Cross-border Pre-service Teachers in Hong Kong: 'To be or not to be integrated, that is the problem'

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This study uses the findings of discourse theory to explore the teaching identities of a group of mainland Chinese pre-service teachers of English in a Teacher Education Institute in Hong Kong. Exploring how the teaching identities are discursively constructed, the study suggests that 1) the pre-service teachers negotiate their own positions within multiple positionings from peers, students on teaching practicum and the broader enterprise of professional language teaching in Hong Kong; 2) they discursively construct their teaching identity as 'English language teachers with particular linguistic and cultural backgrounds' to gain legitimacy. The study extends understandings of the interconnected relations of discourse and identity in such contexts.

Keywords: Teaching identity; Discourse; Difference; Cross-border pre-service teachers; Chinese students

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Introduction

Hong Kong (HK), after over 150 years of British colonization, was returned to China in 1997 as a "Special Administrative Region" and granted the opportunity to retain its pre-existing economic and social systems. Cantonese is the dominant language spoken by 88.7% of the population, according to the 1996 By-Census (Tsui, 2004). English had a long history as the sole official language and; in fact, Cantonese only became the second and equal official language in 1974. Putonghua, the national language, has been increasingly used especially in business and official communication, and has become an important subject in most primary and secondary schools.

The current policy stipulates that HK education should produce citizens who are trilingual in Cantonese, Putonghua and English and biliterate in Chinese and English. As a result, all government and aided primary schools and three quarters of secondary schools have now adopted Chinese Medium of Instruction (CMI). However, a strong demand for English Medium of Instruction (EMI) has been expressed by the public not only because the government's aim to make HK a World City, but also because of very pragmatic attitude to the language held by HK people (Kirkpatrick & Chau, 2008; Li, 2002), who view it as path to success. This unique mix of Cantonese, Putonghua and English in HK education mirrors linguistic phenomena in HK that are more complex and diverse than in mainland China where Putonghua has always been the medium of instruction for all primary and secondary students.

China sends a large number of undergraduate and post-graduate students to English-medium universities abroad (Li & Bray, 2007). This includes a large number

of cross-border students studying at HK universities. As an example of the phenomenon, we might consider the situation in Hong Kong Institute of Education, the principal local teacher education institution, where in the English Department, in the academic year of 2005-2006, 7 out of 67 enrolled students were from mainland China. In the following two academic years, the proportion of the mainland students was 18.4% in the year 2006-2007 (31 out of 109), and 61.7% in 2007-2008 (74 out of 120). These mainland students were also allowed to seek employment in HK primary and secondary schools after graduation.

It may be argued that the increase in mainland Chinese students, who are potential English teachers in the local schools in HK, generates a complex scenario for the linguistic and cultural context in HK, and will change the demographic composition of teachers in the local schools in HK. Such a situation, however, may not be unique to HK due to the globalization of higher education and international migration (Gao & Trent, 2009). There is a need therefore to deepen the understanding of the experiences of the cross-border teachers working in host regions or countries.

This study aims to investigate the complexities of the professional development of a group of mainland Chinese pre-service teachers in a teacher education institute in HK. This study is hoped to shed lights on the teacher identity formation experienced by the cross-border teachers in other places of the world. The paper begins by briefly reviewing relevant studies on teacher identities. A framework for analyzing teacher identity is then outlined before the findings are presented and discussed.

Professional Teacher Identities

Teachers' professional identity has been regarded as an important component in teachers' development (Varghese, Morgan, Johnson & Johnson, 2005). While most

studies emphasize the personal dimension of identity formation, where identity refers to individuals' self-perception, knowledge and naming of themselves (Danielewicz, 2001), an increasing number of researchers have paid attention to the shaping effect of the professional context, the broader social and political context on teacher identity formation (e.g., Benson, in press; Miller Marsh, 2003). This has entailed a discussion concerning the interaction between the individual and the social in identity formation. For example, Coldron and Smith (1999) argue that teachers' professional identities are constituted by the choices they make in learning and teaching, whereas Moore, Edwards, Halpin and George (2002) stress the importance of the policies and institutions in restricting teachers' development. To overcome this dichotomy, agents in this study are viewed as being able to reflect upon and seek to create the social arrangements that facilitate the realization of their own particular interests and ambitions (Toohey and Norton, 2003). At the same time, social structure such as policies and institutions is seen as being always anterior to individulas so providing an enduring context for them. This approach suggests that, to present a holistic picture of identity formation, researchers need to consider both the micro-world of individuals' experiences and activities, and wider pre-existing social relationships and realities (Layder, 1993).

