How are Preservice Teachers Discursively Positioned During Microteaching? The Views of Student Teachers in Hong Kong

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Abstract: This paper reports the results of a qualitative study that used in-depth interviews to understand the experiences and perceptions of six pre-service teachers as they engaged in microteaching at a tertiary institution in Hong Kong. Using a framework grounded in dialogism and positioning theory, the study describes the ways in which different discourses offer, as well as deny, positions to the pre-service teachers as they planned and implemented microlessons. The results suggest that competition between these discourses to position pre-service teachers can result in microteaching being associated with negative emotional experiences, such as disappointment, isolation, and frustration. This emotional dissonance is shown to lead some pre-service teachers to question the efficacy of microteaching. The paper therefore argues that it is imperative for teacher educators to support pre-service teachers' engagement in microteaching by revealing the presence of these discourses and by exploring how the latter can exercise agency by accepting, resisting, or rejecting the positions made available to them during their microteaching experience. Suggestions for future research are also considered.

Keywords: microteaching; approximations of teaching; pre-service teachers; positioning theory; dialogism, Hong Kong.

Introduction

Internationally, teacher educators are increasingly concerned with how pre-service teachers learn to teach in practice (Canrinus et al., 2019; Hennissen et al., 2017; Jenset et al., 2018). Termed the 'practice turn' in teacher education (Cochran-Smith, 2016), many countries, including Australia, consider pre-service teachers´ school experiences crucial components of this learning and hence essential to their preparation for a teaching career (Murray, 2016). This turn represents a response to the "praxis shock" some novice teachers experience as they transition from pre-service teacher to employment as a school-based educator (Edwards & Nutall, 2015). Underlying this shock is a mismatch between expectations of teachers' professional life and the day-to-day realities of teaching. Praxis shock is associated with burnout, attrition, and low levels of job satisfaction amongst teachers (Ballantyne & Retell, 2020).

Praxis shock might be alleviated by grounding teacher education programmes in classroom practice (Jenset et al., 2018). Practice-based approaches situate a suite of instructional

practices – including leading classroom discussions, giving instructions, and providing feedback to learners – at the heart of teacher education (Grossman & Macdonald, 2008). Having access to safe, supportive environments of reduced complexity where pre-service teachers can, with guidance, practice these skills is essential (Grossman et al., 2009). Providing such environments necessitates connecting teacher education programmes to practice in sites beyond schools: coursework and university-based experiences must also be considered crucial sites in which these connections can be realized (Jensett et al., 2018).

Grossman and McDonald (2008) point out that university-based teacher education programmes frequently consider field experiences to be the primary sites at which pre-service teachers will acquire such skills. Yet teacher educators have limited capacity to shape the professional education of pre-service teachers within these sites. Pre-service teachers should therefore also be provided with clinical environments that afford "intensive, focused opportunities to experiment with aspects of practice and then learn from that experience" (Grossman & McDonald, 2008, p. 189).

Within a university-based teacher education programme, microteaching can supply these learning opportunities. Microteaching is a procedure "in which different teaching skills are practiced under carefully controlled conditions, often involving a student-teacher teaching part of a lesson to his or her classmates" (Richards, 2015, p. 753). Microteaching is one of the most widely used methods of providing clinical experience for pre-service teachers (Amobi, 2005). Early iterations promoted the ability to execute teaching behaviours. More recently, interest has shifted to approximations of teaching, which are "opportunities to simulate certain aspects of professional practice before enacting that practice in a fully authentic classroom context" (Kavanagh et al., 2020, p. 96). These approximations enhance the ability of pre-service teachers to overcome pedagogical challenges and provide space to research and reflect upon their own practices (Canrinus et al., 2019; Trent, 2012; 2013).

Microteaching appears to be popular with some pre-service teachers who value the chance to apply instructional techniques introduced during their teacher education programme (Ralph, 2014). Microteaching is endorsed as a means of acquiring knowledge of teaching (Amobi, 2005), enhancing teacher efficacy (Mergler & Tangen, 2010) and promoting critical thinking (Arsal, 2015). Yet it can also be associated with anxiety (Horgan et al., 2018).

Bell (2007) argues that research has not adequately considered "what it means to microteach, especially from the perspective of students" (p. 25). According to Bell (2007), many pre-service teachers regard microteaching merely as a course requirement or a performance rather than practice teaching. Student anxiety could be dissipated by acknowledging microteachings' performative nature: "If microteaching is framed as a performance and injected with a sense of playfulness, students may benefit from a chance to explicitly 'try on' and experiment with new voices and teaching styles" (Bell, 2007, p.37).

More than a decade after Bell's (2007) call for greater attention to be given to student voices in investigations of microteaching, Canrinus et al. (2019) declared that "studies including candidates' perceptions of their opportunities to enact practice in campus courses are limited" (p. 112). Many of the pre-service teachers in their study report having limited time to engage in practices close to students' learning. It is proposed that future research considers the views of pre-service teachers around the globe regarding the opportunities they enjoy to enact practice within different teacher education programs (Canrinus et al., 2019).

