through concrete social practice (e.g., classroom teaching and practicum supervision), can teacher educators hone their self-understanding of what it means to be a teacher educator (Dinkelman, 2011). The (trans)formation of teacher educators' professional identities is also closely related to the personal values, vision and emotions they possess, which may be translated into their professional practice and guide their identity transformation (Hagenauer & Volet, 2014; Koster & Dengerink, 2008). Agency is another critical element in teacher educators' professional identity work. Defined as "people's ability to make choices, take control, self-regulate, and thereby pursue their goals" (Duff, 2012, p. 417), agency can influence the ways teacher educators perceive and cope with competing demands on their work, particularly in the face of the institutional constraints and ever-shifting policy contexts in higher education (Dinkelman, 2011; Hökkä, Eteläpelto, & Rasku-Puttonen, 2012).

Currently, much research attention has been paid to novice teacher educators' identity transition from school teaching and university-based teacher education. Characterized as a "rocky road" (Wood & Borg, 2010, p. 17), the transition process from school settings to higher education is always entangled with new teacher educators' struggle in (re)constructing their professional identities to meet diverse contextual demands. As shown in Murray and Maleös (2005) study, moving from being first-order practitioners (i.e., school teachers) to being second-order practitioners (teacher educators), the participants struggled with their identity building as the expert becoming novice given their limited pedagogical knowledge about teaching teachers. Wood and Borg (2010) also reported the various challenges novice teacher educators might confront upon their entry into higher education. Both internal (e.g., a lack of personal resilience and coping mechanism) and external factors (e.g., emergent research demands) impeded their sense-making and identity growth as legitimate teacher educators. Similar findings can be observed in Dinkelman (2011), Ritter (2007), and Yuan (2017) in different educational contexts.

Based on the above literature review, this study set out to explore nontraditional teacher educators' identity experiences at the novice stage, which is currently underexplored in the field of teacher education. As opposed to their counterparts who move from school teaching to teacher education, the nontraditional teacher educators reported in the study joined the field with little or no formal school teaching experiences, which further added complexities to their professional practice and identity work (Newberry, 2014). Below I introduce the theoretical framework that informs the current research.

3. An integrated identity framework

Identity, defined as being recognized as a certain "kind of person" in a given context (Gee, 2001), is widely perceived as fluid, hybrid, and thus contested and paradoxical in nature. While individuals are in a constant search of a stable and consistent identity to guide their professional (inter)actions and fulfill their personal goals and visions, their identity work is often disrupted by dynamic and potentially conflicted socio-cultural contexts (Block, 2007). As a result, individuals' identity (re)construction may turn into a site of conflicts and negotiation, where they find themselves standing between opposing poles with multiple and potentially contradicting identities due to complex social-cultural influences (Jenkins, 2011; Yuan, Li, & Yu, 2019). To shed light on the multiple and contested nature of novice teacher educators' identities, this research is theoretically anchored by an integrated identity framework which incorporates self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987), possible selves theory (Markus & Nurius, 1986) and identity conflicts theory (Baumeister, 1986). Self-discrepancy theory and possible selves theory delineate various types of identities (i.e., actual, ought, ideal, and feared) constructed by individuals in their situated socio-cultural contexts. Such identities are constantly interacting with each other with potential tension and conflicts, which can be explained by identity conflicts theory centering on identity struggle and negotiation as an essential part of human experiences (Baumeister, Shapiro, & Tice, 1985). In this sense, the study can not only reveal how different forms of identities emerge from non-traditional novice teacher educators' ongoing professional practice, but also add to the existing knowledge about the complex interaction (particularly conflicts and deficits) between their identities, which can impact

greatly on their sense-making and continuing development in teacher education.

3.1. Self-discrepancy theory and possible selves theory

"Self-concept" refers to "the summary of the individual's self-knowledge related to how the person views him/herself" (Dörnyei, 2009, p. 11). Individuals' self-concepts, which derive from their past experience, can motivate them to evaluate themselves and others and to direct their current and future actions (Higgins, 1987; Markus & Nurius, 1986). Particularly, Higgins (1987) in his self-discrepancy theory proposed that an individual's self-concept is composed of "the actual self" (i.e., the attributes individuals are believed to actually possess), "the ideal self" (i.e., the attributes individuals ideally like to possess), and "the ought self" (i.e., the attributes individuals are supposed to possess as a result of certain duties and responsibilities). Influenced by individuals' desires, hopes, expectations, and imaginations for their future, their self-concept is also emotionally charged and future-oriented (Dörnyei, 2009; Hamman, Gosselin, Romano, & Bunuan, 2010). Following this line of thinking, Markus and Nurius (1986) in their possible selves theory further proposed the notion of "feared selves", i.e., self-images people are afraid of becoming, which can provide incentives or impediments for their ongoing decision-making and actions (Markus & Wurf, 1987). The two theories emphasize that people's multiple self-concepts (i.e., the actual, ought, ideal, and feared) may exist in harmony or conflicts as a result of the ongoing interaction between their personal beliefs and desires as well as their embedded socio-cultural and institutional context (Oyserman, 2001). The congruence and disparity between these identities can (re)shape individuals' cognitive learning, motivations, and personal growth over time (Higgins, 1989).

