

Exploring the Role of Identity Construction, Teaching Skills, and Professional Discourse & Awareness: A Study from a Language Methodology Course for EFL Preservice Teachers

Sumalee Chinokul

sumalee.c@chula.ac.th, Faculty of Education, Chulalongkorn University

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Received 09/04/2021	Abstract This article discusses the role of identity construction, teaching skills, and professional discourse and awareness in language teacher education. The aim is to explore and conceptualize the underlying principles, and explain how these three essential elements help EFL preservice teachers learn how to teach. Evidence gained from the four case studies is employed to highlight these three elements in support of the argument of the main inquiry: What sources of knowledge and skills should be prepared for EFL preservice teachers in a language methodology course? Self-evaluation and constant questioning of the 'self as teacher' may help preservice teachers in strengthening their identity construction. Preservice teachers benefit from participating in a community of practice, which fosters improvement of their teaching skills and strategies, as well as their co-construction of professional knowledge. They become aware of, and increase their ability to communicate effectively, based on the norms and standards required by their professional discourse community. These opportunities help
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	increase their confidence and facilitate the use of the target language in the classroom, while learning to be teacher.
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1. Introduction

In a language methodology course, preservice teachers are equipped with certain body of knowledge. To acquire teaching competence, they are expected to undergo stages of a knowledge construction process, to make use of the core knowledge they have obtained, and demonstrate knowledge of 'the teacher in action'. Preservice teachers must realize that the teaching situations, as well as the knowledge gained from their course, may be continually changing. They must be prepared to accept the kinds of natural constraints that may be present in real classrooms, and must accommodate themselves to the multiple confounding influences, both within and beyond the classroom setting, which may impact their instruction. EFL teacher preparation programs or courses should be oriented to a developmental focus, rather than a training one. This new teacher education perspective has been reframed by the notion that effective teaching cannot be taught directly. This has resulted in the shift from "teaching of teaching" to "learning of teaching" (Richards, 1998). Singh and Richards (2006) posited that "teacher-learning involves not only discovering more about the skills and knowledge of language teaching but also what it means to be a language teacher" (p. 155). Gaps in the process of preparing new preservice teachers, especially in the field of language teacher education in the Thai context, have been identified and documented, as follows:

1. The lack of a model of new EFL teacher preparation in the Thai context, a model which would account for the impact of, and identify the connection between, theory and practice of teacher education, based on the main concepts that have come from the strong move towards socio-cultural theory and reflective practice in recent years.
2. The need to construct a teacher's theory of pedagogy, based on recent trends in teacher education research, which could be used as a framework for both teaching and researching, rather than merely transmitting knowledge.
3. The need for individuals to develop a professional identity, starting from the methodology course.

4. The failure to provide adequate procedural knowledge, or the extended practice needed.
5. The need to establish standards, as well as indicators for measuring the effectiveness of EFL teachers in the Thai context.
(Chinokul, 2012)

Through research and development, Chinokul (2012) proposed a framework for EFL preservice teacher preparation via a language methodology course. Chinokul's theoretical framework is based on "2R2C", i.e. Reflective practice, Research-orientation, Co-construction of knowledge and ability, and Connections made among the teaching profession. It is framed as three 'Core Elements':

1. Learning to teach as identity construction,
2. Learning to teach via a community of practice,
3. Learning to teach by acquiring professional discourse and awareness.

These concepts were employed in the design of the instructional activities in an English language methodology class. Chinokul's research proposed that, to acquire teaching competence, participation in the discourse of teaching and learning is essential, as preservice teachers contribute to the construction of their own professional identities, while simultaneously learning teaching skills and strategies. Acquiring teaching competence is merging experiences, beginning with exploring the self, learning and sharing with peers, and learning to professionally communicate with one's network (see Figure 1). Such knowledge and skills should be instilled early in a language teaching methodology class, so that preservice teachers may not feel 'lost', but stay committed and continue learning throughout their professional life.

This article explores evidence to conceptualize the underlying principles and explanation to answer the research question: What sources of knowledge and skills should be prepared for preservice EFL teachers in a language methodology course?

Figure 1.