With some exceptions, studies of the formation of teacher identity have seldom focused on the inherent processes and its gestation has seldom been theorized as a learning process. While Merseth, Sommer and Dickstein's (2008) work is focused on how teacher identities were tempered, challenged, and strengthened by a twelve-week teaching practicum, Tsui (2007) looks at the teaching experience of an EFL teacher over an extended span of six years and reveals a complex interplay between the individual and the institutional context in identity formation. The long-

term development of teacher identity is also investigated in Lasky's (2005) work, which considers the teachers' identity development to be mediated by both the teachers' early professional training and the political and social context.

This brief review implies the necessity of addressing the interaction between the agency and structure in the developmental processes of identity formation. The theoretical framework this study employs is presented below.

Legitimacy, Identity and Discourse

To investigate how the teacher identities of the cross-border students are constructed, this study draws on Wenger's (1998) framework, Fairclough's (2003) critical discourse analysis, and Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) discourse theory. The communities of practice model (Wenger, 1998), which has been used by studies investigating the experiences of the novice teachers (Bathmaker and Avis 2005; Darling, 2001; Trent, 2010), views the process of learners' socialization into a given community as moving from 'legitimate peripheral participation' (LPP) to full participation. Initially, the newcomers need to gain legitimacy in order to make actual participation possible. Legitimacy is a prerequisite for newcomers to "be treated as potential members" since "only with legitimacy can all their inevitable stumblings and violations become opportunities for learning rather than cause for dismissal, neglect, or exclusion" (Wenger, 1998, 101). In the case of marginality, both non-participation and participation are involved. Marginality contains "a form of non-participation" that "prevents full participation" (Wenger, 1998, 165-166). Wenger (1998) investigates identity formation through three modes of belonging - engagement, imagination and alignment. Engagement involves participation in, and negotiation of meanings around, a shared practice. Whereas engagement focuses on the here and now of lived practice, imagination is capable of extending our

experiences beyond the boundaries of present time and space. Alignment bridges "time and space to form broader enterprises so that participants become connected through the coordination of their energies, actions, and practices" (Wenger, 1998, 179).

Wenger's theory of identity, emphasizing individuals' participation in social activities, enables us to account for identity construction in practice (Trent, 2010). However, a comprehensive understanding of teaching identity requires us to recognize that identity is constructed in both practice and discourse (Creese, 2005; Varghese et al. 2005). The mutually constitutive effect between language and identity has been recognized by poststructuralists (Weedon, 1997). Language is "the place where our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity, is constructed" (Weedon, 1997, 21) and people use (among other things) varieties of language to perform who we are (Pennycook, 2003). Researchers like Clarke (2008), Trent (2010), and Miller Marsh (2003) have emphasized the role of discourse in teacher identity formation. Fairclough's (2003, 2) approach to discourse analysis is founded upon "the assumption that language is an irreducible part of social life, dialectically interconnected with other elements of social life", and hence "social analysis and research always has to take account of language". For exploring how teacher identity is constituted and constructed in discourse, the strategies of "legitimization" were considered, including authorization, which involves referring to "the authority of tradition, custom, law, and of persons in whom some kind of institutional authority is vested", rationalization, which involves referring to "the utility of institutionalized action, and to the knowledge society has constructed to endow them with cognitive validity", and moral evaluation, which involves referring to value systems

(Fairclough, 2003, 98). These strategies play important roles, both in establishing and cultivating belief systems and in justifying the elements related to social structures.