The aim of the current study, therefore, is to contribute to our understanding of microteaching by exploring the views of six pre-service teachers who undertook a compulsory

microteaching project during their teacher education program in Hong Kong. The next section describes a theoretical framework grounded in positioning theory, which is then used to understand how the participants position themselves, and are positioned by others, during and after microteaching.

Conceptual Framework
Positioning Theory

This study uses positioning theory to investigate microteaching from the perspective of preservice teachers. Positioning theory is an appropriate conceptual lens for this task as it is concerned with face-to-face interaction between two or more people and, as such, has been used previously to understand classroom positioning (Anderson, 2009). Harre (2012) conceptualizes a position as "a cluster of beliefs with respect to the rights and duties of the members of a group to act in a certain way" (p. 196). The social and cognitive process, which establishes such positions, is termed positioning, as van Langenhove and Harre (1999, p. 16) explain:

> *The act of positioning thus refers to the assignment of fluid 'parts' or 'roles' to speakers in the discursive construction of personal stories that make a persons'-s actions intelligible and relatively determinate as social acts.*

Drawing upon poststructuralist perspectives, positioning theory argues that social acts are rendered intelligible through discourses: "to know anything is to know it in terms of one or more discourses" (Davies & Harre, 1990, p. 45). Discourses "make available positions for subjects to take up…[people] are placed in relation to each other through the meanings which a particular discourse makes available" (Holloway, cited in van Langenhove & Harre, 1999, p. 16). Positioning theory identifies the storylines within conversations that shape the positions people take up, or which they have assigned to them. 'Teacher' and 'student', for instance, represent positions and a storyline of instruction influences the speech and actions associated with each position. These positions also bring with them certain rights and duties. In a storyline of instruction, there exists the 'duty to instruct', as well as the 'right to receive instruction'.

Individuals can position themselves as well as position others. The former is known as reflexive positioning and the later interactive positioning (Davies & Harre, 1990). Van Langenhove and Harre (1999) refer to such positioning of self and others within interactions as first order positioning. Thus, during discussions with her classmates, a preservice teacher might position herself as a 'contributor' by providing suggestions for teaching activities as she and her fellow students prepare a microlesson.

Dialogism

The emphasis on discourses within positioning theory has parallels with Bakhtin's 'dialogism', which begins from the premise that an utterance is "drenched in social factors" (Holquist, 2002, p. 61). As Bakhtin (1981) explains, "the living utterance cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogical threads…it cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue" (p. 276).

Viewing the utterance as an active participant in social dialogue means that it is imperative to understand social acts in terms of positioning within different discourses and to consider how the interplay of such discourses makes available and denies certain positions to

people. Bakhtin (1981) considers this interplay conflictual; an utterance, "finds the object at which it was directed already as it were overlain with qualification, open to dispute, charged with value, already enveloped in an obscuring mist" (p. 276). This competitive interplay occurs in terms of "two embattled tendencies in the life of language" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 272):

> *Every concrete utterance of a speaking subject serves as a point where centrifugal as well as centripetal forces are brought to bear. The processes of centralization and decentralization, of unification and disunification, intersect in the utterance.*

This centripetal – centrifugal dichotomy underscores that discourses do not compete on a level playing field. Against this background of struggle between dominant centripetal discourses and marginalized centrifugal discourses, positioning theory foregrounds the role of individual agency by conceptualizing positioning as dynamic and positions as subject to negotiation and change: "people are capable of exercising choice in relation to (discursive) practices…who one is always an open question…" (Davies & Harre, 1990, p. 46). This exercise of choice may take the form of questioning, resisting, or rejecting first-order positioning during interactions, a process known as second-order positioning. Third-order positioning takes places when first-order positionings are contested within another conversation about the first conversation (van Langenhove & Hare, 1999**).**

Operationalizing Positioning Theory

To operationalize positioning theory, this study draws upon the work of Soreide (2006), who describes an analytical framework for illuminating how people are positioned, and how they position themselves, within different discourses. Soreide (2006) analyzes data on the positioning of teachers in Norway in terms of two questions; first, how do teachers identify themselves with available subject positions and, second, how do teachers distance themselves from available subject positions? Answers to the first question are labeled positive positioning and are found, linguistically, by examining the ways in which teachers positively refer to subject positions to make clear how they would like to be perceived as teachers. Answers to the second question represent negative positioning and are revealed in teacher's descriptions of behavior, ideas, values and activities that they want to be different from (Soreide, 2006).

Data collection and analysis was based on this theoretical framework and guided by the following research questions:

> *What are the discourses that make subject positions available to six MATESOL pre-service teachers at a tertiary institution in Hong Kong as they participate in microteaching?*
> *What are the implications of the interplay between these discourses for the positioning of the six MATESOL pre-service teachers as they participate in microteaching?*

The Study
Setting

Having obtained ethical review approval, six pre-service teachers, who at the time of data collection were enrolled in the degree of Master of Arts in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (MATESOL) at a tertiary institution in Hong Kong, agreed to take part in the

study. The MATESOL is a one-year full time program that provides candidates with an introduction to the theory and practice of English language teaching. One MATESOL elective course requires students to undertake an assessed episode of microteaching.

