

# A Narrative Inquiry of a Chinese Novice Teacher's Professional Identity Development

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## Abstract

This case study investigates the processes of the professional identity development of a Chinese novice teacher who is responsible for teaching Basic Chinese in a university in Thailand. The data was collected during her first teaching year. This is because the construction of her teacher identity and the perception of her roles as a teacher overseas may still be relatively new. Self-perception of the main roles or identities (Simmons et al, 1999 & Harmer, 2007, 2015) in different periods was used to spot this development. A wide range of internal and external factors (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009) was considered to identify the factors that affected her identity development. The data in a form of texts from interviews and the participant's teaching diaries were analyzed based on her narratives. The results show that the changes of her identities have taken place in the first teaching year since she mentioned that she adopted more roles in her second teaching semester. Besides, her beliefs and students' characteristics were highlighted as the most important internal and external factors. This study hopes to provide suggestions to teacher trainers and help novice teachers understand the complexity of the teacher's identity development. Moreover, novice teachers need to raise their awareness and be flexible to adjust their roles to accommodate the teaching environment around them.

**Keywords:** professional identity development/ novice teacher/ narrative inquiry

# การพัฒนาอัตลักษณ์ทางวิชาชีพของครูใหม่ชาวจีน โดยใช้การวิจัยแบบใช้เรื่องเล่า

## บทคัดย่อ

การศึกษารายกรณีครั้งนี้เป็นการศึกษากระบวนการพัฒนาอัตลักษณ์ทางวิชาชีพของครูใหม่ชาวจีนซึ่งเป็นอาจารย์ผู้สอนวิชาภาษาจีนพื้นฐานของมหาวิทยาลัยแห่งหนึ่งในประเทศไทย ผู้วิจัยได้เก็บข้อมูลในช่วงการสอนปีแรก โดยเห็นว่าการสร้างอัตลักษณ์ของความเป็นครู และการรับรู้บทบาทในฐานะครูต่างชาติที่ต้องมาทำการสอนในต่างแดนอาจยังเป็นสิ่งใหม่ สำหรับครูผู้สอน การรับรู้ดูตื่นเองเกี่ยวกับบทบาทหรืออัตลักษณ์หลัก (Simmons et al, 1999; Harmer, 2007, 2015) ในช่วงเวลาต่าง ๆ ถูกนำมาใช้เพื่อสังเกตการพัฒนาอัตลักษณ์ ในการทำวิจัยครั้งนี้ รวมไปถึงปัจจัยภายในและภายนอกที่หลักหลาย (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009) ได้รับการพิจารณาเพื่อระบุปัจจัยที่ส่งผลต่อการพัฒนาอัตลักษณ์ ข้อมูลจากการสัมภาษณ์และการบันทึกการสอนของครูใหม่นี้ ได้รับการวิเคราะห์โดยยึดตามเรื่องเล่าจากประสบการณ์ ผลการศึกษาแสดงให้เห็นว่าการเปลี่ยนแปลงอัตลักษณ์เกิดขึ้นในช่วงปีแรกของการสอน และยังกล่าวว่าผู้สอนใช้บทบาทการสอนต่างๆ เพิ่มมากขึ้นในการสอนของภาคศึกษาที่สอง นอกจากนี้ความเชื่อของครูผู้สอนและคุณลักษณะของนักศึกษาได้ถูกเน้นว่า เป็นปัจจัยภายในและภายนอกที่สำคัญที่สุด การศึกษาครั้งนี้หวังที่จะให้คำแนะนำแก่ครูใหม่ และช่วยให้อาจารย์ที่ทำหน้าที่ให้คำปรึกษาการสอนเข้าใจความซับซ้อนของการพัฒนาอัตลักษณ์ทางวิชาชีพครู นอกจากนี้ครูใหม่ยังจำเป็นต้องสร้างมีความตระหนักรู้และพร้อมที่จะยึดหยุ่นและปรับบทบาทการสอนเพื่อให้เหมาะสมกับสภาพแวดล้อมอีกด้วย

**คำสำคัญ:** การพัฒนาอัตลักษณ์ทางวิชาชีพ/ ครูใหม่/ การวิจัยแบบใช้เรื่องเล่า

## Rationale of the study:

### *What is identity?*

“Identity is our understanding of who we are and of who we think other people are” (Danielewicz, 2001). Gee (2000) also defines identity as a type of persons which individuals choose to be in a particular context. Wenger (1998) suggests that we are always in a state of becoming a certain kind of person. What type of person we want to become has influences on the decisions we make about our lives, and it is our identity that helps us to set goals and directs where we are headed.