It is also important to explore the resistance or conflict when individuals respond to marginalism in the teacher identity construction (Clarke, 2008), because, for example, these phenomena can represent the attempt of the cross-border students to legitimate their own position within both the learning and the prospective working communities. As recognized by Bates (2008), one important goal of teacher education is to provide space of possibility for the retransformation of pedagogical practices through fostering critical reflection and explorations of diversity. Laclau and Mouffe (1985) theorize on the construction of antagonistic relations in political processes through the logic of equivalence, which "consists in the dissolution of the particular identities of subjects within a discourse by the creation of a purely negative identity that is seen to threaten them" (Howarth, 2000, 107). The concept of social antagonism has been considered in examining the potential for resistance and conflict in identity formation (e.g., Author, 2009, 2010; Clarke, 2008).

To achieve a better understanding of the discursive strategies that a group of pre-service teachers from mainland China adopt to establish their identities as English language teachers, I employ Wenger's (1998) model to explore teacher identity in practice, and draw on Fairclough's (2003) critical discourse analysis, and Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) discourse theory to investigate teacher identity in discourse. Based upon the theoretical framework discussed in this section, this study attempts to address the following question:

How is teacher identity constructed by cross-border students from mainland China in an English Teacher Education program in HK?

The Study

Participants and data collection

The HK Institute of Education (HKIEd) offers a four-year Bachelor of Education (English Language) degree programme. The introduction of participating HKIEd student teachers to school experience is gradual and supportive, starting in the early years with visits and attachments. The teaching practicum represents an integral part of the B-Ed programme. At HKIEd, students undertake two practicums — one of six weeks in their third academic year and one of eight weeks in their fourth year, shortly before graduation. Most students intend to become either primary or secondary English teachers, according to their own individual preferences.

I was interested in finding out the developmental process of the pre-service teachers' identities over the university period. Therefore, this inquiry focused on year 4 students and involved all undergraduates from mainland China in the fourth-year cohort in English Department in the academic year of 2008-2009. Table 1 summarizes the profile of the seven participants. The names are all pseudonyms.

[Insert table 1 here]

As can be seen from the Table, the participants, from a number of provinces and regions in China, well represent the mainland Chinese population at HKIEd.

I adopted an in-depth narrative interview approach in order to gain understanding of participants' experiences through their retrospective accounts (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). Rather than being broad-sweeping life stories, the interviews focused on a limited range of topics and thus provide referential accounts of specific English learning and teaching training experiences at HKIEd and elsewhere(Barkhuizen and de Klerk, 2006; Wengraf, 2001). There were three rounds of individual interviews at the intervals of three months, each one of which lasted

about one hour. The first two interviews were focused on the students' teaching identity development, and the third one on confirmation and clarification of the preliminary findings emanating from a preliminary analysis of data from the earlier interviews. These exchanges were conducted in Mandarin, the students' mother tongue in order to reduce or eliminate any possible misunderstandings or infelicities that might be occasioned by the use of a second language and to preserve the participants' own personal perspectives.

Data analysis

As soon as an interview was conducted, the data would be subject to preliminary analysis; this initial analysis often generated new questions, which were then posed in subsequent interviews. Analysis of the data was a gradually evolving process in which I moved between the dataset and literature on identity until some themes that potentially answer the research question emerged (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Therefore, these themes were constructed from the data rather than rather than pre-determined by the theoretical framework. In this sense, these themes represent "indigenous concepts" (Patton, 2001) initiated by the participants. For instance, the development of an 'indigenous concept' is illustrated below:

> I hope I can uitilize my mainland background and learning experiences in HK and abroad and become a teacher with multicultural awareness and multilingual ability. So I can guide my students to develop an open mind to the outer world. (Shanshan, Interview 2)

In the above extract, Shanshan imagines herself as "a teacher with multicultural awareness and multilingual ability" by directing naming the identity position. Fairclough's (2003) theory was then used to explore how identity was constructed through language in use. The strategy she utilizes to legitimate her position in HK

schools is rationalization. She invokes the utility: “So I can guide my students to develop an open mind to the outer world”.