Sources of Knowledge and Skills for Preservice Teachers to Acquire Teaching Competence in a Language Methodology Class



2. Issues to Be Explored

2.1 How and Why Teacher Identity Construction Should Be the Focus of a Language Methodology Course

When most preservice EFL teachers enter a teacher preparation program, they seek to discover the ‘what and how’ of being effective English language teachers. Yet, preservice teachers need experiences that will position ‘self as teachers.’ Knowledge of self is seen as an essential aspect for being a teacher. Self-disclosures somehow relate to identity. The concept, which has been revisited and explored, is that the process of discovering the inner self is “identity construction”. *Teacher identity* is defined as “the beliefs, value, and commitment an individual holds toward being a teacher (as distinct from another profession) and being a particular type of teacher (e.g. an urban teacher, a beginning teacher, a good teacher, an English teacher, etc.)” (Hsieh, 2010, as cited in Richards, 2021, p. 2). It is considered a fundamental component of second language teacher education, as in “how individuals learn to teach” (Freeman, 2002. p.1), “how to be”, “how to act” and “how to understand their work and their place in society” (Sachs, 2005, as cited in Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009, p.178), as well as “how to express and position themselves in an interaction” (Richards, 2021, p. 1). Teacher identity construction is a lens through which preservice teachers’ mental status, as well as their

ideological dilemmas, are inspected when they encounter situations where knowledge from different sources and/or domains are in conflict.

Preservice EFL teachers who are non-native English speakers (NNES) may face the challenge of their own misperceptions and biases, and/or discrimination from educational stakeholders, who may prefer native English speakers (NES), because of their perceived English language proficiency level and their teaching performance. Preservice teachers' *self-consciousness* of their own English language skills, as well as their perception of how their language skills have developed over time, may have affected their identity construction. Their teaching ideology, as expressed through their preferences in designing a language course, their goals as language teachers, their position vis-à-vis the notion of NES-NNES, and their beliefs with regard to the NES-NNES debate, may affect their level of self-awareness, with the result that they judge themselves as inferior, simply for being NNES teachers (Medgyes, 1999).

Preservice teachers must acquire a conceptualization of what it means to be effective English language teachers. They will also participate in reflective practices, and construct their teaching competence with a focus on 'self as teacher.' The activities are assigned, such that the preservice teachers are the learners, and engage in reflective practice activities to disclose an identity that reveals their new identity of 'self as teacher' to them. This is done through the kinds of class activities Meirink et al. (2009) have suggested:

- acquaintance with the traditional beliefs of prior generations of language teachers via reading or listening, as well as reflection on, and evaluation of, explanations for these beliefs,
- inquiry into preservice teachers' goals regarding lesson content, or their experimentation with, or evaluation of, an alternative teaching method, and
- reflection on their own personal teaching methods and behaviors, after either participating in microteaching sessions or teaching in a real classroom, and contrasting those with new teaching behaviors that they think may be more effective.

2.2 How and Why Teaching Skills and Strategies Should Be Practiced and Discussed in a Language Methodology Course via a Community of Practice

Specific teaching skills and strategies are the main competence that preservice teachers would like to master in a language methodology

course. Preservice teachers are learning to plan and practice teaching skills and teaching strategies required for EFL classes. They are expected to possess and apply four different types of knowledge:

1) *content knowledge*, which refers to knowledge of the subject matter, and which, in the case of language teachers, is the target language, as well as its sociocultural aspects,

2) *pedagogical knowledge*, referring to knowledge of generic teaching strategies and practices,

3) *pedagogic-content knowledge*, which covers specialized knowledge of how to represent the aforesaid content knowledge in diverse ways, and how to teach its various aspects and skills, while communicating in a foreign language generally, and

4) *support knowledge*, which involves knowledge of various disciplines that inform their approach in the language classroom, e.g., psycholinguistics and second language. (Day & Conklin, 1992, as cited in Mantero, 2004)

Through *learning to teach via a community of practice*, based on Social Constructivism Theory, preservice teachers are very likely to gain higher levels of knowledge of both language teaching principles and classroom-based teaching skills, and to establish networks and partnerships with classmates. By communicating and collaborating in a language methodology class, preservice teachers are free to explore, with the result that they begin to see teaching differently, exchange ideas, articulate their thinking, understand others' viewpoints, and develop their capacity to take on new perspectives and build new understanding about their profession.

In a language methodology class, the activities are intended to take the form of teaching as dialogic mediation, as originally used in conflict resolution, and later imported into teaching. A preservice teacher participating in the activities may be propelled by:

- Individual dissatisfaction, either with one's level of knowledge, skills, or attitudes of students and the effects of current teaching methods, or with one's individual formulation, or with experimentation with alternative teaching methods, or with the evaluation of alternative teaching methods,
- Collaboration and dialogue with colleagues that helps develop reflective teaching, professional learning, and personal fulfillment,
- Discovery of new teaching methods or ideas during spontaneous interactions with peers (e.g., observation, discussion/experimentation)

and with teaching methods of peers, or the evaluation of alternative teaching methods,

- Analysis of teaching based on videoed lesson segments or lesson transcripts, that increases awareness of various issues, such as action zones, group dynamics, turn-taking, corrective feedback, teacher's role, etc. When discussing a new concept, through a video analysis, participants think about what they see, and share and discuss it with peers. Through such discussions, teacher-learners reveal their implicit understandings of the importance of the issues being discussed.