As claimed by Hamman et al. (2010), the line between self-concept and identity is fuzzy as the two constructs share many common features. For instance, they both represent individuals' self-images and their images perceived by others, and they highlight the powerful influence of the sociocultural context on identity construction. Therefore, current educational literature (e.g.,Gaines et al., 2017; Kubanyiova, 2009; Yuan, 2016; Yuan, Liu, & Lee, 2019) has explored how teachers and students construct, interpret and act on different types of identities (actual, ought, ideal and feared) in specific school contexts. However, limited attention has been paid to teacher educators' identity work in higher education. Given that the multiple forms of identities derive from the negotiation between individuals' personal values, beliefs and emotions as well as contextual affordances and constraints, it is thus meaningful to examine how they may interact with and influence each other in shaping ad reshaping teacher educators' professional engagement and development. In particular, it is interesting to explore how such identity interactions may lead to identity deficits or conflicts (Baumeister et al., 1985) experienced by novice teacher educators in university settings.

3.2. Identity conflicts theory

To account for the potential identity tension and struggle experienced by novice teacher educators, the study further draws on Baumeisterös (1986) identity conflicts theory, which stipulates two types of identity-related dilemma, i.e., *identity deficits* and *identity conflicts*. Identity deficits occur when individuals are not able to live up to certain identities due to situational demands and constraints, which thus put them into self-questioning with a search for new meaning and fulfillment in their identity (re)construction. On the other hand, identity conflicts refer to individuals' state of being "torn apart" between different identities, which prescribe commitments and behaviors that are discordant and possibly conflicting with each other (Baumeister et al., 1985). To resolve the identity conflicts, individuals may need to negotiate and balance different contextual demands, which, however, can lead to negative emotions and experiences and even escalate into identity breakdown and crisis. For instance, Lee (2013) described how an English teacher in Hong Kong experienced emotional struggle due to the conflicts between her personal identity as a strong believer in innovative feedback approaches (e.g., peer review and selective feedback) and the externally imposed identity as a "marking machine" who responded to every single error in students' writing. However, identity deficits and conflicts can also be a driving force that critically lead to positive growth for individuals both professionally and personally (Baumeister, 1986). For example, prompted by the identity conflicts, the teacher in Lee (2013) actively and agentively engaged in reflection upon her teaching of writing and sought opportunities for continuous professional learning (e.g., a teacher education course), which helped her reduce the identity conflicts and bring innovative feedback practice to her classroom teaching and school curriculum.

Taken together, drawing on the integrated identity framework, the study examines the complex process of non-traditional novice teacher educators' identity (re)construction in university settings. The framework is integrated and appropriate in a sense that it can generate insights into the dynamic and complicated interaction between teacher educators' multiple identities (i.e., actual, ought, ideal, and feared) (Higgins, 1987; Markus & Nurius, 1986) with a particular focus on their potential identity conflicts and deficits (Baumeister, 1986) in the situated institutional and socio-cultural environment. Two research questions guide the present inquiry: *What identities did the novice teacher educators construct and how did their identities interact with each other in their professional work?*

4. Methodology

4.1. Research context and participants

This study is part of a larger research project that explored professional experiences and development of teacher educators in Hong Kong. While the project investigated a total of six teacher educators, which were selected based on their gender (three males and three females), work experiences (two novice, two middle career and two experienced) and work institutions (different local universities), the two novice teacher educators, Arnold and Kenny (pseudonyms), were reported in this paper given its research

purposes and question. The two participants, both male and holding an assistant professor position, were from two different universities, which offer pre- and in-service language teacher education programs in Hong Kong. Traditionally, teacher educators in Hong Kong had prior teaching experiences in local primary or secondary schools, which equipped them with knowledge about the classroom reality and educational system for their teacher education work. Yet, Arnold and Kenny joined the field of language teacher education after they finished their PhD degrees. At the time of the study, Arnold was in his first year as a teacher educator in a local university. Before taking up his current position, he had five years of full-time experience of teaching English for academic purposes (EAP) courses at the tertiary level. As for Kenny, he was in the second year of teacher education work after working as a full-time university EAP teacher for six years. The two participants were regarded as non-traditional teacher educators for the following reasons. First, while the two teacher educators were educated locally, they did not have any formal school teaching experience. Specifically, although Arnold had a teaching qualification with a few months' school teaching experience (as a part-time teacher), he mainly taught in university language programs before becoming a teacher educator. As for Kenny, he never taught in schools, and he only obtained his teaching qualification through the part-time PDGE program in the first year of his work as a teacher educator in his university (to be reported in the paper). In addition, in the interviews, the participants also acknowledged their differences (e.g., in terms of knowledge and competence of teaching teachers) from other colleagues who moved to teacher education with rich school teaching experiences. Such differences thus rendered them non-traditional teacher educators as agreed by the participants.

4.2. Data collection

Data collection lasted for one academic semester from 2018 to 2019. Multiple sources of data were collected, including semi-structured interviews, field observations, and informal communication. Before the study commenced, research ethics approval had been sought from the author's university with the consent gained from the participants.