As recurring patterns that seemed relevant to addressing the research question were identified, theoretical categories were developed, informed by the theoretical framework outlined above with the aim of developing a coherent understanding of teacher identity construction of these participants. The coded categories were then tested against data until they were modified and confirmed (Patton, 2001). Examples of these categories were ‘gaining legitimacy in a learning community’ and ‘self-positioning in a language teaching profession’, which were associated with the notions of ‘legitimacy’ and ‘imagination’ in the CoP model (Wenger, 1998). Discourse theory was then used to provide a deeper understanding of how the student teachers’ identities were constructed. Findings were consulted with participants to seek their interpretations before further refinements were made.

The Findings

Three major categories relating to the cross-border pre-service teachers’ construction of identity were identified: gaining legitimacy in a learning community, teacher identity formation in the teaching practicum, self-positioning in a language teaching profession. A graduated development process may be inherent in these three categories; the participants gradually saw beyond their immediate learning community and the context of teaching in classrooms to connect themselves to the broader enterprise of the language teaching profession in HK and made attempted to gain a place within this profession. Each of these is discussed separately, but they are clearly inter-related.'

Gaining legitimacy in a learning community

It seems that in legitimating their teacher identity in the learning community, the participants adopted discursive strategies including legitimating beliefs (Fairclough, 2003) and logic of equivalence (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). They advocated discourses of wide exposure to various activities and cultures justified on the basis of the teacher being a key feature influencing students. The following excerpt illustrates this view:

> Teaching can have essential impacts on students' development no matter where the teaching takes place, in HK or the mainland. I don't want to mislead the students. So I have kept on learning new things about both English and English teaching, and improved myself all round. (Yawen)

Yawen drew on the shared values that "teaching can have essential impacts on students' development" in all contexts, wherever the teaching takes place, to position herself in the general discourse of the teaching profession. Rationalization, one of the legitimating strategies proposed by Fairclough (2003), was of relevance here. Yawen explained the utility of her continuous learning of English, and self-improvement: "I don't want to mislead the students".

Although mainland pre-service teachers managed to legitimate their position in this learning community through working hard on learning English and being among the high-achieving students, acquiring Cantonese, participating in extracurricular activities and making efforts in their all-round development, they also established differences between the mainland and HK student majority. The following extracts are representative of the mainland participants' views of their relations with local peers:

> We have good relationships among the seven mainland students in the program. We have similar backgrounds and experiences of growing up. We have a lot of common topics and can understand each other well. For example, they think that the good discipline in mainland middle school is because of lack of democracy and autonomy, but for us, we believe that students should respect the teachers and that young people should respect their seniors. It is a virtue we should always advocate. (Yani, interview 1)
> HK students usually rush to submit assignments just before the deadline. We mainland students usually do a lot of research and finish the work in advance. I think as a teacher, I always hope that the students can take their assignments seriously. (Li, interview 1)

It seems that in the above extract the participant constructed two opposing teaching identities in opposition. On the one hand, “they” or “HK students” tended to dismiss the good discipline in mainland classrooms as a symbol of an absence of democracy and autonomy, and rushed their assignments; on the other hand, “we” or “mainland students” advocated respect for teachers in the classroom, and placed emphasis on a serious, studious attitude to work. Through this discursive strategy, the participants constructed an ‘otherization’ of ‘them’ when talking about HK students.

Apart from the above differences and disparities, one further major difference, according to the participants, between HK students and themselves existed. This concerned views on what constituted the most effective forms of academic and professional preparation for future teaching. For example, the following extract is typical of the comments furnished by mainland students:

> We have tried to utilise as many of the learning resources as possible, including the internship overseas, leadership training, English speech contests, voluntary teaching etc. I believe it will strengthen our teaching because in my experience all students love the teachers who are resourceful and eager to try new things. But maybe most HK students do not think self-improvement is critical for being a good teacher because they spend all their spare time taking up tutoring jobs to earn money. I read an article indicating that people cannot really enhance their ability from such repetitive simple work. (Keli, interview 2)