2.3 How and Why Acquiring Professional Discourse and Awareness Should Be Introduced in a Language Methodology Course

Theoretically, preservice teachers engage in academic discussion by active participation in various discourse socialization practices, in a collaborative learning community during a language methodology course. They engage with, and learn to form their professional 'identity-in-discourse' in, the various arenas of language teacher education and the second language classroom. Mantero (2004) explained that EFL preservice teachers acquire their professional language and discourse collectively from four areas:

- 1) the discourse of the language teacher education *curriculum*, as a stock of knowledge of technical terms that they have learned and used in the coursework and activities,

- 2) the discourse of the language teacher education *profession*, as a stock of knowledge and current issues to discuss, research, have an individual interest in or perspective on, and about which to share teaching approaches with others, both within and outside their community,

- 3) the discourse of the language *classroom*, from practical knowledge and skills, as well as interactions gained from various experiences teaching English in formal classroom settings, and

- 4) the discourse of the *community*, concerning the ways to communicate with others within one's own society to achieve the overall purpose, goals, and methods of language teaching.

These areas of discourse emerge as preservice teachers take part in language teacher education programs and become involved in professional development organizations. When participating in an international graduate program, for example, preservice teachers are expected to follow and act in accordance with the standards and specific

rules valued in the field. They are supposed to relate to others in socially acceptable ways in their own communities, and when attending learning communities that are established for teacher development, such as teacher research groups, communities of practice, learning circles, inquiry communities, or teacher networks. Their shared goal is to promote professional dialogue to enable change practices and social relationships that maximize the students learning outcomes. When attending these professional development special interest groups, participants are positioned as co-learners in the co-construction of a professional dialogue with one another.

The way that preservice teachers are encouraged to look at how they can make sense of the practices, and explain their practices, is called *theorizing of practice* (Richards, 2010). Through theorizing of practice, preservice teachers are expected to arrive at explanations and generalizations, and develop principles, and ultimately, propose new ideas and methods as their own teaching philosophy. By engaging in various kinds of discourse, such as practical arguments, pedagogical reasoning, and explaining their practicable knowledge, preservice teachers are typically motivated to reflect on the reasoning that lies behind their actions and beliefs, and thus self-evaluate their reasoning (Gholami & Husu, 2010). They need to clarify their identities as teachers through substantive and progressive discourse, and explain their thinking. To do this, critical reflection is the key skill required. The critical reflection needed for this type of professional dialogue can be performed through inquiring, talking, writing, and engaging in research projects. The level of language used must be appropriate to make ideas explicit, as teachers must communicate and share ideas publicly, and co-construct knowledge with others (Windschitl, 2002).

In practice, preservice teachers are to acquire teaching experience through observation and direct teaching experience, whether in microteaching or actual class teaching. They participate in collaborative learning via dialogue, to connect the theory and practice, justify their teaching behavior, and construct professional discourse and awareness.

Possible activities are:

- collaboration and dialogue with peers, to help develop reflective teaching, professional learning, and personal fulfillment,
- construction of one's own system for on-going professional learning, including joining professional organizations and support networks, and subscribing to journals in one's subject area,

- determination of assignment standards for students, observation and evaluation of students doing an assignment, evaluation of the assignments, and focusing authentically on meaning-making and real-life examples, and
- observation of peer teaching from videotaped recordings for improvement.

These three core elements, concepts, and suggested activities were used to design the course content of an English Language Methodology Course that is an elective graduate level course offered for preservice teachers who enroll at a public university in Bangkok, Thailand.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

To explore the role and impact that these three core elements may have on how preservice teachers experience and learn to teach English, a qualitative case study was employed as the research design of this study. Four research participants were recruited as the case studies. They will be referred to as preservice teacher (PT); i.e., PT1, PT2, PT 3 and PT 4, in this article. PT1 and PT2 were master's degree students, and PT3 and PT4 were doctoral students. They were among other MA and Ph.D. students who were studying the course.