Professional identity is regarded as a component of multiple perspectives of a person’s identity (Gee, 2001). In other words, the self plays a role with the commitment competently and legitimately in the context related to their jobs or their professions, and keeps going to develop themselves in individual future careers (Tana, Molenb & Schmidt, 2016). The person’s identity comes from one’s social position, one’s interactions with others and one’s interpretations of his or her experiences (Gee, 2001; Geijssel & Meijers, 2005). Identity is not a fixed personal attribute, but a social attribute which means that “each stage has its own characteristics regarding the individual’s interactions with his or her environment” (Beijaard, Meijer & Verloop, 2004). It is dynamically negotiated and socially constructed (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Gee, 2001), and it is regarded as a continuing process of interpreting oneself to be a certain “kind of person” and being recognized as such within a given context (Gee, 2001).

The concept of professional identity is used in different ways in the field of teaching and teacher education. Teacher identity, as one type of identity, has been variously defined (Beijaard et al., 2004). Sachs (2005) proposes that teacher identity provides a framework for teachers to construct their own ideas of how to be, how to act, and how to understand their work and their place in society. Moreover, teacher identity plays an important role in decisions teachers make about their teaching practices, the content they teach, the kind of relationships they build up with their students (Beijaard et al., 2004), the effort where they can make, and the professional development opportunities whether and how they explore ( Hammerness, Darling-

Hammond & Bransford, 2005). As can be seen, teacher identity not only determines the way they teach and their attitudes toward their job, but also influences their future professional development.

Teachers' identity development is believed to be influenced by a wide range of internal and external factors (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Based on the previous research analysis, the internal factors include teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards teaching and being a teacher, knowledge of curriculum goals and their classroom interpretation, prior experiences, educational background, and emotions in the teaching (Chong & Low, 2009; Day, Kington, Stobart & Sammons, 2006; Zembylas, 2003). External factors refer to the national curriculum, national educational reform publications, public expectations, school cultural context and students (Jansen, 2003; Jita & Vandeyar, 2006; Onwu & Mogari, 2004; Proweller & Mitchener, 2004).

Therefore, it is interesting to explore how novice teachers have tried to enter the teaching profession, and form their professional identity, particularly in the context where they are not familiar with. Through the process of reflections by using narrative inquiry, we may see and understand their emerging professional identity. With this result, educators or teacher trainers may be able to facilitate and accommodate the path in their teaching career and they eventually develop as effective teachers in the future.

### ***Novice teachers and Chinese teaching***

For novice teachers, Farrell (2009) proposes that they are sometimes called newly qualified teachers (NQTs) and usually defined as teachers who have finished their teacher-education program (including the practicum) and have just started their teaching career in an educational institution. Novice teachers are constructing a collective self or a professional self while they are learning to teach (Danielewicz, 2001). Their first year of learning to teach is very important, because during the first teaching year, novice teachers usually come across many challenges (Farrell, 2009), as the first year of teaching has been called an "unpredictable and idiosyncratic activity" (Johnson, 2002). Moreover, teaching in the first year will cause novice teachers' anxiety, as they have to balance between learning how to teach and trying to perform

an identity as a “real” teacher in a given school context (Farrell, 2009). Also, they experience the “reality shock”, as they are making a transition from teacher education programs to the first year of teaching (Flores & Day, 2006; Keys, 2007; Whitelaw, 2007).

For novice teachers, teacher identity is very important, since it could reflect their pedagogical knowledge, expectations and possibly different kinds of challenges that they may encounter in their real teaching practice as a new teacher (Astuti, 2010).

In the past few decades, teachers’ mobility has increased because of the globalization and internationalization process in education (Sun, 2012). The field of foreign language teaching and learning is also facing this truth. Due to the increasing demand for learning Chinese, Chinese as a Foreign Language is being taught worldwide (Wang, Moloney, & Li, 2013). The increase in the number of Chinese language programs has led to the need for more Chinese teachers. In order to meet this need, many universities set a special major called Teaching Chinese to Speakers of Other Languages to train the international Chinese language teachers in China. Besides, a program named Chinese National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language was established to provide more opportunities for Chinese teachers to teach Chinese overseas. Novice teachers, then have been sent out to several countries in the world to teach Chinese. They embark on their first or second year of teaching Chinese as a foreign language overseas and strive to apply what they have learned in a real teaching situation.

