Negotiating English Language Teacher Identity—An Autoethnography

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Abstract

Identity construction is an integral part of learning how to teach. As a former British colony, Hong Kong provides a unique educational and research context where East meets West. This study examines my identity construction as an English language teacher (ELT) in Hong Kong and the United States using an autoethnographic approach, which serves as an attempt to answer recent calls in the field of applied linguistics for more innovative and authentic research. Reflexive journals and essays written for my postgraduate courses were used to reconstruct my life stories and identify the critical events pertinent to my professional identity formation as an ELT and meaningful lived experiences as a transnational woman. To analyse the important events that contributed to the construction of my professional identity, critical event analysis was used in tandem with salient literature pertaining to teacher identity development and teacher education. Based on my lived experiences as a transnational woman educator, I provide some suggestions regarding teacher identity construction for school administrators, researchers, and teacher educators to consider when implementing ways to recruit, support, and retain English language teachers.

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List of Abbreviations

AAVE: African American Vernacular English

CMI: Chinese as the medium of instruction

EDB: Education Bureau

ELF: English as a lingua franca

ELT: English language teacher

EMI: English as the medium of instruction

ESL: English as a second language

HKSAR: Hong Kong Special Administrative Region

L1: First language

L2: Second language

MEd: Master's in English Language Education

MOI: Medium of instruction

NEST: Native English-speaking teacher

NET: Native English teacher

NNEST: Non-native English-speaking teacher

PSA: Public service announcement

TESL: Teaching English as a second language

TESOL: Teaching English to speakers of other languages

WE: World Englishes

UK: United Kingdom

US/USA: United States of America

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Overview

This chapter discusses the background, aims, and organisation of this autoethnographic study based on my lived experiences as a Hong Kong English language teacher (ELT). By examining the factors that contribute to my professional identity development as a Hong Kong ELT and presenting my lived experiences as a transnational woman educator, I hope to contribute to the field of applied linguistics through facilitating a better understanding of the diverse experiences of transnational ELTs, especially in terms of their professional identity construction and the role of critical incidents in forming such identities.

1.2 Background

The pathway to becoming an English language teacher, or any teacher, involves the construction of a professional identity and development of professional practice (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Within a teacher's identity, there are professional, situated, and personal dimensions that interact with one another—these interactions can positively or negatively influence teacher identity (Day et al., 2006). As teachers transition from novices to experts, they often undergo an identity shift (Huang et al., 2019). Teacher identity is important to teacher learning and development not only because it influences the work, lives, and effectiveness of teachers, but it also determines how long teachers stay in the profession (Trent, 2017). As such, it is important to form a comprehensive understanding of how teacher identity is constructed and consider what factors contribute to identity development as teachers progress along the professional continuum from novice to expert teachers.

Although there has been a wealth of research on language teacher identities the last few decades (e.g. Barkhuizen, 2017; Posada-Ortiz, 2022; Varghese et al., 2005), many studies on identity development of ELTs still rely on a dichotomous division between nativeness and non-nativeness (e.g. Hayes, 2009; Lee et al., 2017; Ma, 2012), with little attention paid to the multiple identities and transnational experiences of ELTs (Huang & Varghese, 2015; Solano-Campos, 2014). With an increasing number of English language learners worldwide, there is a pertinent need to recruit a more

diverse and international pool of teachers who can better understand their students' needs and background (Ajayi, 2011). In the US for example, it has been estimated that there would be a 200%–300% increase in English language learners over the next five years (Walker & Edstam, 2013), yet most American teachers feel unprepared to serve this population (Ladson-Billings, 2013). According to Solano-Campos (2014), due to shortage of English-as-a-second language (ESL) teachers in US urban school districts, international English teacher recruitment has accounted for an unprecedented number of non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) from around the world. Meanwhile, in Hong Kong, due to social uncertainty, many highly qualified teachers are considering leaving or have already left their home to pursue their career elsewhere, such as the UK and the US, resulting in a huge demand of teachers in Hong Kong, especially ELTs (Lai-LaGrotteria, 2021). With globalisation, teacher mobility has become more widespread than ever, whether it is within or across national borders (Gu, 2013). Consequently, there has been an increasing number of ELTs worldwide who are transnational teachers with bilingual and even multilingual backgrounds, yet the provision of appropriate support and professional development for these teachers remains an under-researched area (Gao, 2021; Solano-Campos, 2014).