3.2 Data Sources and Treatment

3.2.1 Weekly reflections on lesson plans and teaching demonstrations, recorded in methodology notebooks, were the target data sources. The reflections were on 1) assigned tasks, 2) micro-teaching, 3) actual class teaching, 4) self-reports after teaching, 5) video records of their teaching, 6) discussions/dialogues in class, and 7) assessment and evaluation forms created for the class.

3.2.2 Content analysis was employed to analyze the weekly reflections. The data from different data sources were triangulated to establish the trustworthiness of the data.

3.2.3 A scale by Chinokul (2012) to measure how well the preservice teachers met the standards of, and indicators required in, the classroom

was used to evaluate the preservice teachers' teaching performance. To seek evidence related to learning to teach via a community of practice, the first aspect examined was the knowledge and understanding of the content and principles of language teaching, as listed in Component 1, professional knowledge and understanding. Additionally, for the second aspect, Component 2, professional skill and strategies, the preservice teachers were evaluated on 23 various detailed performance indicators, aiming to measure three different aspects: 1) classroom-based teaching skills, 2) interest in, and caring about, students, and 3) interpersonal skills. Lastly, for the evidence related to professional discourse and awareness, Component 3, focusing on *Professional values and personal commitment* to disclose the participants' activities, as contained in "In search of excellence", was examined. The results were reported by descriptive rubric scoring, which was written, according to the expected teaching behaviors of the standards and indicators, as four levels: Unsatisfactory, Basic, Proficient, and Distinguished.

3.2.4 A coding manual adapted from Wise (1996) was used in the video analysis to observe the teaching strategies employed by the preservice teachers, to explore learning to teach via a community of practice further. Nine teaching strategies were listed: questioning, direct instruction, enhanced context, inquiry, focusing, assessing, instructional technology, collaborative learning, and manipulation strategies.

3.2.5 A reflective thinking ability scale (Chinokul, 2012) was used to assess the level of ability of the preservice teachers' reflections, to seek evidence related to professional discourse and awareness. The scale consists of three levels: Level 1 *Description*; Level 2 *Critical reflection with justification*; and Level 3 *Critical reflection with solution*. The scores varied from 1 to 10 points, and the can-do statements in each level are explained.

4. Findings and Discussion

Being important elements in the design of a language methodology course, identity construction, teaching skills via a learning community of practice, and professional discourse and awareness, are explored.

4.1 The Evidence of Identity Construction of Self as Teachers

The following excerpts reveal how the preservice teachers construct their identity as teacher.

PT1 revealed her uncertainty about being an English teacher, due to the issue of NNES.

PT1: I used to think that teachers were the most professional in the subjects they taught. However, as I am getting closer to be a real teacher after finishing my MA study, I still don't feel that my language and teaching skill is strong enough to teach my future students. Even though I have learnt a lot from x program from the theoretical foundations to the teaching practice, I feel that I am not yet ready to be fully called 'a teacher'.

The reflection here described PT1's self-efficacy and self-perceived English proficiency. Hoang and Wyatt (2021) posited that these elements may affect confidence in teaching and the professional goals that teachers set for themselves.

PT2 seems to become aware of herself when she relates her experience while teaching.

PT2: I hadn't really taught per se. I've done one-on-one private tutoring since I was fourteen, and when I was doing my undergrad, I volunteered at the writing center, helping students with their English papers. The whole "standing in front of a classroom" experience was new for me. Also, I'd only ever dealt with one person who was... only a year younger than me, so it was more like helping out a peer than teaching. So I can say that teaching at x was my first real traditional classroom teaching experience.

Educators usually use the concept of self-awareness to describe a teacher's ability to think about, talk about, and define feelings, thoughts, and/or actions. Warin and Muldoon (2009) defines self-awareness as "the availability of, or ability to maintain and expand, a rich, differentiated story of self" (p. 293).

PT1, PT2, and PT 3 expressed their anxiety when they were to teach, as in the following excerpts:

PT1: I hardly slept the night before but I tried to stay calm that day. I kept thinking everything's going to be alright. I tried my best and I won't regret.

PT3: First of all, I was racked by indecision and doubts as to what lesson I was to teach. There was also the difficulty of choosing the methodology that I was going to use. And then the many years of my teaching experience became like a burden. I felt an enormous pressure and I was overcome by unpleasant feelings. In fact, I was in this state for days and days. Finally, I said to myself, "I need to beat this. There's no pulling back."

PT2: I was terribly nervous, especially with the video camera rolling. I was so flustered, I launched into a hundred-word-a-minute speaking pattern, which happens when I get very nervous. I could see from the blank looks on my classmates' faces and the repeated, "Excuse me?" and general stunned silence that I was going much too fast. Overall, I thought the lesson was just asking myself, "What on earth am I doing?" The important thing I learned is no matter how well-prepared you believe you are, things never go exactly as planned. Therefore, it's always best to leave a bit of room for improvisation.