### *Teacher’s Profession Identity and Narrative Inquiry*

Many researchers and scholars have paid attention to how novice teachers cope with their teaching career. For example, Flores & Day (2006) conducted a longitudinal study of teachers’ professional identities in the early years of teaching. They analyzed key influences upon the ways in which new teachers’ identities are shaped and reshaped over time. Through their own perceptions, analyses of the school cultures in which they work and their pupils’ views it reveals how the interplay between contextual, cultural and biographical factors affects their teaching practices. Teachers’ personal

and professional histories and pre-service training, alongside issues of school culture and leadership, emerge as stronger mediating influences in determining the kinds and relative stability and instability of professional identities which teachers develop in the early years of teaching and thus the kinds of teachers they become and their effectiveness.

Similarly, Teng (2018) explored how four student teachers take control of their teaching, conduct agentic behavior, and negotiate identities in the Chinese EFL context. Data included interviews, school documents, participants' practicum reports, and lesson plans. Findings revealed that EFL student teachers encountered constraints related to the school curriculum, evaluation mechanisms, and social settings. Constraints affected their capacity to negotiate the gap between reality and ideals and fostered changes and innovations in teaching. These forces, influenced by the social, institutional, and physical settings, also affected the formation of their identities. The different development trajectories during the teaching practicums were found to be related to teacher autonomy, teacher agency, and teacher identity.

It could be seen that teacher identity is multifaceted and dynamic and understanding teacher identity is important to language teaching and learning. One of the research methods which can help us see and understand the formation and development of teacher identity is narrative inquiry. According to Connelly & Clandinin, 2000), it is the study of the ways human experiences the world. At the heart of narrative inquiry is a story or a collection of stories (Murray, 2009). It has been used to explore identity by several scholars such as Benson, Chik, & Lam, (2003); Kanno (2003); and Norton (2000). This approach is used from the perspective of the interpretive methodologies by interviewing, observing and involving participants into research process to obtain the stories of the participants. In educational research, narrative inquiry has been used as a tool for collecting data since it is proved to be a good research tool for participant observation and autobiographical studies (Sudtho, 2017).

As mention earlier that being teachers in other countries, novice teachers have to learn how to teach when facing a new environment. During their learning to teach, they are essentially formulating conceptions of "self-

as-teacher” and developing their identities (Farrell, 2009). This study, therefore, aims to find out how the novice teachers develop their teachers’ professional identities and the factors which may influence their professional identities development by using narrative inquiry. The researcher hopes that the findings of this study will help Chinese teacher educators better understand how Chinese novice teachers’ professional identities develop during the first year teaching, and contribute to their decision-making about how to develop and implement programs so as to help novice teachers go through a productive process of developing their professional identities.

### **Purposes of the study:**

The researcher aims to answer these two research questions:

1. How does the participant develop professional identity?
2. What are the factors that influence the participant’s professional identity development?

### **Participant and context:**

The participant of this study is a Chinese teacher who teaches Chinese at one of the public universities in Thailand. She just graduated from the master’s degree in China in 2018, majoring in Teaching Chinese to Speakers of Other Languages. She had not taken a job in a school or an educational institution before she came to Thailand and this was her first time to teach Chinese in Thailand. She was willing to be the participant of this study. For this study, the pseudonym of this participant is Mo Li.

Her teaching started from the first semester 2018 and lasted for a year. In the first semester, she taught two classes a week, and in the second semester, she taught three classes a week. Chinese was an elective course in the university, and students who were all Thai had this course once a week. Each lesson lasted three hours. Students were from different faculties, such as Engineering and Science. Each class consisted of about 25 male and female students in total. Most of the students’ Chinese proficiency was considered to be at lower intermediate, some of whom just started studying Chinese from this course. The participant taught LNG 351 Basic Chinese I for

both semesters. This course aimed to equip students with basic Chinese skills. The focus was to improve students' vocabulary, listening skills, speaking skills, and reading skills. The participant needed to prepare lessons to engage students in various activities such as drills, practice, games, and role-play. Besides, she was responsible to write the quizzes, mid-term exam and final exam papers.

### **Research method:**

In order to see the development of participant professional identity and factors that influence the development, narrative inquiry is used as a tool to investigate the participant's experiences. The data comes from the series of interviews and diaries which were gathered from November, 2018 to March, 2019.

1) The diary is used as a main instrument for this study. The participant was encouraged to write diary entries in Chinese every week. They allowed the researcher to gain an insight into the participant's professional identity development and the factors influencing this development. She had to describe her teaching experiences which included what actually happened in class, how she dealt with it and some interesting incidents which impressed her.

2) The semi-structured interview conducted in Chinese is used as a supporting instrument. After collecting the participant's diary, the researcher read and identified the important events and interesting incidents about her teaching in the diary every week. After that, a list of possible questions was prepared to have an interview with the participant, aiming to have an in-depth understanding of how the participant's identity changed and the main factors influencing this change. Semi-structure interviews were conducted every week from November, 2018 to March, 2019. This process lasted about 30 minutes each time.