The Experience of Microteaching

I served as instructor on a twelve-week elective course, focusing on pedagogy, which formed one component of the MATESOL program described above. This elective course, comprised of 27 pre-service teachers, met once a week for three hours each time during semester two and provided preservice teachers with opportunities to engage in microteaching. Richards and Farrell's (2011) depiction of five stages of microteaching structured this student experience. In the first stage, which these authors term 'briefing', six course meetings provided students with an introduction to a series of teaching competencies.

In the next stage, called 'planning', pre-service teachers worked in groups of three to four to plan a microteaching activity of approximately 25 minutes. In stage three, 'teaching', the pre-service teachers taught a microteaching lesson to their MATESOL peers and the course instructor. These lessons were video recorded and uploaded to the course website. In the subsequent 'critique' stage attention turned to dialogue as the microteaching participants, their classmates and the course instructor discussed and analyzed the microlesson. Finally, in *'reflection'*, each of the pre-service teachers submitted an essay to the course instructor, as one part of their course assessment. This essay requires them to respond to three questions: what aspects of the microlesson they taught do they consider successful and why? What aspects of the microlesson they taught do they consider less successful and why? How would they alter their microteaching lesson if they had the opportunity to re-teach it?

Participants

As mentioned above, six pre-service teachers who had recently undertaken the microteaching activity described in the previous section, agreed take part in the study. Given my role as course instructor, recruitment of participants to the study commenced only after completion of the MATESOL elective course described above, including the submission of all assessments and the finalization of grades.

A convenience approach to sampling was adopted (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In my role as instructor for the MATESOL elective course discussed earlier, I had access to a group of pre-service teachers who recently experienced microteaching. At the same time, this study employed a purposeful approach to sampling. According to Patton (2002), purposeful sampling "focuses on selecting information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study" (p. 230). As the pre-service teachers who took part in this study had engaged in microteaching, each represented an information-rich case that could provide in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

In addition, the demographic composition of the class guided sampling decisions. Four of the six participants were born in mainland China. These participants spoke Putonghua, or a regional dialect, as their mother tongue and completed all their education in mainland China prior to coming to Hong Kong to complete a MATESOL. Most participants were female, which reflects the gender composition of this MATESOL class. Participants were recruited to the study

one-by-one until a point of "saturation" was attained, which means, in the words of Merriam and Tisdell (2016), "that you begin hearing the same responses to your interview questions…no new insights are forthcoming" (p. 101). The names of all participants in this paper are pseudonyms.

Data Collection and Analysis

This study employed a single, semi-structured interview with each of the six pre-service teacher participants to collect data. The interviews, which were audio recorded and transcribed, ranged from 40 to 65 minutes. The participants all agreed to be interviewed in English, with each of the pre-service teachers self-rating their spoken English language proficiency as 'high' or 'very high'. Interview questions explored their reasons for choosing to study on the MATESOL program and their understanding of, and expectations for, microteaching prior to enrolling in the elective course mentioned earlier. The participants then reflected on their experience of microteaching. For instance, they described the decision-making processes that occurred as their group planned what and how to teach their microlesson. Participants also considered the extent to which their expectations for microteaching were fulfilled, including whether they believed this experience enhanced their teaching competency.

The first step in data analysis is to identify the discourses that make subject positions available to the participant as they engage in microteaching in Hong Kong. For this purpose, thematic analysis was used as a "method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). After the data were read and re-read, codes, which "identify a feature of the data that appears interesting to the analysist" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 88), were developed. In terms of the theoretical framework described above, these codes represent subject positions. For example, features of the data such as "contributing to the group", "sharing information with others" and being "considerate of others views", position pre-service teachers in microteaching as 'contributors', 'sharers', and 'considerate'. Next, categories were constructed. The codes mentioned here were then joined together to identify a category or, in terms of the theoretical framework used in this study, a discourse. In the current example, this category was labeled 'the discourse of collectivity'.

The theoretical framework described earlier implies that people play an active role in the process of positioning within particular discourses. As Davies and Harre (1990) explain, positioning theory "recognizes both the constitutive force of discourse and…that people are capable of exercising choice" (p. 46) as they take on, resist, or reject subject positions made available within different discourses. Therefore, to investigate positioning as a dynamic process, the next stage of data analysis drew upon the conceptual framework introduced by Soreide (2006). In this framework, positioning is analyzed in terms of positive and negative positioning, which examines how people choose to identify with, or distance themselves from, the subject positions made available to them within discourses.