It is quite normal for preservice teachers to experience anxiety when they have their first actual class meeting with real students. The anxiety can be divided into three stages, according to McKeachie (1986), which are "before teaching hours", "while-teaching hour", and "after teaching hour". Based on McKeachie's formulation, PT1 and PT3 expressed their anxiety "before teaching hours", while PT2 discussed her anxiety "while-teaching hour." In fact, PT1 reported her "after teaching hour" elsewhere, as well. What is interesting here is that these preservice teachers have different strategies to handle their anxiety. PT1 seems to go with self-control, trying to calm down (Bress, 2006), while PT2 employed the 'let-it-be strategy', i.e., acknowledging and releasing the situation, and going with the flow (Bawcom, 2005), whereas PT3 deployed the 'face-it and handle-it strategy' (Hatloy, 2012).

One of the reflections that shows commitment is reported by PT2.

PT2...to be an effective teacher, flexibility is a key...being able to change and adapt. I think that being able to think on your feet is crucial to being an effective teacher. The classroom is

a volatile place; things don't always go according to plan. It is imperative that one stay professional, poised and calm, and ready to deal with anything. Professionalism deals with many aspects... I believe [in] the idea of never being completely satisfied with your practice. That is, always searching for "best practice".

PT3 set high expectations for improving her teaching skills, with the goal of being a master teacher, and planned to continue engaging in reflective practices.

PT3: Then a point in my teaching life came when I asked myself: How can I best continue to grow professionally? How can I successfully meet the challenges that lie ahead? The answer obviously was x University and now this course, Methodology of English Language Teaching. It puts system into my thinking, into my teaching. By being enrolled here, I have already tackled some major professional goals based on X ...

The course has inspired me to strive to be better and better in my teaching job, to be a master teacher.

PT3: I will keep practicing the art of reflection. I'll see to it that I have a small teaching log book and enter the strengths and weaknesses of every lesson if it means writing only key words. Actually, I do this sometimes, but mostly, I emphasize on those very successful teaching days. I'll make sure, this time, I will 'consciously' write and highlight weaknesses on those 'very bad days' as I still have them. Part of the teaching realities?

PT4 disclosed her current and future professional commitments, disposition to act with agency, and sense of professional responsibility.

PT4: I tried to reflect on my teaching every time after the class. Although I don't have time to write a journal, I keep reflecting and thinking about the class right away after teaching and I try to adjust the activity if I realize the flaws. Besides, I like attending conferences and seminars and if possible I attend the conference as a presenter. My plans to grow professionally are 1) doing some research, 2) being the author of some books and 3) being an Assistant Professor.

Some of the aspects of preservice teachers' construction of their professional identity that influence how they react to critical issues in teaching include commitment, self-esteem, agency, and self-efficacy (Richards, 2021). Thinking both before and after teaching, as well as during instruction — which Schön (1983) and Richards and Lockhart (1996) have suggested calling the processes of 'reflection-on-action' and 'reflection-in-action' — preservice teachers engage in the process of refining their teaching in the context reviewing themselves as teachers, during which they reaffirm, commit to, and explore, the concepts of being effective teachers.

Interestingly, the preservice teachers displayed their professional identity construction in process in one of the class activities that involved making metaphors for themselves as teachers. PT1 seems to be quite humble in her role as an MA student who is learning alongside classmates who are doctoral students when she uses a Thai metaphor that literally translates as "a crocodile trainer". It reflects her awareness of her inexperience in teaching, even as she has to critique her more experienced classmates' teaching performances. The other preservice teachers seem to suggest taking an active role while learning to teach, using metaphoric descriptions, such as "Stew that has just been put on the stop" (PT2), "a scientist, a navigator, a traveler, a chemist" (PT3), or "Teacher as a salad maker" (PT4). Their metaphors seem to accord with the constructivism view of learning, in which learners construct meaning by linking new ideas with their existing knowledge (Naylor & Keogh, 1999). Martinez et al. (2001) suggest that "metaphors may function as stepping stones to a new vantage point from which a teacher can look at his or her own practice as an educator from a new perspective" (p. 974).

4.2 The Evidence Related to Learning to Teach via a Community of Practice

Findings which may, to some extent, connect the way the four preservice teachers learned how to teach via a community of practice are:

PT1 has penetrated to the heart of peer mentoring in the community of practice, where the attitude of caring to build trust was witnessed in this excerpt:

PT1: A [her Ph.D. classmate 1] commented that I didn't make my aims/objective clear at the beginning of the class. I thought I already make it clear that the topic is x and I taught

the grammar before practices. I don't know where I went wrong...