Altogether, there are 10 diary entries and 10 transcripts of the interviews.

## **Data Analysis**

### **1) Data from the diaries**

Data from diaries was transcribed and analyzed qualitatively, having an insight of how the novice teacher developed her teacher professional identity and the factors influencing her professional identity development. The researcher looked for the key words about roles of the teacher, factors and reasons of what she did in the classes, and feelings about her teaching from the transcriptions, and then grouped them according to these different themes.

### **2) Data from the semi-structured interviews**

The interviewing records were transcribed and the researcher looked for how the participant told her story of her identity development. Set 1 questions provided the information about the participant's background knowledge. For the set 2 questions, the researcher found out the key words about the roles of the teacher, factors and reasons of what she did in the classes, and feelings about her teaching. The data from semi-structure interview supported the data from diaries and helped to explore how the participant developed her teacher identity and the factors influencing her professional identity development.

Since this study was data-driven, the researcher started the research procedure by reading through the transcriptions and identifying key words which could represent teacher's roles and identities. Then she reviewed some relevant literatures and research studies to find out more about the concepts, or definitions of teacher's roles or teacher's identities as suggested by some scholars in the field. For this study, Simmons et al (1991) and Harmer (2007) were chosen as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1. Definitions of teacher's identities**

Teacher Identity	Definition	Sources
Collaborator	The teacher works jointly with students by sharing knowledge and interacting to each other.	Simmons et al (1999)
Assessor	The teacher assumes this role to see how well students are performing or how well they performed. Feedback and correction are organized and carried out.	Harmer, J. (2007)
Facilitator	The teacher who is democratic rather than autocratic, and one who fosters learner autonomy through the use of group and pair work and by acting as more of a resource than a transmitter of knowledge.	Harmer, J. (2007)
Harmony keeper	The teacher uses different teaching techniques to build a harmonious relationship with students and create a harmonious classroom atmosphere.	Created by the researcher and her supervisor

## Findings

### Story 1 (Semester 1)

At the first semester of Mo Li's teaching, in general, she was satisfied with her teaching. From the perspectives of students, she said that she built a good relationship with students and her teaching was recognized by the students. Moreover, in terms of teaching effectiveness, she achieved her teaching objectives and most students got good grades in exams. Besides, for herself, she thought "she made a good progress in teaching". At the beginning of her teaching, especially in her first lesson, she started her teaching with anxiety, as she said that "I was facing a totally unfamiliar teaching environment and especially teaching subjects, so I felt a little

nervous". However, she could adapt herself to the teaching environment gradually, as to what she mentioned "as knowing more and more about the teaching environment, such as students and teaching materials, I could prepare myself and lesson plans better and better, so I was not that nervous and was able to enjoy teaching in class gradually."

### ***Identity 1: A harmony keeper***

Based on the situation described above, for Semester 1, Mo Li particularly defined herself as a harmony keeper. She mentioned that she wanted to build a good relationship with students and create a harmonious rapport in the classroom. She tried to know her students' interest, as she said "I know students like pop songs when I talked with my students, so I decided to play Chinese pop songs for them during break time." Moreover, she organized some fun activities to foster students' interest in learning Chinese, such as "Food squat", "Scene Play", "Cowboys and Cowgirls" and so on. By doing this, she said that not only could she take as good care as possible of every student, building a harmonious relationship with them, but students can also learn Chinese in a relaxed and pleasant atmosphere.

From the interviews, she put emphasis on three main factors which led her to become a harmony keeper. They were students' characteristics and the influence from her previous teachers. She also mentioned that she had an outgoing, active and easy-going personality.

The first factor was her personality as she mentioned:

*"I think I am outgoing, active and easygoing. Also, I like to play games. So in the class, I'd like to do some activities and create some special activities for my students."*

*(interview set1)*

Her personality fundamentally affected how she reacted in the teaching context. She preferred an active atmosphere in the class, so she designed activities and created games for students to play and join in the class; she is a kind and friendly person, so she had good attitudes and

manners towards students to build a close and harmonious relationship with them.

Besides, students' characteristics had an effect on her in how she constructed her role as a "harmony keeper":

*"Most of my students are active and lovely. So, I think a friendly and harmonious teaching atmosphere is more suitable for them."*

*(interview set1)*

Considering students who were active, kind and lovely, Mo Li decided to create an active rapport in the class. She felt that the teaching style in which the teacher mechanically moved from one assignment to the next in a dull atmosphere might not be an appropriate approach to teach them. Moreover, she thought that students were so active and lovely, so she needed to build a friendly and harmonious relationship with them instead of a serious and tense relationship.