To provide better support for ELTs, Lindah and Yazan (2019) call for an identity-oriented lens in applied linguistics research for understanding ELTs' lives. By framing the journey of an ELT with an identity lens, it provides "preservice and practicing language teachers a space to assert their agency in creating the contours of their identity formation" (Lindah & Yazan, 2019, p. 1). One type of identity-constructing narrative that can offer deep insights on how ELTs negotiate their identities is autoethnography, where authors "construct and reconstruct their fluid understanding of connections between their personal lived experiences and the social cultural structures" (Yazan, 2018, p. 5). Different from traditional positivistic research which perceives anything based on the self as "subjective and distorting valid knowledge claims", autoethnography values "the self as a rich repository of experiences and perspectives that are not easily available to traditional approaches" (Canagarajah, 2012, p. 260). Ellis et al. (2011) define autoethnography as a writing

and research approach which challenges canonical ways of doing research by systemically analysing personal experiences, and treating research as a political, socially-just, and socially-conscious act.

As explained by Duff (2015), many transnational educators belong to marginalised or underrepresented communities, yet their personal histories and aspirations are often overshadowed by their professional identity as ELTs or social identity as non-native English speakers. Adams et al. (2017) underscore the limitation of traditional ethnographic studies in addressing the challenges faced by transnational educators from marginalised or oppressed communities, cautioning that "[e]thnographers, in particular, could no longer hide behind or try to perpetuate an aura of objectivity and innocence [since] many of the ethnographer's observations came to suggest more about the ethnographer and the ethnographer's agenda than about the cultural 'others' being studied" (p. 2). While some ethnographers risk misrepresenting or even abusing their research subjects, autoethnographers attempt to "offer accounts of personal experience to complement, or fill gaps in, existing research [by articulating] insider knowledge of cultural experience" (p. 3). As insiders who have directly experienced oppression and cultural problems such as racism and sexism, autoethnographers can inform readers about aspects of their cultural life that other researchers do not have knowledge of—they address these issues in ways different from those who have limited experiences with these topics (Adams et al., 2017). Hence, understanding and appreciating their personal stories from their *own* point of view is important in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of their teacher identity, which is intersectional and multi-faceted (Lindahl & Yazan, 2019). Since many scholars and educators in applied linguistics also began their careers through transnational experiences "involving mobility within multilingual or multiethnic countries" (Duff, 2015, p. 60), the lived experiences of transnational teachers should serve as central themes in identity research in English language teaching. As a transnational woman educator who has taught both in Hong Kong and the United States, I therefore find it pertinent to present my experiences, which can inform teacher educators who are preparing prospective teachers with transnational background and school

administrators who are attempting to retain or recruit teachers from outside their countries.

1.3 Aims of the study

The main purpose of this dissertation is to understand the factors contributing to my identity construction as a Hong Kong ELT and document my lived experiences as a transnational woman educator. Hence, this qualitative study includes an autoethnography of myself both as the subject and researcher.

As defined by Yazan (2018), an autoethnography is "a form of writing that affords the authors the discursive space to negotiate their own identities" (p. 6). In an autoethnography, "personal experience is [utilised] as a lens to challenge existing conversation about a social and/or cultural phenomenon" (Zacharias, 2019, p. 3). In this autoethnographic study, my unique position has allowed me to closely examine my own identity development as an ELT in Hong Kong and the United States, thereby challenging hegemonic concepts such as native speakerism, racism, and sexism.