B [her Ph.D. classmate 2] commented about the vocabulary part. My weakness is that I used PowerPoint and didn't prepare a handout for students; the real students wouldn't be able to remember all of it...

To sum up, peer teaching provided a valuable (plus a bit strange) experience to me. I had a sense of what I should prepare before, during, and after my teaching.

A mentoring attitude values both one's own learning and the learning of others in a reciprocal way. It can be maintained successfully in a "culture of trust" (Taylor, 2002). In order to build trust, preservice teachers need to be able to demonstrate empathy and understanding, and be able to speak and listen in ways that demonstrate that they value themselves and others. Interpersonal skills are required in a learning community, as well.

PT1 seems to apply this strategy in listening to her senior classmates commenting on her teaching.

PT1: I didn't know how to deal with real students. I just learned from other Ph.D. friends (e.g. giving rewards and punishment). I've to ask my classmate when facing some difficulties...

Rodgers (1993, as cited in Cornu, 2005) asserts:

We are always learning how to listen better, how to respectfully challenge one another, how to give feedback in non-threatening and responsible ways, how to receive feedback with equanimity, how to 'stay with' a person in his or her struggle to understand his or her teaching, and how to stay open. (p. 360)

The comments by PT4 demonstrate the collaboration, interdependence, and teamwork found in teacher learning. Teacher learning is facilitated in a collaborative culture with a commitment to shared goals about teaching and learning (Hargreaves, 1994).

PT4: I always work with colleagues, especially when developing materials and supplements... Besides when

developing tests or exams, I always work with my friends and seniors who have a lot of experience. In this case, I can learn how to create an exam from the senior and working in a team to develop good exams

PT3 was satisfied to see how the instructor used teaching materials and demonstrated the lesson for the class.

PT3: I enjoyed so much the activity about how to use the passages that carried the theme: x. The first passage is entitled ... The second one is... the third one has no title, but if give it one, I'd name it... The fourth one is... The fifth one is... the sixth one is an untitled letter, and again, if I gave it a name, I'd name it... and the last one is entitled...

I am singling this lesson out because it was challenging.

Our professor asked us, the students, how each material might be used or presented in class to get the most out of it. For teachers to make the students understand the passages, it is not enough to simply ask varied questions like: knowledge questions, comprehension questions, application questions, inference questions, analysis questions, synthesis questions, reevaluate questions.

PT3: The teacher has to make students see for themselves first the structure of each text. This was exactly what our professor did in class. She gave us ample time to read and figure out what to do with the texts. ...I could imagine the amount of effort, the imagination, the creativity, the time that went along with the choice of the passages. There were seven passages altogether under the same theme: x and yet they came in different text structure, offering the readers varied experience and perspectives. The passages were adequately supplements for the readings in the textbook. It was amazing... They were all authentic materials. They offer a wide range-from simple to complex, building up context. Their contents are practical and useful and are lifted situation, giving readers' reason to read. They are also pleasurable to read, catering to different levels of difficulty were varied.

The learning atmosphere in a language methodology class can be a friendly environment, where the relationships among persons in the community are of a much more collegial and equal nature. Participants

become co-constructors of knowledge and co-learners. Learning communities attempt to reduce expert–novice hierarchies by positioning everyone as a learner as they engage in a mentoring process. Even the instructor participates, creating as well as receiving knowledge, in a learning community (Lieberman, 2000). In this context, the instructor did not merely teach by lectures, but also created the activities to demonstrate how to teach, as well as prepared authentic teaching materials.

With regard to the evidence of the preservice teachers' ability in teaching, the preservice teachers' actual teaching performance was recorded on video, and examined using a scale designed by Chinokul (2012) to measure how well they met the standards of, and indicators required in, the classroom (see 3.2.3). Based on the scale, the preservice teachers' knowledge of the language teaching principles in Component 1, professional knowledge and understanding, was rated as either *distinguished* or *proficient* for a variety of six detailed performance indicators. Their performance for Component 2, professional skill and strategies, which aimed to measure three different aspects: 1) classroom-based teaching skills, 2) interest in, and caring about, students, and 3) interpersonal skills, was reported as either *distinguished* or *proficient*.

The total frequency of teaching strategies used, as measured by a coding manual adapted from Wise (1996) (see 3.2.4), is reported below.