Identifying the processes of positive and negative positioning in the case of the participants in this study employed tools for discourse analysis described by Fairclough (2002). Fairclough's (2003) discourse analytic framework was of value in understanding how the participants identify with or reject the subject positions made available to them within different discourses because he argues that "to what one commits oneself, one's degree of commitment to truth, is a part of how one identifies oneself" (p. 166). Fairclough (2003) suggests that this commitment is realized, linguistically, through both modality - as suggestive of what is true and what is necessary - and evaluation, as indicating what is desirable or undesirable, good or bad (p.

164). For instance, one participant, Bob, argued of microteaching that "it's good practice for the real teaching situation". The strength of the modality and the explicit positive evaluation deployed in his initial declaration ("it's good") suggests Bob's resolute commitment to the positive positioning of microteaching because it prepares preservice teachers for their later engagement in "real teaching".

The emphasis Bakhtin (1981) places on the discursive centripetal-centrifugal struggle reminds analysists of the need to explore the interplay of different discourses and the implications this has for a person's positioning. Thus, the final stage data analysis was concerned with understanding how this discursive interplay makes available and denies certain positions to a group of pre-service teachers engaged in microteaching in Hong Kong. To do so, I employed White's (2003) distinction between dialogic expansion and contraction. As to the former, the textual voice is positioned as open to, or entertaining of, dialogic alternatives. In the case of the latter, dialogical interaction is characterized by a closing down of the space for dialogic alternatives through the rejection or countering of these alternatives.

Analysis of the data revealed the dominance of dialogic contraction, most commonly occurring in the form of countering. Countering, as Martin and White (2005) explain, occurs when an utterance recognizes the value of one discourse but ultimately rejects this in favor of an alternative discourse. Linguistically, countering is realized through expressions including 'but' and 'yet'. For example, in arguing that "microteaching should be a chance to try new things in teaching but I'm too worried that we might get a lower grade so we didn't do anything unusual", a participant initially gives voice to a discourse of novelty ("…a chance to try new things..."). However, as signaled by the use of the term "but", the participant goes on to counter this discourse in pointing to the potential risk of a lower grade and subsequently deciding that, consistent with a discourse of conventionality, she will not "do anything unusual". In this example of discursive interplay, the participant ultimately affords dominant, or centripetal, status to the discourse of conventionality.

During the analysis of the data, the emerging discourses and their meanings for positioning were discussed with the participants in a form of member checking (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), with participants indicating their agreement with the themes that emerged from analysis of the data.

Results

The data suggests that eight discourses position the participants during their engagement in microteaching: 'collectivity'; 'individuality'; 'restraint'; 'expression'; 'conventionality'; 'novelty'; 'realism', and 'idealism'. The remainder of this section discusses the role of these discourses, and their interplay, in the positioning of the pre-service teachers as they participated in microteaching.

Individuality and Collectivity in Microteaching

One of the discourses surrounding the positioning of the pre-service teachers as they engage in microteaching is the discourse of individuality. This discourse emphasizes individual freedoms, privileging microteaching as an opportunity for teachers to "express their inner teacher self", as Jess put it. At the same time, another discourse, labeled here the discourse of

collectivity, celebrates microteaching as a group or collective accomplishment. This discourse places a premium on cooperation and harmonious relations between pre-service teachers as they work together to plan and implement a microlesson. Three of the participants in this study framed their views about microteaching partly in terms of these two discourses. Fiona's comments are representative of these views:

Excerpt one

Fiona: One of the good things (about microteaching) is that, in theory, you need to really exchange ideas and collaborate with the others (in the group), to be part of the team; I guess I did learn something from this but, at the same time, personally, I felt disappointment that being a team player meant that sometimes I couldn't really be myself as a teacher, my true teacher self, fully doing the type of teaching I wanted to do…each one of us should be able to do that

Researcher: Why did you find that disappointing?

Fiona: Because the whole time in microteaching I was just pretending, like being an actor in a play and playing a part, because they didn't really accept any of the activities I wanted…I wanted to be different from the others, but I was really uncertain about whether I could…I wanted to do some jigsaw activities but the (group members) said it might be too chaotic in class and they worry about how to explain many different steps. So, finally, my ideas are suppressed because they don't want our grade to be brought down…I was conflicted between being myself as a teacher, being the type of teacher I really want to be, and taking on the type of teacher the group wanted, to me it was being just a fake teacher…at the end I put the interests and success of the group first, rather than my own interests but, still, it became barrier between the group and me. (Fiona)

The storyline in excerpt one concerns relations between pre-service teachers as they worked in small groups to plan and prepare a microlesson. The conceptual and analytical framework described earlier implies that it is necessary to identify the discourses that position pre-service teachers as they undertake microteaching and how students such as Fiona identify with, and distance themselves from, the positions made available within these discourses. The first discourse Fiona draws upon in this excerpt is the discourse of collectivity. This discourse, which is reified in practices and activities such as exchanging teaching ideas with microteaching groupmates, positions pre-service teachers as 'collaborators' and 'team members'. Fiona evaluates this as positive positioning. For example, her use of the term "good" explicitly situates these positions in a desirable light. She also implicitly assesses the positions of 'collaborator' and 'exchanger of ideas' positively by associating them with teacher learning, which is taken to be a desirable outcome of engagement in microteaching.