As the researcher, I used my reflexive journals and essays written for my postgraduate courses to reconstruct my life stories and identify the critical events pertinent to my professional identity formation as an ELT and meaningful lived experiences as a transnational woman. Multiple frameworks were employed to describe and analyse my journey as a transnational woman ELT. They include different theories concerning teacher identity construction, transnationalism, and feminist theory. The reason for using multiple frameworks is because "a single theoretical stance cannot fully stand to account for the identity development process; multiple theories in the same domain and school may compensate and recoup for the accounts of the process" (Gao, 2021, p. 8). Hence, to fully account for my identity development process as a transnational woman ELT, multiple theoretical frameworks were adopted.

1.4 Outline of the dissertation

This dissertation contains five chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the aims and outline of the dissertation. Chapter 2 provides the theoretical frameworks of the study, an overview of existing literature and research regarding English language teacher

identity and native speakerism. The chapter also reviews studies linking teacher identity and English language teaching within the context of Hong Kong and the wider global context to identify gaps in existing research, which underpins the research questions. Chapter 3 covers the methodological approaches adopted in the study, including data collection, analysis, positionality, and reflexivity. Chapter 4 presents both the research findings and discussions of the autoethnographic study. Chapter 5 concludes the dissertation with a reflection on the study's answers to the research questions, implications, significance, limitations, and possibilities for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Overview

This chapter aims to map the research landscape germane to the research questions by presenting the theoretical frameworks and salient literature pertaining to professional identity construction of ELTs in different contexts.

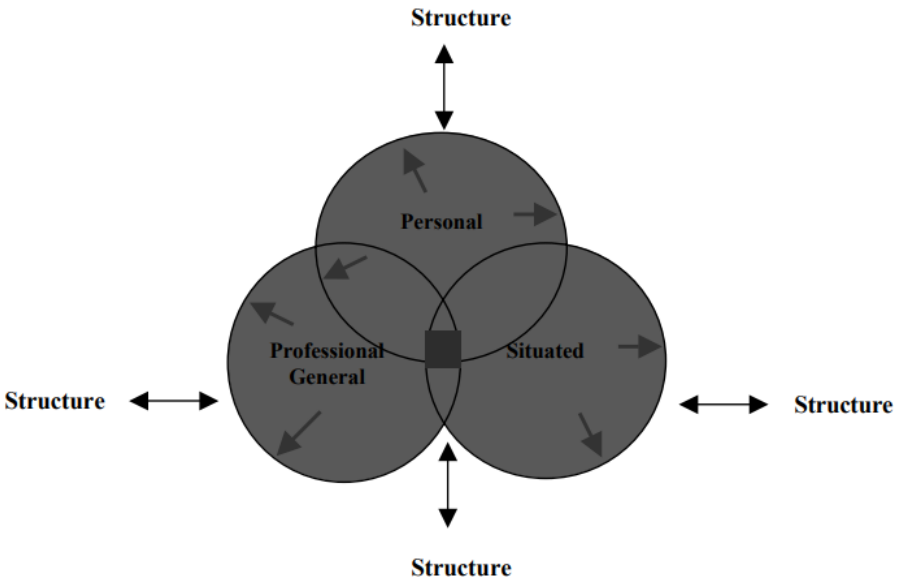
2.2 Theoretical Frameworks

2.2.1 Teacher identity construction

The theoretical and methodological underpinnings of the *four dimensions of learning* proposed by Alexander et al. (2009) and Day et al.'s (2006) theory on teacher identity were employed to guide data collection and analysis in this study. To become a language teacher, novices go through a learning process where they construct their professional identity (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). To delineate this learning process, Alexander et al. (2009) proposes a topographical perspective of learning which comprises "four dimensions that are continuously interwoven and interactive, represented by the *what*, *where*, *who*, and *when* of learning" (p. 180). The *what* of learning includes acquired habits and conditioned responses, concepts and practices that learners accumulated through daily interactions with others, as well as the scientific knowledge they gained from formal education. The *where* of learning is the context in which learning occurs; while the *who* of learning refers to the learners who "are influenced by, and at the same time push back, take from, change, control, and create the environment in which learning is situated" (p. 180). In other words, the *who* and *where* of learning are closely intertwined. The *when* of learning is "the flow of experiences or the availability of human and nonhuman resources that come with the flow of time" (p. 185). These four dimensions constantly interact with one another and can be used to delineate the identity development of teachers, particularly ELTs who are learning how to teach as they transition from novices to experts. For instance, Kubanyiova (2012) has used the *four dimensions of learning* to capture the conceptual change in language teachers' identity at different professional phases. This autoethnographic study employs the same dimensions to capture the changes in my identity development as an ELT as I moved across different national borders.