Two rounds of semi-structure interviews were conducted respectively with the participants at the beginning and the end of the semester to uncover their professional practice, social interactions and identity (re)construction as teacher educators. The first interview focused on the participants' past English teaching experience and their ongoing work in their teacher education programs. They were also asked to share their personal values and philosophies about language teaching and teacher education, how they practiced in line with their values, as well as the challenges they encountered and support they received as novice teacher educators. In the second interview which mainly focused on their professional engagement and interactions in the past semester, the participants reflected on their course teaching and interactions with students, while they also shared their perceptions, emotions and experiences about other important dimensions of their work (e.g., research and publishing). In particular, they were invited to identify and discuss possible conflicts they faced in their teacher education work and how they addressed such conflicts and sought their continuing professional development. In all the interviews, the author engaged in meaning construction with the participants with a specific focus on the critical incidents (if any) in their work and how such incidents might influence their professional identities. The interviews, ranging from 60 to 100 minutes, were audio-recorded, conducted in English, and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

In-between the interviews, field observations of the participants' teacher education courses were conducted by the author's research assistant (a qualitative researcher with a PhD in education) to explore how they taught pre- and in-service English teachers in teacher education classrooms, which can serve as important sites for their identity (re)construction. Each participant was observed in two teacher education courses with different content focus (e.g., Arnold's courses were about material development and oral skills and Kenny's courses focused on curriculum and teacher leadership), which aimed to equip English teachers with necessary knowledge and skills for their professional work in local schools. The observations were audio-recorded with fieldnotes taken. In total, two teacher education courses were observed for each participant with four sessions (two hours per session) for Arnold and six sessions (three hours per session) for Kenny. Throughout the process of field observation, the author and his research assistant constantly rereviewed the recordings with field notes and engaged in discussion to make sense of the data.

Furthermore, over the academic semester, both Arnold and Kenny engaged in informal communication with the author (who is also a language teacher educator working in a different university) through face-to-face chats (e.g., over coffee or lunch) and text/email exchanges. Therefore, while the author took on the role as an "outsider" and "researcher" by exploring the participants' experiences and identities as a novice teacher educator, he also served as a "critical friend" by posing relevant questions and sharing his personal stories and reflections in teacher education and higher education. This thus allowed him to establish an open and trustworthy relationship with the participants and facilitated the negotiation and construction of meaning to answer the research questions. Over the research process, the author kept the data generated from the informal, personal communication (e.g., emails and text messages) with reflective notes to enrich the dataset. For example, both participants shared their anxiety and fear for losing their job due to insufficient research outputs, which helped the author further understand their identity conflicts and deficits in their professional work.

4.3. Data analysis

A qualitative, inductive data analytic approach (Miles & Huberman, 1994) was adopted to analyze the data as the author moved back and forth between the data, the integrated identity framework and the research question. First, all the interview transcripts were reviewed to identify the participants' identities and how those identities interacted with one another in their process of identity construction. Particularly, the analysis focused on "indigenous concepts" (Patton, 2002, p. 454) used by the participants to describe themselves and their professional work. The analysis resulted in a range of themes in relation to the participants' identity construction, such as "practical teacher educator", "paper generator", and "newbie in new culture". These identified identity themes

were further analyzed by referring to the integrated identity framework (particularly self-discrepancy theory and possible selves theory) to reveal the actual, ideal, ought, and feared identities (Higgins, 1987; Markus & Nurius, 1986) held by the participants in their teacher education practice. For instance, as a "newbie" with limited collegial support (i.e., his actual identity), Arnold tried to develop his teacher education practice and become a practical and committed teacher educator (i.e., ideal identity). As for Kenny, he was assigned to teach teacher education courses by the university, which brought him a teacher educator identity (i.e., his ought identity). In addition, both participants enacted a feared identity (i.e., a failed academic) due to the stringent research requirement in their own university. Following that, the different types of identities were further examined with reference to the theoretical framework, particularly the identity conflict theory (Baumeister, 1986), in order to analyze their possible interactions (especially identity deficits and conflicts) in the situated social environment. For example, Arnold experienced serious identity conflicts between his ideal identity ("a devoted teacher educator") and feared identity ("a researcher who cannot meet the university's publication requirement"), which eventually resulted in his identity deficit.

Regarding the audio-recorded field observations and fieldnotes, analysis was made based on the themes that emerged in the interview data. Drawing on the multiple identities revealed from the interview analysis, the classroom observation recordings were reviewed together with the field notes to identify relevant episodes that could reflect the participants' identities in classroom teaching and interaction with students. For example, Kenny's use of a role-play task in his teacher education course was identified as a critical episode that evidenced his efforts to turn his ideal identity (i.e., an effective teacher educator) into actual identity. Additionally, the data generated from informal communication with both participants were constantly revisited to triangulate with the other sources of data to enrich our understanding of the participants' identities and possible interactions in their professional work. For example, through our text exchanges, Arnold shared how he designed and implemented a micro-teaching task to promote students' practical learning, which led to positive feelings (e.g., joy and satisfaction) about his teacher education work. Such data further evidenced his self-agency and efforts to seek his ideal identity as a practical and committed teacher educator as revealed from his interview data analysis. To enhance the trustworthiness and rigor of the study, the author and his research assistant engaged in rounds of discussion to reach a consensus about data analysis in the end.

5. Findings

The findings revealed multiple forms of identities of the participants derived from different personal (e.g., past experience and individual backgrounds) and contextual sources (e.g., collegial support and institutional policy). Such identities tended to interact with each other, resulting in potential identity conflicts and deficits. Drawing on data from multiple sources (i.e., interviews, field observation and informal communication), this section presents chronological accounts of the two participants' identity (re)construction experiences case by case in order to shed light on the complex and ongoing interactions between their various identities (particularly their identity conflicts and deficits) in their situated professional contexts.