The second discourse referenced by Fiona is the discourse of individuality. This discourse celebrates microteaching as the accomplishment of individual, personal development as a teacher, allowing Fiona to position herself, positively, as her "true teacher self". Linguistically, the presence of this discourse can be seen in Fiona's repeated use of strongly modalized declarations of intent that set out her personal agenda for engagement in microteaching: "*I* wanted to be…*I* wanted to do…". The strength of her alignment with the discourse of individuality is apparent in arguing that the ability of pre-service teachers to take up the positions made available within this discourse represents a right. Thus, in an adamant

declaration that assumes the authority to speak on behalf of all pre-service teachers, she claims that "each one of us should be able to do that".

Drawing upon the work of Bakhtin, the conceptual framework discussed earlier also underscores the importance of considering how the interplay of these two different discourses makes available, and denies, certain positions to pre-service teachers during microteaching. The interplay of the discourse of collectivity and the discourse of individuality is first revealed in Fiona's use of the expression "but, at the same time…". In this linguistic move, Fiona counters the apparent desirability of positioning herself within the discourse of collectivity by arguing that it limits her ability to take on positions such as her "true teacher self" and to engage in microteaching as "doing the type of teaching (she) want(s) to do". In pointing to these limitations, she implicitly assesses positions such as 'collaborator' negatively, thereby distancing herself from this and other positions available within the discourse of collectivity.

How did this discursive interplay between the discourses of collectivity and individuality position pre-service teachers such as Fiona during microteaching? The discursive struggle between the discourse of collectivity and individuality appears, in the case of Fiona's microteaching group, to be resolved in favour of the former. As Fiona states: "I put the interests and success of the group first, rather than my own interest". This is a decision that, nevertheless, entails negative practical and emotional implications for Fiona. In practical terms, she positions her engagement in microteaching as taking on positions such as 'pretender', "actor" and "fake teacher". Emotionally, the negative implications of this discursive struggle include Fiona's self-positioning as disappointed and conflicted.

Expression and Restraint in Microteaching

The discourse of expression prioritizes the right of pre-service teachers to reveal to the microteaching groupmates their views and opinions about how and what to teach in their microlesson. Within the discourse of restraint, in contrast, a premium is placed on the duty of students to withhold opinions that might run counter to those of their microteaching groupmates. Three of the pre-service teachers mentioned tensions associated with expression and restraint in describing their participation in microteaching, with Bella's reflections illustrative of their views:

Excerpt two

Bella: There can be conflict in microteaching, not just between group members but also inner conflict…I felt conflicted because I don't always like their (other group members) teaching suggestions, but I think I should support them and this microteaching exercise…so I don't openly oppose them. I think they saw me as agreeable or somehow polite. But I also thought, should I really be silenced or express myself? Should I be outspoken and opinionated, because I think it's good to speak my mind…?

Researcher: How did that make you feel?

Bella: This worried me; I wasn't sure what I should do, because if I speak up they will probably see me as a troublemaker. On the other hand, at that time I was thinking, if I don't speak my mind, if I just keep it private, to myself, then we do some dull, boring teaching, then it's my grade that's going to be lower, so I'm affected, individually…But, for (group) harmony, I just kept my mouth closed and let the others do what they want, although I don't agree… so I felt

completely isolated from the groupmates during the microteaching as we can't really agree… (Bella)

As was the case in excerpt one, the storyline in excerpt two also concerns relations between pre-service teachers as they plan and implement a microlesson. However, in the case of excerpt two, rather than referring to the degree to which pre-service teachers engagement in microteaching allows them to take on the position of "their true teacher self" (Fiona, excerpt one), this storyline is concerned more directly with individual rights and duties when faced with tension and conflict between microteaching group members. This storyline explores the right of individuals to publicly oppose the ideas put forward by their microteaching groupmates.

Two discourses are at play in this excerpt. The first is the discourse of restraint. This discourse values individuals not openly voicing their disagreement with the suggestions and ideas of their groupmates. The positions this discourse affords pre-service teachers include 'supporter', 'agreeable' and polite', which are implicitly presented by Bella as desirable positions for pre-service teachers. A second discourse that Bella uses to position herself during microteaching is the discourse of expression. Within this discourse, it is the public expression of opinions that is prioritized, with pre-service teachers who do so afforded the seemingly positively evaluated positions of 'expressive', 'outspoken', and 'opinionated'.