In the above extract, comparing mainland and HK students’ different ways of seeking self improvement outside of the classroom, Keli felt that tutoring work was unproductive and chose rather to participate in extracurricular activities. Keli legitimated her utilization of all kinds of learning resources by referring to the authority associated with her own experience and to some research findings which suggest that people could not be cognitively enhanced by performing only simple repetitive tasks. This is an example of legitimation through authorization (Fairclough, 2003). By using ‘we’ and ‘they’, Keli constructed two groups holding two differing belief systems regarding teaching and learning. Exploring whether there are other

reasons that may explain the contrast existing between mainland and HK students in the attitudes towards taking up tutoring jobs, I found that the different financial status is also an important reason. According to the participants, five of them could get sufficient financial support from their families and the remaining two had obtained scholarships which could cover their tuition fee and living expenses. Consequently, they could afford to take the learning opportunities open to them without having to work; while most HK students, without family support and grants, had to work to sustain their study.

In the above extracts, the participants established a logic of difference while constructing their teaching identities. Stating that they had gained legitimacy in the learning community, the mainland participants pointed out that they did not actually merge with the HK group. They identified more with their mainland peers in terms of core values and tended to make friends within mainland group. In the following section, I move to the locale of teaching practicum (TP) and explore how the participants believed they were positioned by the pupils on TP, and how they then discursively positioned themselves.

Teacher identity formation in the teaching practicum

For the pre-service teachers from mainland, the TP was their first chance to get to know the pedagogical practices in English classrooms of HK secondary schools and to engage in regular communication with HK students. Recalling their first TP in year 3, the participants mentioned that their nonstandard Cantonese somewhat impeded them in effectively teaching and communicating with the students. The following extracts are representative of how they were positioned by the students due to their accented Cantonese:

> There is accent in our Cantonese which can easily be recognized by others. Speaking Cantonese with them meant disclosing my mainland background. The students would laugh at me and think I knew little about the local school. They would think my English was not good enough. They would be more uncontrollable (Li, interview 1).
> I didn't tell the students I was from mainland and I just pretended that I could not speak Chinese and they thought I was an ABC, which made things much easier. (Yani, Interview 1)

In Li's account, HK middle school students tended to position mainland teachers as having little knowledge about the local schools and as being not proficient enough in English. As a result, the discipline problem became more acute. By intentionally concealing her mainland identity and pretending to be an American-Born-Chinese (ABC), a more neutral or passive reaction was induced in Yani's account. This antagonism may in some sense reflect the power relations between Putonghua and English in the worldwide linguistic market. Being an ABC, and hence possessing limited local experience, was less likely to evoke a negative, or prejudiced reaction.

A developmental process also became evident in the participants' self-positioning. During the second TP in year 4, the participants made conscious attempts to establish an identity as a professional language teacher. The following extracts are representative of their views:

> I put aside the fact that I had no local experience and just tried my best to set up a professional teaching image. To me, creating an environment that heightened inquisitiveness was the first and foremost matter when teaching students who had low motivation to learn English. I always reminded myself to step into the students' shoes and provide sufficient and appropriate language support… Being enthusiastic and positive was my teaching style, and that contributed to student success. (Yawen, interview 2)
> The class I taught had quite a lot of NACS (New Arrivals from China). They are usually from low-income families and can only speak Putonghua. Lacking sufficient parental guidance and support, they were amotivated learners and tended to easily lose track. I talked to them after class and helped them solve problems. My own mainland background shortened the distance between us. In this way I gradually gained their trust and respect. They improved their performance in class. (Keli, interview 2)

We may find that Yawen provided an example of how the participants legitimated their status through rationalization, when teaching in the HK secondary school context, a completely new and somewhat alien environment. To do this she explained the utility of her teaching strategies and approach in enhancing students' learning

motivation, these clearly contributing to better learning on the part of the students. Keli emphasized the particular advantages bestowed by her mainland background and legitimated her identity by invoking its value in the form of the students' improved performance in class. By deliberating upon and stressing the strategies they adopted in the classroom to facilitate effective teaching and learning, the particular value of being a teacher of mainland origin and the resulting improvement in students' performance became a salient feature of her teaching style. In this way, the participants exercised their agency to construct a professional teaching identity that compensated for their lack of knowledge of local schools. In the following section, I explore how the participants moved beyond the immediate teaching context and positioned themselves in the broader setting of HK.