5.1. Arnold's case

Arnold did not plan to become a teacher educator at the beginning of his career. Instead, he had been aiming to become an assistant professor in a Hong Kong university since he was an undergraduate. He was attracted not only by the "prestige" of the job title but also the "flexibility" in working schedule of the job (Interview 1). To get his dream job, Arnold invested efforts in accumulating qualifications, including finishing a master's degree and a PhD degree, writing and publishing research articles, and teaching English at the tertiary level for years. With all his efforts, Arnold finally became an assistant professor, actualizing what he had been "waiting for in the past ten years" (Interview 1).

In his current university, Arnold was assigned to teach a series of teacher education courses and conduct teaching practicum supervision. Such responsibilities made him realize "he had become a teacher educator" (i.e., ought identity) as shared in the first interview. Although he joined the field of teacher education by accident, he believed that he would gradually develop his identity as "a practical and committed teacher educator" (i.e., his ideal identity) in his current position (Interview 1). First, he enjoyed his past teaching experience in university EAP classrooms in which he played the role as "a teacher who can both educate and entertain students" (Interview 1). As he described, most of his students, regardless of their age or levels, were "engaged" and "motivated" to learn through games and competitions (Interview 1), which was an acknowledgement of his teaching effectiveness. Having a good experience of teaching with the "edutainment" (Interview 1) approach, Arnold believed that he could use the same approach in the teacher education courses and from there, could develop and nourish his budding identity as a teacher educator (Informal communication).

Additionally, his passion towards teacher education could be attributed to his past learning experiences as a pre-service language teacher in a different university. As he recalled, some of the courses he took in his previous teacher education program were abstract and theoretical, which did not effectively support his professional learning about language teaching. Reflecting on his experience, he believed that he needed to be "a language teacher educator who can help his students integrate theories with practice in language classrooms" (i.e., his ought/ideal identity).

> We are taught all these theories but then we don't really see how to apply them [in teaching]….That's really a huge reminder for me now. In every single lesson, I have to demonstrate something practical as a teacher educator. (Interview 1)

However, as a novice teacher educator without school teaching experience (i.e., his actual identity), Arnold experienced some challenges and tension in living up to his ought/ideal identity as a practical teacher educator in a new work environment. First, he

found that his knowledge and skills accumulated in the past years of teaching EAP courses (e.g., listening and speaking) were not sufficient to support his teacher education practice. As he explained, the courses he needed to offer focused on language teaching pedagogy in local school contexts, which differed greatly from the language proficiency courses he had taught in university settings. Therefore, although he was able to draw on his previous past-time school teaching experience to "evaluate what strategies may or may not work in local language classrooms" (informal communication), he fell short of specific knowledge and pedagogy in educating teachers:

> If you ask me to teach English for three hours, it's quite easy. I know how to give students tasks and engage them [to practice English]. But now I need to teach something content-based. … Lesson design and content are huge challenges. (Interview 1)
> The focus here is not language enhancement but theories, frameworks, philosophy, and methods, etc. These are far more abstract than language proficiency per se. So, apart from preparation, I have to spend a lot of time digesting these myself as well. Of course, I can relate these theories and frameworks to my previous teaching experience, but you see, my experience is only the side dish, not the main course (for teacher education). (Informal communication)

The tension between his actual identity as "a language proficiency teacher" and ought identity as "a language teacher educator" was further exacerbated due to the limited support he received from colleagues in the new work environment:

> Usually they [colleagues] will give you the course outline, but if they don't, you don't need to be too surprised. As a newbie here, it's difficult to start from scratch, especially you only have the course description which is just one-paragraph long. (Interview 1)

Being "a newbie" with limited contextual support (i.e., his actual identity), Arnold had to exercise his self-agency to develop his teaching knowledge and improve his teacher education work. Specifically, he tried to familiarize himself with relevant teaching theories through literature reading and designed various classroom activities that could combine theories and practices. For example, to make classroom learning more authentic and practical, he invited his former students of lower academic ability to come to his teacher education course and "act as real students" in the micro-teaching tasks conducted by his current students. He explained:

> I want my students to teach low achievers in an authentic situation. Usually they would just be teaching their peers [who are advanced learners] in the class. That's fake. I think most of my students graduated from band one schools[1] . They never actually know what is happening in band three schools. I'm showing them the reality. (Interview 2)

In their written reflections, Arnold's students gave positive comments on his teaching practice, especially how this experience helped them see the reality and their limitations. Such positive responses gave Arnold strong confidence as a practical teacher educator (i.e., his ideal/ought identity) and he decided that he would "try more practical and innovative approaches" in his teacher education classrooms (Interview 2). In other words, by exerting his self-agency to address the contextual obstacle (i.e., limited collegial support), he managed to alleviate the tensions between his ideal identity (a practical and committed teacher educator) and actual identity (a newbie with limited support) in his teacher education work.