The interplay of these discourses also has implications for the positioning of pre-service teachers during microteaching. Linguistically, the existence of this interplay is suggested by Bella's use of the expression "but I also thought…". In this case, she deploys this expression to signal the countering of her apparent alignment with the discourse of restraint. For instance, rather than taking on positions such as 'supporter' and 'agreeable', she self-positions herself as "silenced" within this discourse, which appears to be an implied negative positioning. However, the most striking effect of the interplay of these two discourses is Bella's positioning as 'uncertain'. For example, she begins by weighing the costs and benefits of aligning herself with the discourse of expression, a decision that would warrant her openly opposing the ideas for teaching of her microteaching groupmates. On the one hand, she speculates on the implications for her positioning if she embraces this discourse. These consequences include taking on the positions of 'outspoken' and 'opinionated', yet also accepting the risk of being negatively positioned by others as a "troublemaker".

On the other hand, she considers the implications of identification with the discourse of restraint. As noted above, one such implication, according to Bella, is to be positioned as 'silenced'. Taking on this position encounters the risk of possibility receiving a lower grade by failing to speak her mind and thereby not alerting her groupmates to what she sees as shortcomings in their microlesson. It is not surprising, then, that her willingness to commit fully to either discourse is shrouded, initially, in uncertainty ("I wasn't sure what I should do").

Bella describes the resolution of this discursive interplay in terms of prioritizing the discourse of restraint: "I just kept my mouth closed". Yet, as was the case with Fiona (excerpt one), the decision to identify with this discourse, and thus distance herself from the discourse of expression, is accompanied by negative implications for Bella's self-positioning. Bella refers to herself, for example, as "completely isolated from the groupmates". This concluding observation suggests that this student's experience of identifying with, and distancing herself from, the discourses of expression and restrain during microteaching did not end positively.

Convention and Novelty in Microteaching

The discourses of conventionality and novelty concern questions of what and how students will teach during a microlesson. The discourse of conventionality endorses what some of the teacher participants characterized as a "traditional teacher model in Hong Kong" (Fiona). This discourses values continuity and consistency between microlessons and the methods and approaches to teaching and learning prioritized in teacher education programmes, as well as the approaches to teaching and learning that are thought to be common in many Hong Kong classrooms. In contrast, the discourse of novelty embraces microlessons that overturn this "traditional" teaching approach. This discourse assigns a premium to risk taking and experimentation in microlessons. Jess elaborates on these discourses:

> **Excerpt three**
> *I think in microteaching it's difficult to know whether we should just do what we think is a safe, so-called, lesson or should be more adventurous and innovate in our teaching. We discussed this a lot…if we are only going to limit ourselves as teachers, to being routine teachers, conventional Hong Kong teachers: maybe give students worksheets, check the answer, maybe some simple pair work; it's what we had given to us as (school) students we might be safe if we do it (microteaching) like this and we could get a reasonable grade and good feedback as rewards for being very conventional…. on the other hand, we also think it's a time for use to try out something unique, what we have never tried before in a classroom…or maybe never even studied before on our (teacher education) course…microteaching should be fun…but it could be a risk, our microteaching might end up a disaster; that's embarrassing…in the end we went for a safe choice but I feel let down overall with microteaching because it didn't really show our full teaching potential (Jess)*

This storyline concerns tension and indecision Jess confronts as she simultaneously negotiates her identification with, and distance from, positions made available to pre-service teachers within the discourse of conventionality and within the discourse of novelty. This pre-service teacher commences by describing the possibility of microteaching as engagement in practices and activities that are rendered intelligible from the perspective of the discourse of conventionality. These practices include replicating teaching methods believed to be associated with contemporary Hong Kong schools, activities that include "simple pair work', and the use of teaching and learning resources in the form of worksheets. Within this discourse, pre-service teachers are positioned as "routine" and "conventional" teachers. The consequences of taking on these positions - being "safe", receiving a "reasonable grade" and "good feedback" – all imply that she positively assesses such positions. However, the strength of her identification with the discourse of conventionality is dissipated through use of relatively weak modality: "we *might* be safe if we do it (microteaching) like this and we *could* get a reasonable grade…".

This weakened identification with the positions made available to teachers by the discourse of conventionality is confirmed as Jess proceeds to consider the implications of the discourse of novelty for pre-service positioning. Her exploration of this alternative discourse is framed in terms of a countering of the discourse of conventionality by the discourse of novelty, a move which she previews in her choice of the expression "on the other hand". Having signaled this challenge, Jess explores microteaching as an opportunity for positioning herself within the discourse of novelty. According to this discourse, microteaching means "try(ing) out something unique". The use of the term "fun" implicitly positions this form of participation in

microteaching as desirable and is suggestive of her wish to identify with the positions made available within the discourse of novelty. Indeed, her identification with this discourse is strengthened as she declares such participation to be the right of all pre-service teachers: "microteaching should be fun".

Nevertheless, as was the case with Bella (excerpt two), the primary implication of the interplay of the discourse of conventionality and the discourse of novelty that Jess explores is to position her as 'uncertain'. This uncertainty is evident as she once again engages in the countering of one discourse by another. In this latter move, she indicates her intention to counter her potential identification with the discourse of novelty using the expression "but it could be…". She subsequently distances herself from the discourse of novelty by linking the position "unique" with what she considers to be the undesirable "risk" that her engagement in microteaching could lead to embarrassment and "end up a disaster". The need to reconcile this discursive interplay between identification with and distancing from the positions made available within the discourses of conventionality and novelty saw this microteaching group select "a safe choice", thereby aligning with those positions made available within the discourse of conventionality. Yet, this was a decision that had negative emotional repercussions. Jess, for instance, reports feeling "let down" because of what she believes to be unfulfilled teaching potential.