Self-positioning in a language teaching profession

The experience of TP made the participants realize that teaching in HK was a challenging job. Among the seven mainland students, five chose to teach in HK and the other two decided to pursue master's degree courses in HK after graduation, the eventual acquisition of a permanent HK Identity Card being an important reason for them to stay in HK for at least another three years. Asked why so much importance was attached to a permanent HKID in their future planning, they specified a number of reasons: for example, HK passport holders can travel to most countries in the world without a visa; HK passport holders are given a study visa to the US much more easily than to mainland Chinese passport holders. They also mentioned that HK is a desirable place to live and work because of its "convenient transportation", "good social system", "pleasant natural environment", and "sufficient teacher training opportunities" (Han, interview 1).

The five students who are going to work in local schools upon graduation imagined of their teaching identity in the following way:

> National education is necessary in HK. Although HK is a metropolis, some people's vision is narrow and values are distorted. For example, some people regard everything related to the mainland as underdeveloped and believe people have no freedom and are leading a very impoverished life there. The funny thing is that those who make such claims have never been to the mainland. I will introduce the students to real mainland China, where like anywhere else, there are both laudable and less laudable. I hope I can teach them not only English knowledge but also how to think and analyse things. This will definitely help enhance their English learning. (Keli, interview 2)

Keli showed her ability to see beyond the immediate learning context and to position herself in the broader context of HK. Also, Keli provided an example of how cross-border students employ rationalization, the utility of a course of action (Fairclough, 2003) to legitimate their beliefs and to discursively construct their teaching identity. Utility was invoked in the expression, "which will definitely help enhance their English learning" and their identity as an English teacher with a mainland background was legitimated in HK classrooms.

Both the students who decided to pursue master's degree chose Chinese-related programs. One will enroll in a translation program after graduation, and the other in a Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language program. They imagined of working in secondary schools in HK after their postgraduate studies and legitimated their choices through authorization, moral evaluation and rationalization. The participants' discursive strategies appear in the following extracts:

> I will study translation because I think I can enhance my knowledge and proficiency in both Chinese and English. We have a better foundation in Chinese than HK students. One lecturer told us that recent research found the first and the second language learning are inherently related. Anyway the postgraduate studies in translation will be good for my teaching. (Yawen, interview 2)
>
> I chose Teaching Chinese as a foreign language for three reasons. First, Putonghua has become more and more popular and important throughout the world. Second, I have got a Bachelor in Education in English. Some knowledge and training in Chinese teaching will broaden my teaching career path. Third, having Putonghua as my first language and knowing China so well, I am in an advantageous position in this program compared with HK students. (Shanshan, interview 2)

Yawen legitimated her choice through authorization, by reference to an authority, which could be tradition, custom, law or persons who hold an advantage or have expertise in a certain field (Fairclough, 2003). As such, she emphasized her higher proficiency in Chinese as compared with her HK peers and derived the legitimacy of her potential advantage in teaching English from her lecturer who had cited research findings suggesting that the first and the second language learning are inherently related. Anther legitimating strategy, rationalization, was employed by both Yawen and Shanshan when they justified their choice, as they stated that their postgraduate studies would "be good for teaching" (Yawen) and "broaden my teaching career path" (Shanshan). Meanwhile, their mainland identity was construed in Yawen's use of first person pronoun "we" when comparing mainland and HK students, and in Shan's evaluative statement about Putonghua.

Despite the fact that they aspired to a HK passport, they pointed out that it would not alter their identification with mainland China. The comment of Yani is representative of the participants' views:

> I will always identify myself as a mainland Chinese rather than a Hankongese, even after I get the permanent HKID. I will always be an English teacher with a mainland Chinese background. My roots are in mainland China. I have childhood memories, a family and good friends there… People can sometimes slow down their steps and enjoy life. I like this feeling. But I didn't grow up in HK and I am not familiar with the traditions and customs. Everyone seems to be in a hurry and busy making money. (Yani, interview 2)

In Yani's comments, we find the co-existence of two seemingly contradictory identities in a single person: a mainland Chinese and a HK passport holder. Yani associates "roots" and "childhood memories", "family" and "best friends" with her self-identity as a mainland Chinese. This is further connected to her teaching identity, e.g., "I will always be an English teacher with a mainland Chinese background". Signaled by "but", Yani sets up a binary opposition between her identity position as a

mainland Chinese and a HK identity and construed her dis-identification with the 'race against time', materialistic lifestyle in HK.