Moreover, her previous teachers had some influences on her as she recalled:

*"When I was a student, I met many teachers who were able to establish a harmonious relationship with students and had a good attitude towards students to create a relaxing and harmonious atmosphere in the class. I think this kind of class is better for students to learn and improve their learning efficiency as well as develop their initiative and interest in learning."*

*(interview set 1)*

The excerpt suggests that her previous teachers gave her a good demonstration. Their good attitude towards students and creating a harmonious atmosphere in class could motivate students to study and raise their interest in learning. As a student at that time, she felt that this atmosphere was good for her study, as she mentioned that "teachers were so nice and I respected them, so I was willing to listen to their lessons". Besides, a good atmosphere in the class helped her "learn in a relaxing

state” . Learning from her previous teachers, now, as a teacher, she also wanted to be a teacher who could keep a close and harmonious relationship with students.

### ***Identity 2: An assessor***

Another important role that the participant took up was an assessor. She paid more attention to correcting and assessing the accuracy of her students’ language. Once she found students were not able to pronounce well in the class, she spent time correcting students’ pronunciation one by one as she mentioned. Moreover, she usually “ talked about students’ mistakes at the beginning of the class”, if she found some mistakes in their homework or quiz.

The main factor which influenced her to become an assessor was her belief:

*“When students start learning Chinese, I think they should learn authentic and standard Chinese. So I was strict at students’ pronunciation accuracy.”*

*(interview set 1)*

Mo Li held a belief about transmission of the knowledge, as she mentioned above that she would like to have students learn authentic and standard Chinese from the beginning of their studying, so she focused on the accuracy of language they were studying, and emphasized their basic Chinese knowledge and skills, such as pronunciation and characters writing.

### **Story 2 (Semester 2)**

The data of story 2 came from Mo Li’ s a series of diaries and interviews which were collected from the beginning to mid of the semester. In her diaries and interviews, she mentioned quite often that she was “ a democratic teacher” . She also emphasized that she focused on correcting students’ mistakes about pronunciation, tones and Chinese characteristics, as she mentioned a lot that “I was strict on students’ pronunciation and helped them to correct their mistakes” . Moreover, she was willing to work with students as she let students write down their learning needs which

contributed to her lessons planning. By considering students' learning needs, she felt "more confident to plan the lessons". She also considered the relationship with the students. Apart from organizing various activities in classes, she used other teaching techniques such as "giving awards to students" and creating interaction in Thai with them. Therefore, she stated that she was a facilitator, an assessor, a collaborator and a harmony keeper.

### *Identity 1: A facilitator*

Most importantly, she viewed herself as a facilitator in her diaries and interviews. She described herself as a democratic teacher frequently. "Democratic teacher" to Mo Li meant that a teacher who would like to create a student-centered class, sharing control for learning with students and using group or pair work to facilitate students to learn in the class. As she mentioned that:

*"When I had students introduce themselves, I did not give them a fixed pattern...I just let them introduce themselves by their styles.*

*(1st week interview)*

*"I organized students to play a game... I had them group by themselves and practice freely in group first. After that, I invited volunteers to have a competition in front of the class."*

*(2nd week diary)*

These two excerpts indicate that she organized activities with less control and gave students freedom to join the activities rather than controlled everything in the class, such as the pattern of students' introduction and the ways of students grouping themselves and joining the competition.

Moreover, she said that she was not an exact lecturer to transmit knowledge. She preferred to use pair work or group work to help students develop their learning autonomy.

*“In this activity, students grouped themselves into a group of 5 to ‘open a drink shop’. Each ‘shop’ needs to make their own menu... Each group can use their phone to search more words about drinks and more sentences about selling and buying drinks in the shop... If they have any questions, they can ask me to help them.*

*(5th week diary)*

She created a student-centered class where students were given a chance and responsibility to search for content they needed and they had to learn by themselves rather than by relying on her lectures. Mo Li played a role of a “facilitator” to answer their questions and to help them explore knowledge instead of being a “knowledge transmitter”.

The main factor which influenced her to be a facilitator was students’ characteristics as manifested in the following extract:

*“They have their own initiative and cognitive ability to search what they want to learn. They lived in a digital age, and they are good at using their phones, tablets and computers to search information.”*

*(5th week interview)*

In the excerpts, Mo Li mentioned that her undergraduate students had their own individualities, ideas and free thinking. Besides, they had their ability to judge, make a decision, and express their opinions. Therefore, she took an action to create a student-centered classroom where students were given opportunities and responsibilities to explore learning resources in collaborative work. “Students have done a very good job in this activity” Mo Li said. She described her students that “They were all actively involved in this activity”, “They searched new words on their phone initiatively”, and “They also had a warm discussion in their group”. It can be seen that students enjoyed this kind of class.