Another strategy adopted by Arnold was to explicitly model effective teaching approaches for pre-service teachers to help them experience and understand how to design and implement language teaching tasks. For instance, in his course about how to teach English speaking, Arnold demonstrated an information gap activity for promoting English oral proficiency. Playing the role as a language teacher, Arnold assigned students to pairs and guided them to find out the missing information on their individual worksheets by asking questions and seeking clarification. Based on their direct experiences, Arnold further engaged students in group discussion on how to implement an information gap activity in their future teaching. For instance, he asked the students to predict possible problems in the implementation of this activity (e.g., "students may cheat by looking at each other's worksheet") and pushed them to think deeply by throwing out more questions (e.g., "How do you implement the activity in a way that nobody gets to cheat?") (Classroom observation). In this way, Arnold facilitated students' learning to teach through role changes (i.e., from language learners to language teachers) and reflective practice (questioning and discussion), which brought him closer to his ideal identity as a practical teacher educator.

Despite his efforts and commitment to teaching, Arnold sometimes felt "sad" and "guilty" for "not doing enough" (Interview 1) for his students. In his new work environment, Arnold came to realize that his job was "like a conglomerate" (Interview 1) that involved multiple responsibilities and commitments, which could lead to potential identity struggle and conflicts. In particular, apart from teaching and practicum supervision, he also needed to conduct research, publish research outcomes (i.e., journal publications), and apply for external research grants. Due to the increasing pressure on research outputs and quality in Hong Kong universities, Arnold felt he had to prioritize research and publishing over teaching:

> No matter how much I care about teaching, I still put research as my priority. Definitely. (Interview 1)

The mounting research pressure thus largely added to Arnold's feelings of insecurity and anxiety about his job. In fact, in his university, some assistant professors who had failed to get promoted lost their contracts in the past, which thus gave rise to his feared identity as "a failed academic who could not keep his job" (informal communication). This feared identity was in direct confrontation with his ideal identity (i.e., a practical and committed teacher educator) as he shared,

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[1] In Hong Kong, secondary schools are classified into three bands. Students in band one schools normally have the highest academic achievements, followed by students in band two and then band three schools.

I really can't do a fifty-fifty balance [in teaching and research] because right now I'm trying to survive. … If I don't have to do research, I can spend a lot of time helping them [students], especially like [supervising] final year project or teaching practicum. … But right now, I'm just trying to survive by focusing on research and publications. (Interview 2)

Therefore, while Arnold made agentive efforts to address identity conflicts and improve his teaching practice (e.g., through modelling) at the beginning of his career, his self-agency and motivations gradually waned due to the research demands and pressure, as shown in the above quote. In the face of the identity conflicts between teacher educator and academic researcher, Arnold decided to devote more time and attention to research and publishing than teaching. As he shared in our informal communication, he worked seven days per week and seized every opportunity to think about possible topics for research publications. This mindset was summarized by him with the metaphor of "ninja":

The only thing I'm doing is just like charging ahead, publishing as many as possible. … I really have to be a ninja to survive. (Interview 2)

Being a "ninja" (i.e., actual identity) who had to meet the strict research demands, Arnold thus decided to put a hold to the pursuit of his teacher educator identity for the time being, suggesting an identity deficit (Baumeister, 1986) in his teacher education work:

After I get tenured, I think I can go back to that side [teacher educator] more. I need to survive [get contract renewal and promotion] first. If I survive, I can be a teacher educator for twenty years, thirty years or longer. (Interview 2)

Overall, Arnold joined his university with an imagined, ideal identity as a practical teacher educator, and he made agentive efforts to overcome potential identity conflicts (e.g., "a language proficiency teacher" versus "a language teacher educator") and live up to his ideal identity. Over time, however, his self-agency was curbed due to the rise of a feared identity (i.e., a failed academic), which drove him to primarily focus on research and publishing. As a result, he faced an identity deficit as a teacher educator in his situated work context.

5.2. Kenny's case

Similar to Arnold, Kenny aimed at getting an assistant professor job at a university in Hong Kong (i.e., ideal identity) and worked hard towards that goal (i.e., getting mater's and PhD degrees, writing and publishing papers, and teaching English at the tertiary level). After years of hard work, Kenny earned what he desired for and started his work as a university assistant professor. Upon arrival at his current university, Kenny soon discovered that his department focused heavily on teacher education, which brought him an external identity as a teacher educator (i.e., ought identity) as reflected in his teaching of different teacher education courses and supervision of student teachers during their teaching practicum.

Unlike Arnold, however, at the beginning of his work Kenny did not show much personal interest in teacher education (Interview 1) and experienced an identity deficit as a teacher educator. Firstly, although he had six years of university English teaching experience (i.e., ESP and EAP courses), he did not teach at the 'frontline' (i.e., local primary or secondary schools) and thus lacked knowledge about the reality of local schools (Interview 1). He particularly felt that he was not a "true teacher educator" (Interview 1) in front of his students who were local school teachers:

When the students shared their teaching scenarios and difficulties, I knew [what they mean], but I was like, "Okay, that was the situation, but I had not actually experienced that as a school teacher". (Interview 1)

Secondly, Kenny believed that teacher educators should "link their teaching with teacher research" (Interview 1) as he had seen in other experienced teacher educators' cases (e.g., his PhD supervisor who had done extensive research on/with language teachers). However, given that his own research only focused on language learners, he felt detached from the professional practice and lived experiences of school teachers. In this sense, he saw himself only as a teacher educator by university and departmental recognition (i.e., his ought identity) instead of a credible and qualified teacher educator:

I think teacher educator should understand a lot about the development of teachers [through research]. But I haven't researched that much. That's why I do not feel that I'm a well-qualified teacher educator. (Interview 1)