- 1) questioning strategies (24.8%)
- 2) direct instruction (18.1%)
- 3) enhanced context strategies (15%)
- 4) inquiry strategies (13.7%)
- 5) focusing strategies (13.6%)
- 6) assessing strategies (12.3%)
- 7) instructional technology strategies (1.1%)
- 8) collaborative learning strategies (0.8%)
- 9) manipulation strategies (0.6%)

The *most common teaching strategies* the preservice teachers employed were *questioning strategies*. This finding is not surprising, as questioning strategies are the main teaching strategies often used in the EFL teaching context for various purposes; i.e., to prompt interactions, scaffold reading, elicit speaking or students' answers, structure content, and getting attention in class (Davoudi & Sadeghi, 2015).

There is a threshold proficiency level for teachers to reach, in order to be able to teach effectively in English (Richards, 2010). Preservice

teachers who may have an English language deficit are more likely to experience difficulty in conveying messages to their students in class, using the target language, or providing a language model for the students (Beny, 1990). Their style may thus follow the teacher-fronted textbook. Cullen (2001) posited that “a teacher without the requisite language skills will crucially lack authority and self-confidence in the classroom, and this will affect all aspects of his or her performance” (p.29). Richards (2010) also commented that many preservice English teachers find themselves lacking the ability to explain rules of English grammar and vocabulary to match the students’ level. Some aspects of these comments were reflected by PT1.

PT1: My final teaching will be more challenging; I have to teach real students in the class that was, and has been, my worst, grammar. I have to think hard on how to make it interesting and keep my students alert.

4.3 The Evidence Related to Professional Discourse and Awareness

Pedagogical reasoning, the term coined by Shulman (1986), is the process by which teachers apply and implement their professional knowledge to flexibly innovate and adapt their lessons to fit particular students, ideas, and circumstances. In order to develop this pedagogical reasoning, Shulman (1986) posits that theoretical, practical, and moral knowledge sources must be addressed, and collectively used, to refer to the knowledge base of teaching. In the following excerpts, PT1 and PT2 seem to invoke their pedagogical reasoning, including to justify their teaching enquiries. As graduate students in an international program, the preservice teachers were to engage actively in many activities that demand pedagogical reasoning, including small group discussions, reading books and documents in English, working on assignments, writing lesson plans, conducting micro teachings, practice in an actual classroom, conducting research, keeping up-to-date with trends in the ELT field, participating in the program seminars, listening to the special guest lectures, attending overseas excursion programs, and giving academic presentations. Such a litany of academic activities requires candidates to possess advanced-level literacy skills. They may have reported feeling pressured, and felt anxious from time to time, due to having to act in the prescribed acceptable ways. The tasks were even more challenging for the

candidates as non-native speakers (NNES), since international norms were very likely often the standards.

PT1: [After observing for the first time two student teachers doing their practice at a school, in which she was confused by the teaching approach, and so, she read the books and wrote in her methodology journal, as in the following excerpt.]

The following diagram shows the differences between PPP and TBL proposed by x.

The instructor suggested that the class should be CLT in a sense that it focuses on language functions rather than grammar points. That's true. But I found several principles of CLT proposed by x...From my observation (the first time of my life), the last principle seemed not to work with the lower-secondary students. But still, can we call it a communicative class? Maybe the answer is not black and white, it's grey!!! It's 'communicative continuum' (x). The language classroom can be drawn in a continuum, more or less communicatively oriented. Maybe the use of PPP doesn't mean that the class will be less communicative. For the beginning level, the use of PPP might be more appropriate though the language is restricted. After students gain some more knowledge, they can have a less restricted activity and lead to a freer language production.

PT2: When we stand in front of our students, we cannot just simply ask any questions to them and expect their perfect answers. We have to know what kind of questions should and shouldn't be asked. I have experienced when I asked my students some open-ended questions and students kept silent. They preferred to answer yes/no or choice question types probably because they did not feel confident to give more elaborated answers. This might be the reason why the "why" and "how" questions are not quite successful when asking Thai students even though the questions positively aim for thought-provoking and analytical skills. Consequently, teachers should employ some questioning techniques in order to encourage students to speak out in class as well as create more effective learning experience.

PT2: I don't find that the teaching is my biggest problem – it's the discipline I have trouble with, how to handle rowdy students or consistently tardy ones. I don't know how to deal

with students who come to me and beg for a better grade or so forth. That's the toughest part for me. Of course, my teaching is not exactly trouble-free. I don't really like the course book we're using at the moment – I find it boring, disorganized, and not at all well-written. I don't know if my attitudes are rubbing off on my students, but I think going through exercises in the book might be boring them too, though it's a necessary evil. Also, I like to only speak English in class, which might make it hard for weaker students and I speak quickly—both of these factors contribute to problems.