Realism and Idealism in Microteaching

A final discursive interplay in the positioning of pre-service teachers concerns a tension between microteaching either as a close replication of students' anticipated future teaching contexts or as an opportunity to experience teaching in an ideal world. The former, reflecting the discourse of realism, champions the need for microteaching to mirror as closely as possible the future teaching and learning conditions pre-service teachers encounter in the "real world". The discourse of idealism, in contrast, considers microteaching a unique opportunity for pre-service teachers to "think outside of the box" (Bob). These contrasting perspectives, mentioned by four pre-service teachers, are illustrated in excerpt four:

> **Excerpt four**
> *Bob: A decision that we found really difficult was should we try to make it (microteaching) just like the conditions in the schools in mainland China, the real world context, so we should treat this as a very serious teacher time, or should we try to imagine ourselves as completely free teachers? We were uncertain about which way to go in our microteaching.*
> *Researcher: What do you mean free teachers?*
> *Bob: Being realistic, there are many constraints on teachers in schools, like curriculum and exams and demands from principals and parents so we thought we have to do the microteaching in that real world context because it's good practice for the real teaching situation, for us as future teachers, but it's definitely not creative teaching…it could be quite boring teaching. On the other hand, we thought that we should be able to let ourselves free, to go beyond or think outside the box, outside what we might really have to do as teachers in an actual, real classroom and think of microteaching as being in an ideal world, which would be more creative, we would love to experiment with new and different teaching methods…so it was a constant back and forth*

discussion…there was really no clear or agreed decision by us. In the end we were really in-between the two ways to do our microteaching and so we were really uncertain and frustrated when we were planning how to teach and so we didn't have a clear idea about whether we were doing the right thing and how our classmates would react to our teaching… eventually I think we all began to really question if this (microteaching) can actually help us, as teachers, at all. (Bob)

Bob draws upon two discourses to understand his experience of microteaching: the discourse of realism and the discourse of idealism. According to the discourse of realism, microteaching should replicate, as closely as possible, the conditions for teaching and learning that pre-service teachers are likely to experience in their future careers as in-service teachers. Within this discourse, pre-service teachers are afforded positions such as 'serious teacher'. Bob's identification with the positions made available by this discourse is suggested by his explicit positive assessment of microteaching as "good practice".

A second discourse, the discourse of idealism, offers very different positions to pre-service teachers. These positions include 'experimenters', 'free teachers' and 'thinkers outside the box'. A positive stance is taken towards such positions by associating this discourse with the positioning of students as "creative", which is assumed to be a desirable outcome of microteaching. The phrase "love to experiment" underscores the strength of Bob's, and his groupmates, apparent commitment to identify with these positions.

The interplay of these two discourses has implications for the positioning of the pre-service teachers. This interplay occurs as Bob challenges his identification with the discourse of realism using the term "but". In a form of negative positioning, he distances himself from positions such as "serious teacher", which are understandable from the perspective of the discourse of realism, by linking this position to teaching as "not creative" and potentially "quite boring". Yet, once again, uncertainty and ambiguity are the outcomes of the discursive struggle experienced by Bob and his groupmates. This uncertainty is reflected in a "back and forth" process of negotiation for which no clear consensus emerged. The unresolved tension for these students between identification with and distancing from the alternative positions offered to them by the discourses of realism and idealism contributed to Bob and the others in his group calling into question the value of microteaching.

Discussion

The data presented in this paper are consistent with earlier reports that pre-service teachers find microteaching a valuable learning experience (Mergler & Tangen, 2010; Ralph, 2014). However, as some previous research suggests, the participants did view microteaching as tension (Bell, 2007; Horgan et al., 2018). Using the conceptual framework described above, a contribution of this study is to explore these views in terms of the positions made available, and denied, to participants within different discourses of microteaching. This analytical focus allows microteaching to be investigated as a series of discursive struggles for centripetal status; that is, as competition to determine which discourses will prevail in the positioning of pre-service teachers as they participate in the practices and activities of microteaching. The discursive struggle between individuality and collectivity positioned Fiona as "conflicted" between

positioning herself as "the type of teacher (she) wants to be" during her microteaching experience and the positions made available to her by the professional demands of her microteaching groupmates, such as 'collaborator' and 'team player'. In the case of Bob, tensions between the discourses of realism and idealism manifested themselves in a "back and forth discussion" about what and how to teach that ended with "no clear or agreed decision" (excerpt 4).