## *Identify 2: An assessor*

Mo Li referred to herself as an assessor who focused more on helping students correct their mistakes in terms of pronunciation, intonation and Chinese character writing. The main factor which led her to become an assessor was her belief.

Being an assessor, what she mentioned most was when she helped them correct their language mistakes as a language model.

*“Once I found some students cannot pronounce correctly, I would help them correct immediately. I would demonstrate how to pronounce the sound first, and then let them do intensive pronunciation exercise.”*

*(2nd week diary)*

*“For some sounds which certain students cannot pronounce appropriately, I would use my hands as phonatory organs to help students understand how to pronounce these sounds, and then I corrected pronunciation by individuals and the whole class together.”*

*(3rd week diary)*

These two excerpts show that Mo Li was strict with her professional knowledge and she was willing to use her knowledge to help students, as she devoted herself to evaluate the accuracy of the knowledge students had learnt from her, such as pronunciation and tones.

The main factor which influenced her to be an assessor was her beliefs of transmission of knowledge and a teacher's responsibility as she mentioned that:

*“The main reason why I am strict at students' pronunciation is that I think students learn languages mainly for communication. If they can pronounce words correctly, they can express their meanings more accurately.”*

*(3rd week diary)*

This excerpt indicates that Mo Li held a belief about a teacher's responsibility that a teacher should help students learn correct language, and as a teacher, it is natural to point out students' mistakes. That was why she played a role of an assessor to help students evaluate and correct their mistakes and to give them feedback in the class.

### ***Identity 3: A collaborator***

Mo Li saw herself as a collaborator who would like to work with and learn from students. The main factor which led her to become a collaborator was her belief.

*“At the beginning of the new class, I let students write down what they want to learn from this course, and the students wrote so seriously. According to what students want to learn, I felt more confident to decide what and how I am going to teach.”*

*(1st week diary)*

The excerpt suggests that in order to know what students wanted to learn from this course, she organized this activity to have them write down their learning needs, and permitted them to express their feelings and opinions so that she could prepare suitable lessons for them. In this case, she had a collaborative work on the lesson plans with her students, as she learned from her students' suggestions and opinions, and then considered their suggestions and opinions to design suitable lessons for them.

She held beliefs of the student's role in learning and the teacher's responsibility which had impact on her to become a collaborator:

*“I think students are the main subjects of the teaching, and teachers should give them more opportunities to have them play their roles to make decision about their learning. Besides, teachers should understand students' learning needs as well as possible. Based on learners' needs, combining with the teaching materials, I will be able to prepare class more pertinently.”*

*(1st week diary)*

This excerpt reveals that what Mo Li did was inevitably influenced by her beliefs about the student's role in learning and the teacher's responsibility. She asserted that students were the main subjects of learning, and the teacher was responsible to know and consider students' learning needs. In order to prepare lessons which were suitable for students, she worked collaboratively with them to know their learning needs at the first class.

As a collaborator, she was willing to share knowledge with her students as well as learn from her students through the interactions.

*"I sometimes spoke a little Thai to help my students understand some difficult words' meaning. For example, "níng" (níng means 'you', and it is used to call elder people or someone you respect them in a polite way). In Thai, there is a similar word with 'níng', so I used 'khun' which in Thai means 'níng'. When I met some words which were difficult to explain, I would ask students how to speak word in Thai. Students always answered me positively, even sometimes they also taught me some new Thai words. When they found some words I can-not pronounce well, they were willing to help me correct my pronunciation. I teach students Chinese, and they teach me Thai."*

*(3rd week diary)*

In her viewpoint, speaking Thai and learning Thai from students might help students realize that a teacher did not only play the role of a teacher, and she could be a "student" who was willing to learn from them, their language and culture. In this case, Mo Li seemed to be a partner or a collaborator of students' who learned the languages with them. She also demonstrated that learning a language is natural and people can exchange knowledge and experience that enhance language development.

#### *Identity 4: A harmony keeper*

Mo Li also viewed herself as a harmony keeper by using different kinds of techniques such as speaking Thai, organizing activities and giving awards.