Discussion

This study investigates the complex inter-relationships involved in the process of identity construction between marginal status and legitimate membership of the community, between the participants' historical and cultural background, present practice, and future expectations, and finally between social discourse and personal location. Focusing on the constitutive effects of discourse on identity (Fairclough, 2003; Phillips and Jorgensen, 2002), this study explores the discursive construction of teaching identities of a group of pre-service teachers. Consistent with other studies on teacher identity (e.g., Author, 2010; Clarke, 2008), the participants' teaching identities appear to be constructed through an ongoing process, involving identification and dis-identification, negotiation of meanings, and interaction between the individual and the social. The interplay between agency and structure reflects Davies and Harre's (1990)'s observation that individuals are being positioned within pre-existing social discourses and current social conversations, and in the meanwhile the individuals "are constantly in search of new social and linguistic resources which allow them to resist identities that position them in undesirable ways ...' (Pavlenko and Blackledge, 2004, 27).

In this case, however, the unique features of this group, i.e., their mainland Chinese origins, lack of the local experience, together with the historically and politically constructed relationship between HK and China, make their teacher identity formation a more complex process. As illustrated in Figure 1, the cross-

border pre-service teachers employ various discursive strategies in their struggle to construct a legitimate English teacher identity in HK.

[Insert figure 1 here]

In the learning community of the university, the participants strove for a legitimate position through working hard on learning English and becoming among the high-achieving students in the English Department, learning and using Cantonese in daily communication, utilizing the rich learning resources available on campus and participating in the various activities organized by the Student Affairs Office. All were academically high-achieving students and their experiences were greatly enriched through wide and frequent horizon-broadening interplay with the outside world. However, they established their own teacher identities through chains of equivalence between their beliefs and those of their HK peers and through some legitimating strategies. By highlighting the perceived characteristics of their HK peers, the participants 'otherize' the indifferent attitudes towards school students' disrespect of teachers in some HK classrooms, the apparent zeal for making money by taking up a plethora of tutoring jobs, and the habit of rushing for deadlines rather than making careful and comprehensive preparation for assignments. By constructing these differences, the students are able to contrast the alleged failings of the 'others' with their own teacher identity as people who regard respect for the esteemed teacher as a long cherished Chinese value, who stress self-improvement and who advocate a more serious attitude towards learning to teach.

In the authentic teaching context of HK schools, the participants showed a great deal of ability to author their identities. In order to gain legitimacy as English teachers with mainland backgrounds in the classroom, by means of rationalization and chains of equivalences, the participants weakened the effect of their lack of local

experience, but reverted to a professional English teacher identity by stressing the use of teaching strategies and the improved learning effects. Some of the participants concealed their mainland background during the TP for fear of students' laughing at them. This might be partially explained by the unequal power relations between Putonghua and English in HK. Although the HK government aims to develop HK citizen's trilingual proficiency in Cantonese, Putonghua and English, and although Putonghua is becoming instrumentally important in people's daily life for business and political communication between HK and Chinese mainland, Putonghua still tends to be regarded as less important, compared with English (Simpson, 2008). In HK, as perhaps also in other locations, English is rather like an economic commodity, affecting both the choices of people and institutions in the allocation of language education resources (Block and Cameron, 2002).

In imaginings about the future, the cross-border pre-service teachers established a strong connection to HK on the one hand, but stayed alienated from HK on the other. They identified a number of good points concerning living and working in HK, e.g., the convenient transportation, the relatively fair and transparent working environment and the provision of teacher training opportunities. They all decided to stay in HK for at least three more years after graduation in order to obtain a permanent HKID. However, they made a clear distinction between mainland Chinese teacher identity and HK teacher identity, emphasizing their differing historical and cultural heritage which may have positive effects on the students, and criticizing the apparent preoccupation with materialistic pursuits in HK. While recognizing that HK is more academically and economically advanced than most places on the mainland, the participants all tended towards a sense of cultural superiority, and felt as a

consequence somewhat reluctant to be assimilated into the HK group, a tendency that may militate against their full participation in teaching practice in HK.