The results also imply that these discursive tensions have negative emotional implications for pre-service teachers, including feelings of disappointment (Fiona), isolation (Bella), being let down (Jess) and frustration (Bob). As these tensions often remained unresolved, the findings have implications for teacher educators wishing to support pre-service teachers throughout their engagement in microteaching, as well as for pre-service teachers who are preparing to undertake microteaching within a teacher education program. These are discussed in the following section.

Addressing Discursive Tensions in Microteaching

Tensions and ambiguities of the type experienced by these pre-service teachers during microteaching could be anticipated as part of the professional lives of all teachers. As Henry (2016) argues, taking on the position 'teacher' requires an individual to navigate "shifts between different and sometimes contradictory teacher voices" (p. 291). Yet, if such tensions become too great, if teachers find these tensions difficult to manage and if they are not appropriately supported, their professional growth and development can be threatened (Alsup, 2006).

At stake in this struggle between discourses to position pre-service teachers are answers to questions about the efficacy of microteaching. Bob's questioning of the value of microteaching is indicative of this struggle: "I think we all began to really question if this (microteaching) can actually help us, as teachers, at all" (excerpt four). Bell's (2007) approach to improving the practice of microteaching is to acknowledge its positioning as 'performance'. Similar revelation and acknowledgement might also be undertaken in the case of the discursive struggles that position pre-service teaches during microteaching. How this might be realized in practice is considered in remainder of this section.

One way of revealing the existence of discursive struggles is to incorporate the type of conceptual framework and discourse analysis used in this study within students' experience of microteaching. For example, using the microteaching framework described by Richards and Farrell (2011) and discussed earlier in this paper, the stage labeled 'briefing' could include case studies of former students teachers who describe their experiences of microteaching, including the challenges they faced and how, if at all they were able to overcome them. Led by the instructor, these texts could be analyzed using the discursive framework employed in this study in the form of contextualized, situated investigations of how pre-service teachers are positioned by different discourses as they engage in the practices and activities of microteaching in specific educational settings.

Following the identification of this positioning, it is crucial that this 'briefing' stage aims to disrupt student's binary understanding of the positioning possibilities available to them, such as being positioned as 'safe teachers *or* as 'risk takers', as 'agreeable' *or* as 'outspoken', for example. Rather, it will be essential that students are aware of possibilities for alternative positionings. Pre-service teachers can make use of such awareness to see microteaching not as an experience of being positioned by competing discourses but, rather, as an experience of agency. Armed with this awareness, participants can move beyond a view of microteaching as an

'either/or' experience of being assigned positions within binary categories such as 'safe teacher' or 'risk taker', for example. Rather, this awareness raising introduces pre-service teachers to the possibilities that positions are fluid, thereby opening potential for agency by allowing movement between discursive positions. This represents "the multiplication of categories through a practice of imagining oneself in both categories and also in neither" (Davies, 1994, p. 3).

The impact of the micro teaching task itself – as a compulsory, graded component of the participant's teacher education programme – on the positioning of pre-service teachers should also be acknowledged. The assessed nature of the task could, for instance, mean that the positioning reported by participants in this paper largely reflect those that are made available to them by others, that is by course designers and instructors who determine the criteria against which the participant's engagement in microteaching is assessed. Thus, the positions made available to students before, during and after microteaching are drawn from a limited set of possibilities. Pre-service teachers, in turn, may be afforded few opportunities to exercise individual agency by contesting, resisting or even rejecting certain positionings, for example. In future, opportunities might be made available for teacher educators and their students to jointly construct aspects of their microteaching experiences. As Jenset et al. (2018) argue, all teachers possess their own ideas about the meaning of teaching and their goals as teachers. The co-construction of microteaching experiences could include the criteria for assessment which would legitimize a wider range of positionings than is currently available to pre-service teachers.

Conclusion

Set against a background of international acknowledgement of the need to forge close relations between teacher education and practice, this paper reported the results of a study that examined the positioning of six pre-service teachers as they undertook microteaching at a tertiary institution in Hong Kong. These results imply that pre-service teachers are positioned within eight different discourses and that tensions between these discourses can result in negative emotional experiences during microteaching. Such tensions can not only contribute to the anxiety pre-service teachers commonly experience during microteaching but, in some cases, could lead them to question the efficacy of microteaching itself. Therefore, it is essential that teacher educators and pre-service teachers work together to expose the presence of discourses that offer and deny the latter certain positions as they engage in microlessons. Moreover, it is imperative that these discursive positions be understood as open to questioning, thereby promoting agency by allowing pre-service teachers to take on, resist and reject particular positions during microteaching.

Although data collection for this study was limited to Hong Kong and involved a small sample of pre-service teachers, the results have implications for research and practice beyond the Territory. Conducting similar research in other educational contexts would reveal the presence and nature of discourses that position pre-service teachers during microteaching in a diverse range of settings. This research could expand on the use of interview data by including videos of microlessons and students' written reflections as data sources, thereby enhancing understanding of their views of participation in microteaching. Together with the current study, these investigations would represent a comparative database that could inform best practice in the design and implementation of microteaching around the globe.

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