Day et al. (2006) postulate that teacher identity comprises the interactions amongst professional, situated, and personal dimensions. According to Day and Gu (2007), the professional dimension reflects "social and policy expectations of what a good teacher is and the educational ideals of the teacher"; the situated dimension refers to the specific school context, which is affected by local conditions such as student behaviour, leadership style, and support; while the personal dimension is based on a teacher's life outside school, which is connected to their "family and social roles" (p. 431). Differences in these dimensions and the way they interact with one another in each professional life phase of a teacher can have significant impact on the teacher's sense of identity, commitment, and effectiveness (Day et al., 2006). The interrelationships between these dimensions are shown in figure 1.

Figure 1 The fluctuating dimensions of teacher identity scenarios



Note: Adapted from C. Day & Q. Gu, 2007, *Oxford Review of Education*, *33*(4), p. 341.

As seen in figure 1, the three dimensions (*professional*, *situated*, and *personal*) are interrelated and constantly intersect with one another. Where there are more tensions between the dimensions, or more fluctuations within each dimension, more energy will be required from the teacher to stay committed to their profession. Therefore, in this autoethnography, the three dimensions of teacher identity by Day et al. (2006) and Day and Gu (2007) are employed to underscore different tensions I experienced as a transnational woman ELT.

In addition, this study adapts from Day and Gu's (2007) six professional life phases of teachers to capture the different stages and critical incidents in my ELT journey. Day and Gu (2007) posit that teachers' work and lives spanned six professional life phases: 0–3 years (learning to build identity and classroom competence), 4–7 years (developing professional identity), 8–15 years (defining work-life balance), 16–23 years (managing work–life tensions), 24–30 years (adjusting to change) and 31+ years of teaching (sustaining commitment). Since I have taught across different national borders, worked both as a secondary school teacher and university teacher, and did not accumulate more than 15 years of teaching experience, I adapted the professional life phases according to my life histories instead of following the exact model of teaching years proposed by Day and Gu (2007). Table 1 shows the adapted professional life phases that I employed to capture my ELT identity development.

Table 1: My professional life phases as adapted from Day and Gu (2007)

Professional life phase	**Geographical setting**	**Relevance to ELT identity**
Learner/Student	HKSAR	Learning English as a second language
Preservice teacher/ Student-teacher	HKSAR	Learning to build identity and classroom competence
1st year novice teacher	HKSAR	Learning to build identity and classroom competence
		Developing professional identity
2nd to 5th year teacher	HKSAR	Developing professional identity
		Defining work-life balance
Teacher educator	HKSAR	Managing work–life tensions
6th to 9th year teacher	USA	*Repeats the above:* Learning to build identity and classroom competence; Developing professional identity; Defining and managing work-life balance
		Adjusting to change
University teacher	USA	*Strengthening* commitment (instead of sustaining commitment since there is still room for development and growth)

2.2.2 Transnationalism in applied linguistic research

The concept of transnationalism can be dated back to the early 1900s when Randolph Bourne (1916) advocated that instead of forcing newly arrived immigrants to assimilate to the dominant American culture of patriotism or nationalism, one should embrace immigrant cultures and their transnational ties since they are what make the US a unique melting pot and a powerful nation. Transnationalism was later adopted by various disciplines including anthropologists (e.g. Basch, Glick Schiller, & Blanc-Szanton, 1994) and sociologists (e.g. Vertovic, 2009) to refer to the crossing of cultural, ideological, linguistic, and geopolitical borders and boundaries of different nation-states. More recently, transnationalism has been used as a theoretical framework for research in applied linguistics, particularly for studies on language teacher identity (e.g. Duff, 2015; Lee & Kim, 2021; Li, 2012; Park & Wee, 2017; Rumbaut, 2002; Solano-Campos, 2014; Song, 2011; Trueba, 2004).