This seemingly insuperable division that the participants make is likely to lead to their ignoring the positive aspects of the HK pre-service teachers. For example, in most cases, it is actually a financial necessity for HK pre-service teachers to take up tutoring jobs, although this also symbolizes their independence of their families' financial support. Therefore the participants' exclusionary adherence to the discourses that delineate the mainland way of teaching and their concomitant tendency to criticize HK classrooms or dismiss HK teaching approaches through the establishment and maintenance of binary oppositions, would benefit by being offered "insights into the contingency, partiality and fragility of all beliefs" (Clarke, 2005, 221). It would be desirable to foster the pre-service teachers' openness to and engagement with difference and diversity of others and guide them to move beyond characterizing which teaching is good or bad, but rather just see education, schools, teachers, teaching and learning from a wider socially discursive perspective (Clarke, 2008).

The findings indicate that the initial assumption that the governments' education policy of developing trilingualism in HK might give the cross-border students with trilingual competence a competitive edge, in fact proved unsustainable in their experience of TP. Their HK peers' negative impression of mainland China, the social status of Putonghua which has yet to be enhanced in HK and the absence of significant local experience identified by local students, still remain obstacles to full integration into the education system in HK. Although we can find that the students developed an increasing awareness of the importance of symbolic resources in establishing a legitimate teaching position, it would be desirable if the education policies and curriculum design could fully address, develop and exploit the

advantages of the proficiency in Putonghua and knowledge of mainland background of this particular group of students, to facilitate their fuller participation in the HK teaching profession.

It is important to note that although the participants (n=7) represent all the mainland Chinese students enrolled in the academic year of 2005-2006 in English Department in a teacher education institute in HK, the dataset is small. Later cohorts, given their increasing numbers, may be acting differently. For example, they may utilize their legitimate position in the mainland group whose number is comparable to that of HK group to establish an even clearer boundary of their first language group and a more stark opposition between mainland identity and HK identity; they may tend to stick within their group and have less motivation to interact with local students. This would be a subject for future research. Like this multilingual setting in this study, educational settings elsewhere with migrating students from different backgrounds are also likely to be faced with the questions as to how social networks can be established and sustained to facilitate language learning and knowledge sharing among students. Therefore, in spite of the relatively small number of the participants, this study sheds lights on the negotiation of and limitations on teaching identity formation of cross-border pre-service teachers and raises the question how the multicultural and multilingual complexities could be transformed into resources for the students. This study also suggests the existence and operation of interesting phenomena that merit the attention of researchers interested in cross-border pre-service teachers or in-service teachers worldwide.

Conclusion

By examining a group of cross-border pre-service teachers' experience, this study offers a way of thinking about teacher formation as a process of identity development. Drawing on discourse theory, this study recognizes the social and political nature of meaning and suggests some potential strategies for addressing some antagonistic oppositions established in the logic of equivalence. What's more, further research including exploring the interaction between cross-border and local students and investigating the beliefs and values of local pre-service teachers, policy makers, local secondary school teachers and students, to better understand how cross-border teachers are positioned by a wide rage of social agents. More might be revealed in a longitudinal study tracing the teacher identity development of those cross-border pre-service teachers after they start working in local secondary schools. Such efforts would provide insights into how to give full credit to the cross-border teachers' linguistic and cultural resources and how to promote greater collaboration between cross-border teachers, local teachers and schools.

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Table 1 The participants

No	Name	Place of Origin	Gender	Native languages
1	Han	Guangdong	F	Cantonese, Putonghua
2	Keli	Shandong	F	Putonghua
3	Wen	Fujian	F	Putonghua
4	Yawen	Guangdong	F	Cantonese, Putonghua
5	Li	Liaoning	F	Putonghua
6	Yani	Anhui	F	Putonghua
7	Shanshan	Heilongjiang	F	Putonghua

Figure 1 The discursive construction of cross-border pre-service teachers' teaching identity