In terms of speaking Thai, Mo Li mentioned that “I sometimes spoke a little Thai to help my students understand some difficult words’ meaning.” The reason why sometimes she would like to speak a little Thai was that:

*“I think using a little Thai in teaching is not only good for teaching, but also helps to build a closer relationship with students, and then create a harmony atmosphere in the classroom.”*

*(3rd week diary)*

In a Thai context, she thought that using Thai to explain some difficult points was good for students to understand. This suggests that she tried to be involved in this cultural context to build a close and friendly relationship with students.

In terms of organizing activities and giving awards, Mo Li wrote in her journals that she usually organized activities and had students play competitive games, and then she gave awards to students:

*“After the competition, I gave every competitor red packets(during Chinese Spring Festival) as rewards. Giving students red packets as awards is to stimulate students’ learning enthusiasm.”*

*(4th week interview)*

Although Mo Li usually organized some competitive games among students, she gave awards to every student who joined the activities and games instead of just giving winners the awards. In doing this, Mo Li said it did not only help ease the tense atmosphere in the class, but it also maintained a harmonious relationship between students.

The main reason why she did this was because of students’ characteristics:

*“I think most of my students are outgoing and lovely, and they do not really like a giving lecture class. They like to do some activities that they can learn while they are playing. So I think a joyful and relaxing class atmosphere will be good for students to remember the words.”*

*(4th week interview)*

This excerpt indicates that she noticed her students were outgoing and active. For them, it was easy to be happy. Giving every student awards was a good way to make them happy and satisfactory. It also helped to engage and encourage them to join the activities. Besides, students preferred to do some activities as “they could learn while they were playing”, so Mo Li usually created some activities to have students do in the class.

As the semester progressed, there were some changes in terms of the roles about which the participant described herself, as she adopted more roles in her second teaching semester. There were numerous factors affecting her to shift her roles, but her belief and students’ characteristics can be seen as the main internal and external factors.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

The obtained results reveal that the novice teacher’s identity is a developing and ongoing process. It can be seen that minor changes of the novice teacher’s identity have taken place in her first teaching year. In the first semester, she viewed herself as a harmony keeper and an assessor. As a new teacher, she really wanted to build a harmonious relationship with her students to make them happy. Definitely, this meaningful relationship with students is very important for the novice teachers since it can bring them positive emotions, rewards and satisfaction, and motivate them to enter into and stay in the teaching career (Hargreaves, 2000; O’Connor, 2008). As an assessor, she focused on the accuracy of the transmission of the knowledge, such as the students’ pronunciation, tones and Chinese character writing. She was willing to use her knowledge to help her students learn, as Harmer (2015) mentions that most new teachers are full of excitement and enthusiasm at the start of their teaching career, and they challenge

themselves to try and combine the knowledge that they have in hand and at the same time apply this knowledge to help students learn. However, excessive emphasis on students' language accuracy may discourage some students who make mistakes and prevent them from taking risks, and this probably obstructs their language development, as Martinez (2006) posits that “ excessive feedback on error can also have a negative effect on motivation and can also prevent learning steps to take place”.

In the second semester, except from being a harmony keeper and an assessor, she had a kind of mixed identities as she identified herself as a facilitator and a collaborator. As a facilitator, she created a student-centered classroom, shifting focus from teachers to students. She reduced her control over the students' learning, making use of the group dynamics to help them learn from one another more effectively. As a collaborator, she considered classroom as a site of dialogue and a location where knowledge can be shared and learned through interactions, and where the teacher and students, or students and students can work together to finish their tasks.

All in all, her teacher identity development can be described as a “continual project of forming and reforming oneself” (Settlage, Southerland, Smith, & Ceglie, 2009). As can be seen from the findings, there were internal and external factors contributing to the novice teacher's identity development. Specifically, her belief is the main internal factor and students' characteristics are the main external factor.

### ***Teacher's beliefs***

As the main internal factor, teacher's beliefs guided the novice teacher's behaviors and how she viewed herself throughout the first teaching year. Gormally (2016) mentions that teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning have impact on their teacher identity development, and novice teachers may have deep-rooted beliefs about teaching and learning, which are probably formed during their “apprenticeship of observation” as students themselves. “These beliefs are important as they may structure *how* as well as *what* novice teachers learn about teaching” (Grawford, 1999: cited by Gormally, 2016).

It can be seen that her beliefs reflected her teacher identities. For example, she held the belief of language teaching as she thought that students should learn the correct and authentic language, and teachers have the responsibilities to convey accurate language to students and help them lay a good foundation of learning Chinese. So, she played the role of an assessor to focus on her students' basic language skills, such as pronunciation, tones and characters writing. Li (2012) proposes that beliefs play a vital role in language teaching, since they help people understand the world, influence the way they comprehend the new information, and whether they accept or reject it. Harste and Burke (1977) and Kuzborska (2011) also mention that teachers decide their classroom teaching based on their beliefs in language learning and teaching. They stress that teachers' beliefs have a great influence on their goals, procedures, their roles and their learners.