Thirdly, as Kenny worked as a teaching staff in his previous universities where he did not need to meet external research requirement, he was suddenly faced with great pressure of research publication in his current position, a research-track assistant professor who "was supposed to do research and publish" (i.e., ought identity). Similar to Arnold's case, the appraisal system of Kenny's university focused on research outputs and assistant professors who failed to get tenured within six years were required to leave the university. Because of the anxiety about losing his job (i.e., a feared identity as a failed academic who could not keep his job), Kenny saw research and publishing as the most important part of his work:

I'm like a paper generator because it is most valued [in my current university]. …. I had only been in the teaching track… where teaching was valued.… Now the main component added to my career is research. (Interview 1)

Viewing himself as "a paper generator" (ought/actual identity), Kenny felt detached from his identity as a teacher educator in classroom teaching:

I'm an academic teaching the courses I have to teach…. It just happens that those students attending my courses are teachers. (Interview 1)

Kenny's actual identities (i.e., a paper generator and academic who teach the "given" courses) thus indicated an identity deficit in his teacher education work. In other words, he was only trying to fulfil prescribed duties (e.g., course teaching) associated with his ought identity as a teacher educator (externally recognized by the university) with limited self-agency and efforts to internalize such an identity in his professional practice.

On the other hand, through the ongoing process of teaching and interacting with pre- and in-service teachers, Kenny felt that he was "forced to learn more [about teacher education]" and "started to feel like a teacher educator" (interview 1). The more he was involved in teacher education, the more he was aware that he lacked knowledge about teachers' real practice and thus desired to develop his identity as an effective teacher educator (i.e., his ideal identity). With the support of his university (i.e., tuition refund and exemption of daytime teaching), Kenny enrolled in a part-time teaching diploma program. While the program was specifically offered for those who aim to become English teachers, he took on the hat of "a student teacher" and invested great time and energy in the coursework and teaching practicum to fill his identity deficit and get close to his ideal identity (i.e., an effective teacher educator).

His professional learning and engagement particularly in the ten-week practicum became an important turning point in his identity transformation. Firstly, during the teaching practicum in a local secondary school, Kenny tried to implement the teaching approaches (e.g., Communicative Language Teaching) he had promoted in his university courses in his own English classroom and explore how such approaches can be adapted and reformed in the exam-oriented school environment.

> I started with an exam-oriented approach, then I switched to a more communicative approach. … They [students] were a bit shy at the beginning, but then they started talking more and they found it fun. At the end I asked them to write based on the exam requirement. And then I analyzed the exam reports with them, so it was coming back with more exam-oriented approach… It was like a whole package, starting and ending with the exam-oriented approach, but in the middle, there was lots of authentic communication. (Interview 2)

As shared by Kenny, his students gave positive comments on this blended approach, showing him that they "treasured the balance" (Interview 1) between learning English for communication and for examinations. The students' positive responses added to his confidence as a frontline teacher with his own teaching philosophy, which evidenced his increased contextualized knowledge about school teaching as a teacher educator:

> This [a balance between learning English for exam and for communication] is what I wanted to "sell" to teacher. Yes, I understand that in reality students have to learn for the exam, to strive in the exam, but at the same time, I hope that students don't forget about the real meaning of learning English, which is for communication. (Interview 2)

In addition, given his limited research experience on teachers, Kenny conducted an action research during his teaching practicum, which increased his knowledge about the complex school reality from the perspectives of different stakeholders (i.e., school principals, teachers, and students). For instance, he interviewed his own students to understand their English learning needs and some English teachers to understand their teaching beliefs and challenges in continuing professional development. He also interviewed the school principals, who shared their views about the school curriculum at the management level. His action research gave rise to his identity as an "insider" with knowledge about school teachers' daily practice, which further helped him reduce his identity deficit and contributed to the internalization of his ought identity as a teacher educator. As he reflected, after he returned to university classrooms from the "field" (i.e., the local schools), he felt he had become a teacher educator (i.e., his actual identity):

> Now I have a teaching diploma [and teaching practicum experiences], so it is different. I can relate to my students like "I know what you have gone through", and "I know what your daily life is". This actually enhanced my credibility as a teacher educator, which is quite important for my teacher education work. (Interview 2)

Such a change in his teacher educator identity (from ought identity to actual identity) was evidenced in his university teaching, where he drew on his teaching practicum experiences as resources for lesson design and teaching. In a teacher education course, Kenny designed a role-play task to help his students learn about team diversity and conflict management (Class observation). In this group task, each student was given a worksheet that instructed them to take a specific stance about school improvement (i.e., promoting assessment for learning, designing extra-curricular activities, improving public exam results, and strengthening home-school partnership). Without knowing each other's stance, the students had to discuss and reach a consensus about the directions for improvement from the most important to the least. As Kenny predicted, it was difficult for the students to reach an agreement at the end of the task. Seizing this opportunity, he threw out questions to help the students reflect upon the problems in school reforms and introduced relevant coping strategies (i.e., conflict management). The design of the role-play task showed that Kenny used the insights (i.e., different views from school principals, teachers, and pupils) gained from his field experience (particularly his action research) as "a powerful resource" for educating future teachers (Interview 2). In other words, his researcher identity contributed to his teaching practice and identity development as a teacher educator (Dinkelman, 2011).