The main factors contributing to expertise in teaching English should be introduced in a language teaching methodology class. These include taking part in ELT conferences, networking with other teachers, reading TEFL journals, trying out new materials in class, membership in professional language teaching associations, mentoring, class observations, conducting action research, reflection, and attending workshops (Richards, 2010). PT1 and PT4 mentioned some of the activities they took part in.

PT1: Today we've talked about teaching four skills and the approach of how to assess them. I remember Prof. x's workshop on current trends in language assessment. He mentioned the x which is in the developing process in order to assess students' performance in a real life situation. He mentioned the use of x to assess the performance online. The students will be tested by a virtual reality situation. I think that's a fantastic idea though I still question how to do that and the cost that must pay for the test.

PT4:... the general guidelines proposed by x in the book x can help me when creating a lesson plan. At least it serves as rough guidelines to remind me the important factors and features of a good lesson plan I should bear in my mind. ... it can help us not only prepare what we are going to teach, but acts as a reminder for teachers to cover the content in time. Moreover, the self-evaluation also plays an important role as a pedagogical checklist in order to observe and evaluate their own teaching. I deem the two issues extremely crucial that every teacher should bear in mind and keep doing for every class.

PT4: After my teaching demonstration in a writing class, I had a chance to teach a class of medical freshmen in an x course.

Firstly I felt very nervous because I was dissatisfied with my teaching demonstration. I was afraid that this time would be the same as the teaching demonstration. The article was about [an unusual pregnancy]. I let the students present the main idea of the section they had read and then ask them to discuss, share and give opinions whether the parents should have an abortion or not. It worked!

PT4: This is my first chance to teach with theoretical principles in a classroom because I, all the time, teach the students deductively with lots of teacher talking time. This may be because of the time constraint and the plenty of content, so I had no opportunity to teach interactively with communicative approach or other pedagogical strategies. However, I am quite obsessed with my new teaching style and realize the advantages of the teaching with various kinds of theoretical approaches. Nevertheless, it must depend on the class, purposes, students, and many factors.

To evaluate Component 3, focusing on *Professional values and personal commitment*, the scale (see 3.2.3) was used to disclose the participants' activities, as contained in "In search of excellence". The participants were rated *proficient* for all four detailed performance indicators for this aspect.

The scale (see 3.2.5) was employed to examine the preservice teachers' reflection ability. They demonstrated reflection ability at Level 2, *Critical reflection with justification*, in the microteaching. At this level, the preservice teachers can give reasons and prove hypotheses, using theory, by assessing teaching experiences and events. They can make judgments about their own teaching, explaining and discussing what they have learned from the situation, and provide reasons for the success or failure of their teaching. The scores each of the four cases received varied from 6 to 8 points.

5. Conclusion

Developing teaching competence is complex and takes time; it continues throughout a teacher's professional life. The main question is: how can the teacher preparation courses and programs build in and include the core knowledge components and activities? A research model should be developed wherein preservice teachers are able to revisit their actions and their beliefs, in order to re-examine their teaching using available tools and networks, so that they can still continue to reveal and make their identity

of 'self as teacher' visible, and ultimately, help maximize the potential of their students as they learn English. Both discussion and evidence lend support to the importance of identity construction, teaching skills, and professional discourse and awareness, in helping preservice EFL teachers to learn how to teach, and thus, should be the foundation of the knowledge and skills that are provided to preservice EFL teachers in a language methodology course. The need for self-evaluation and constant questioning of the 'self as teacher' may help preservice teachers in strengthening their identity construction. This may serve as a tool, or lens, to reveal the 'self as teacher', and can have an impact on their learning to teach, as well as facilitating teacher growth and professional development. Reflective practices, when systematically undertaken, can help as a catalyst for the better, and for improvement of their teaching skills and strategies, as well as their attitudes toward their teaching performance. Preservice teachers benefit from participating in a community of practice, which fosters improvement of their teaching skills and strategies, as well as the co-construction of their professional knowledge within and beyond the classroom. Since the majority of preservice EFL teachers are NNES, they become aware of, and increase their ability to communicate effectively, based on the norms and standards required by their professional discourse community. These opportunities help increase teacher confidence, and ultimately, facilitate the use of the target language in the classroom, all while learning to be teacher.

About the Author

Sumalee Chinokul: an Associate Professor from Department of Curriculum and Instruction, Faculty of Education, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand

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