Besides, she had beliefs about learners and language learning as she considered that students were the main learning subjects, and they had their language learning needs. Teachers should respect and consider students' learning needs. This belief had a great effect on her that she thought she had the responsibilities to consider the students' learning needs. So she had the students write down what they wanted to learn from the Chinese course, and she attempted to design the lessons to meet their needs. In this case, she played the role of a collaborator who worked with students and learned from their needs and suggestions to design the lessons. To sum up, teachers' beliefs affect teachers planning lessons, making decisions in different ways and teaching practice in the classroom. Also, teachers' beliefs determine their real behavior towards their students (Li, 2012; Pajares, 1992).

### *Student's characteristics*

Apart from the internal factor, students' characteristic as the main external factor also had an influence on Mo Li's identities development. As Mo Li knew her students were undergraduates who were active, kind, outgoing and lovely, and who were likely to be more critical and demanding, being a strict teacher to create a serious and dull classroom atmosphere

probably would not be able to make them satisfied or motivate them to learn. Thus, she wanted to be a friendly teacher and shaped her identity as a harmony keeper, using different kinds of teaching techniques to establish a harmonious relationship with the students and to create an active atmosphere in the class.

Moreover, the participant mentioned that her students' mind and cognition were maturing gradually, and they had their own their ideas and critical thinking, initiative and cognitive ability. They preferred to be involved in groups to explore knowledge and to share their ideas with others. It seemed that the teacher-centered class or giving a lecture was not appropriate for them. Therefore, she adjusted herself as a democratic teacher who shared power with the students and supported them in managing their own behaviors. She designed and assigned more activities for them in the class, having them work in pairs or groups to learn collaboratively. She played the role of a facilitator, and the students can negotiate and have a consultation with her.

It can be concluded that students are considered to be one of the most motivating factors influencing teachers' professional identity and professional development (Proweller & Mitchener, 2004).

### *Pedagogical implications for novice teachers*

The findings obtained from this study can be used to remind novice teachers to be aware of their own beliefs in teaching and learning, since expressing beliefs clearly can reveal how teachers learn, what their teacher's identities are, and the types of teaching practices they apply in the classroom (Luft & Roehrig, 2007). Also, novice teachers need to be aware of their identities development, since teacher identity is not static and it can be changed depending on teaching environment which might include students, teaching materials, and local culture context. Therefore, novice teachers should be flexible in adjusting their roles to accommodate the teaching environment around them. In doing this, they might successfully start serving as a real teacher.

The result may also provide some suggestions for teacher trainers that they should comprehend how trainees develop their beliefs and how these beliefs affect their teaching and their teachers' identity development, so that they can help trainees to hold a set of related beliefs to facilitate learning to teach. Moreover, teacher trainers need to practice trainees to notice the external factors which might affect their identity development, so they can make a good adaptation in different teaching environments. In addition, teacher identity development is complicated and it is influenced by various factors, especially for novice teachers, so teacher trainers also need to help novice teachers raise their awareness of the complexity of teacher identity development, improving their preparations for their future career as a professional teacher.

In conclusion, it can be seen from this study that narrative inquiry can be used as an effective tool to understand and explore the complexity of an individual's identity formation. The story telling process helps us in understanding this development and reflects what the teacher believed. The teacher could see his/her teaching evolution which is fostered by the interactions with several factors. Shifts and changes of the identities in the participant's teaching journey could be evidenced. This suggests that the professional identity development is the dynamic process in nature. Therefore, it is important that teaching training institutions should involve in the initial stage of teaching, so that appropriate guidelines and supports could be delivered in order to shape the future of teachers of the community.

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## Appendix

### Set 1

General questions asking about the participant's background and perceptions towards teaching:

- a. Could you talk about your education background?
- b. During your study period, did you have a teacher idol?
- c. Why do you want to be a teacher?
- d. What kind of teacher do you want to be?
- e. Do you have any teaching experience before?
- f. What kind of problems do you expect to face in your class?

### Set 2

For semi-structured interview questions, the researcher asked how the participant views herself at each time of her teaching session.

- a. Can you describe your teaching this week?
- b. Are there any impressive or important events occurring in your class? How do you feel about them?
- c. Do you notice some things occurring in your class which are beyond your expectations?
- d. How do you view yourself?
- e. Are you satisfied with your teaching? And why?
- f. In the next lesson, can you describe yourself for what type of a teacher you hope to become?

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