By the end of his first teaching semester, Kenny expressed his desire to become both an effective teacher educator and an academic researcher who could secure his job after six years' work (i.e., getting a tenured position) (Interview 2), which therefore revealed his ideal identity as "an all-round professional who could balance teaching and research and do them both well" (Interview 2). He further made agentive efforts in teaching and research in line with his newly formed ideal identity. For teaching, Kenny tried to propose his own teacher education courses to his department so that he could draw on his research expertise (e.g., regarding student motivation) in his teaching to benefit frontline teachers. For research, he "kept on writing" so that he "could produce a number of papers" to secure his job at the university (Interview 2). On the other hand, Kenny also found it difficult to balance the two identities

and the associated duties because "time was limited" (Interview 2). This indicated that despite his efforts Kenny's multiple identities were always contested and conflicted in his daily work (Baumeister, 1986).

Overall, Kenny started his work with an identity deficit, which was gradually resolved as he engaged in continuous teaching and professional development in teacher education. As his teacher educator identity grew stronger, he continued to exercise his agency to update and enact a new ideal identity as both an effective teacher educator and researcher to guide his future work in spite of the ongoing tension arising from the complex and shifting institutional environment.

6. Discussion

Informed by an integrated identity framework (Baumeister, 1986; Higgins, 1987; Markus & Nurius, 1986), this study revealed various types of identities (actual, ideal, ought, and feared) constructed by the participants in their professional practice and social interactions. Influenced by their past experiences (e.g., as a pre-service language teacher), personal beliefs as well as situated higher education environment, their multiple identities tended to align with or contradict each other (Kubanyiova, 2009; Yuan, 2016), thus exerting great impacts on their professional work and sense-making. For instance, through his ongoing efforts (e.g., literature reading, modelling and reflective practice), Arnold tried to overcome the contextual obstacles (i.e., limited collegial support) and integrate theories with practice in his teacher education classrooms, suggesting a growing sense of alignment between his actual identity (i.e., a newbie) and ideal identity (i.e., a practical and committed teacher educator). However, such identity alignment was disrupted due to the mounting research demands and stress in his current position, which resulted in conflicts between his ought (i.e., academic researcher) and ideal (i.e., a committed teacher educator) identities.

While teacher educators' professional work is permeated with various identity conflicts and tensions, such conflicts can also present opportunities for their self-reflections and agentive actions, which can help refine and develop their professional identities (Hamman et al., 2010). In Kenny's case, he experienced conflicts between his ought (i.e., a teacher educator recognized by the university) and actual identity (i.e., a university academic) at the beginning of his career, leading to his identity deficit as a teacher educator. Over time, he gradually crafted a new ideal identity (i.e., an effective teacher educator) through his ongoing practice, which further drove him to exercise his self-agency by pursuing professional development (i.e., enrolling in a teaching diploma program) in order to fill his identity deficit. In particular, by returning to local schools as a student teacher, he developed new forms of knowledge and identities (e.g., "insider"), which further contributed to the transformation of his teacher educator identity (from ought to actual identity). This example testified to the crucial role of self-agency, which can not only help teacher educators examine and regulate their thinking and actions within contextual constraints, but also bring new opportunities for self-exploration and identity building (Dinkelman, 2011; Hökkä et al., 2012).

On the other hand, in the face of severe contextual challenges such as increasing research demands which concern job security and career advancement (Lee, 2014), feared identities associated with intense negative emotions may arise and pose threats to teacher educators' agentive thinking and identity (re)construction (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Yuan, 2016). A vivid example is Arnold whose identity conflicts (i.e., practical and committed teacher educator versus academic researcher) gave rise to his feared identity (i.e., a failed academic who could not keep his job), which directly led to his identity deficit (i.e., postponing the pursuit of his teacher educator identity) in his current work. In other words, despite his previous agentive efforts in promoting his teacher education practice, he temporarily gave up his teacher educator identity and directed most of his attention and energy to his research and publishing work (as suggested by his actual identity as a "ninja") in order to meet the institutional requirement and survive in higher education. The findings thus evidenced the powerful influence of feared identities and their associated emotions, which could mediate teacher educators' professional practice and decision-making (Hagenauer & Volet, 2014; Yuan, Liu et al., 2019).

It is interesting to note that despite the similarity in their educational backgrounds and current status (novice teacher educators), the two participants experienced different identity trajectories at the beginning of their career in teacher education. In contrast to Arnold who started with an ideal identity (i.e., a practical and committed teacher educator) but moved to an identity deficit over time, Kenny managed to overcome his identity deficit and gradually embraced his ought identity as a teacher educator. Such differences can mainly be attributed to their individual experiences in teacher education influenced by their situated universities. Although Arnold tried to exercise his agency and develop his teacher educator identity, he practiced in an isolating status with limited collegial support. Without strong contextual support and a sense of social belonging, Arnold's self-agency and motivations towards developing his ideal identity as a teacher educator gradually decreased, which, coupled with the stringent research demands, contributed to his identity deficit. As for Kenny, with support from his university, he was able to immerse himself in local school contexts during his teaching practicum, through which he tried out his preferred teaching approaches and conducted action research in his classrooms. Such intensive, practical engagement to a large extent made up for his lack of school teaching experience as a non-traditional teacher educator by deepening his contextualized knowledge about language teaching, and further helped him enact new forms of identities such as an "insider" in the local educational system. Similar to Arnold, Kenny was also subject to high-stakes research and publishing requirement, which brought him a feared identity as an academic who was afraid of losing his job. However, this feared identity was to some extent counteracted by the positive learning and identity growth afforded by his teaching practicum, thus giving rise to a new ideal identity (i.e., an all-round professional) and enabling him to invest efforts in both research and teacher education practice. This finding therefore sheds light on the pivotal role of teacher educators' ideal identities in (re)shaping their professional orientations and actions in their daily practice. More importantly, influenced by their individual values and ongoing practice, teacher educators' ideal identities are not static but may experience continual changes over time. By updating and enriching their ideal identities (as in Kenny's case), they can find ways to resolve and move beyond their identity conflicts and pursue new directions as budding teacher educators.

Overall, for nontraditional teacher educators without school teaching background, to be or not to be a teacher educator is a challenging yet crucial question. The findings suggest that identity conflicts and struggle are part and parcel of teacher educators' professional experiences when they join teacher education. Being a teacher educator means that they need to constantly experience, interpret and navigate identity conflicts through concrete and situated reflections and practice. In particular, when teacher education as part of their job description naturally prescribes them a teacher educator identity, such an ought identity needs to be negotiated and internalized as their actual/ideal identity for effective and quality teacher education practice to occur. Otherwise, they may face identity disorientation and even deficits, which can prevent them from investing in their continuing practice and growth as teacher educators. Eventually, this may not only create a huge divide in their individual work (i.e., teaching and research), but can also jeopardize teacher learning and school improvement in the long run.

7. Implications and conclusion

Given that an increasing number of fresh doctoral graduates join the field of teacher education without formal school teaching experience, this study contributes to our understanding of their identity (re)construction and professional development. Specifically, it generates insights into the complex interactions between different forms of identities enacted by novice nontraditional teacher educators and how such interactions (particularly identity conflicts and deficit) may influence their professional decision-making and actions. This study does not intend to project a deficit image of non-traditional teacher educators who lack school teaching experience. In fact, the findings reveal that the participants tried to exercise their self-agency and draw on different sources of support to navigate feared identities as well as update and enrich their ideal identities to enhance their teacher education work.

The study has important implications for current teacher education and higher education. First, given the multiple and potentially conflicting nature of teacher educators' identities, it is important for them to develop awareness of and abilities to reflect upon and analyze their various identities in relation to their work contexts. For example, teacher educators can start reflections from the most basic question of "what identities do they possess?" (i.e., actual identities) to more complicated questions such as "how do their identities interact with each other and what opportunities and challenges are brought by such interactions?". They can also reflect upon questions with emancipative power to further enhance their professional work, such as "what kind of professional do they hope (not) to become?" and "how can they invest in their identity work to reach that goal?". Such reflections would help teacher educators better understand the nature of their job and furthermore, consciously take agentive actions to turn identity challenges into opportunities for professional development.

In addition, the contrast between the two cases in terms of their identity trajectories implies that university policy and management play a crucial role in teacher educators' identity construction. As shown in Arnold's case, he was confined to an isolating status in his teacher education practice. It is therefore suggested that an induction/mentoring system situated in professional communities should be afforded for novice teacher educators in university settings. In the communities, teacher educators, regardless of their career stage, can meet regularly and collectively discuss their multiple identities and potential conflicts as well as explore potential coping strategies. In Kenny's case, he benefited greatly from a teaching diploma program in terms of his knowledge building and identity development. Thus, university management may also consider providing special funding and teaching relief to help novice teacher educators (especially those without school teaching experiences) to take such practice-based programs, which cannot only help make up for their lack of teaching experience, but more importantly can strengthen their credibility and identities as teacher educators. At least, universities need to encourage and promote a close tie with local school communities to preempt possible identity deficits and crisis experienced by teacher educators who are under increasing research pressure in higher education settings.

While the findings show that the participants might be torn between their identities as teacher educator and academic researcher, it does not mean that teacher educators should stop doing research. Instead, practical research relating to teaching and teacher education should be promoted for new teacher educators as a crucial impetus for their identity construction. Nevertheless, this calls for understanding and support from university management to create a conducive environment where teacher education research can be valued in performance reviews and promotion exercises. As far as research outcomes and quality is concerned, a differentiated evaluation approach may be necessary in university settings. Compared to positivist experimental research, teacher education research, which are mostly practice-oriented and classroom-based, may require great time to be implemented for its impacts to novice teacher educators (especially those without school teaching experiences) to take such practice-based programs, which cannot only help make up for their lack of teaching experience, but more importantly can strengthen their credibility and identities as teacher educators. At least, universities need to encourage and promote a close tie with local school communities to preempt possible identity deficits and crisis experienced by teacher educators who are under increasing research pressure in higher education settings.

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Overall, the study shows that nontraditional teacher educators may experience identity tensions and struggle in higher education. However, with a reflective and agentive mind and sufficient contextual support, they may be able to turn their identity conflicts and deficits into positive and rewarding experiences and find (new) meaning in their teacher education work. The study has some

limitations. For instance, the data collection only lasted for a relatively short duration (one academic semester) and the data were only drawn from the teacher educators without exploring the perspectives of other important stakeholders (e.g., university administrators and teachers). Future research is suggested to adopt a longitudinal design and collect data from different stakeholders in order to fully capture the complex and situated processes of teacher educators' identity (re)construction.

Acknowledgement

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