As explained by Duff (2015), applied linguistics is "fundamentally concerned with *transnationalism*, *mobility*, and *multilingualism*—the movement across cultural, linguistic, and (often) geopolitical or regional borders and boundaries" (p. 57). Solano-Campos (2014) argues that adopting a critical and transnational perspective in applied linguistics allows researchers to better understand how socialisation and globalisation contribute to "the perpetuation of oppressive language ideologies [and also] create avenues for the contestation and appropriation of dominant discourses about linguistic, national, and racial identities" (p. 413). In fact, many scholars in applied linguistics began their careers through transnational experiences "involving mobility within multilingual or multiethnic countries" (Duff, 2015, p. 60). As these transnationals may also belong to marginalised or underrepresented communities such as immigrants, people of colour, asylum seekers, diaspora members, internal migrants in multi-ethnic and multilingual societies, and heritage language speakers, their personal histories and aspirations as transnationals should serve as central themes in identity research in English language teaching and learning (Duff, 2015). According to Trueba (2004), transnational individuals or communities possess "a unique capacity to handle different cultures and lifestyles, different social status, different roles and relationships, and to function effectively in different social, political, and economic

systems" (p. 39). Hence, transnational scholars often employ a theoretical orientation to language learning that reflects their multiple identities and complex migratory and linguistic histories (Rumbaut, 2002). Moreover, like their research participants or students, transnational educators debate about where home is or what one's native language is, which is often contentious and closely connected to one's own sense of identity (Li, 2012; Song, 2011).

Since transnationalism is such an integral part of many ELTs' professional identity, considering ELTs' transnational background helps paint a more comprehensive picture of their lived experiences, thereby allowing teacher educators and school administrators to better understand how to support these transnational teachers with appropriate professional development and teacher preparation opportunities (Gao, 2021). Therefore, transnationalism was employed as one of the key theoretical concepts to analyse my experiences as an international ELT in this study.

2.2.3 Feminist theory in applied linguistics research

Since this is an autoethnography based on my lived experiences as a Southeast Asian woman ELT, feminist theory serves as an appropriate lens for data analysis. According to Anderson et al. (1990), feminist research combines "two separate consciousnesses: one emerging out of [women's] practical activities in the everyday world and one inherited from the dominant traditions of thought" (p. 97). To put it simply, "[r]eflecting on one's experience in the world and thereby calling oneself a feminist constitutes perhaps one common definition of a feminist method" (Allen & Piercy, 2005, p. 157). The feminist researchers are filled with the "passionate desire" to include the everyday, personal side of their own reality in order to provide a complete research picture (Christ, 1987, p. 55). Here, the researcher "become[s] part of what is researched, thereby breaking down the separation between subject and object" (Mackie, 1999, p. 569). In many ways, feminist theory and autoethnography go hand in hand. According to Allen and Piercy (2005), autoethnography can serve as a way for women to "validate and [honour] their own lives, particularly when status quo reflects a version of reality that often excludes women's everyday experiences" (p. 157).

However, some researchers critique that feminist research has historically been centring on the oppression faced by middle-class white women (e.g. Collins & Bilge, 2020). Therefore, several feminist scholars of colour call for a feminist approach where gender, class, language, and race intersect (e.g. Kubota, 2020; Lin et al., 2004; Motha, 2006). When combined with transnationalism, feminist theory can shed light on the lived experiences of marginalised women migrants. One such example is Cuban (2010), who adopted an intersectional framework known as feminist transnational methodology to study how women migrants in the UK or the US were treated differently based on their nationalities and ascribed agency differently based on such categories.

When applying such frameworks to applied linguistics, feminism can serve as a theoretical underpinning for analysing power relations, gender, race, and class in the language learning process (e.g. Norton, 2000; Ogulnick, 1999; Pavlenko, 2001) and even the academic experiences of women faculty of colour in TESOL (e.g. Lin et al., 2004). For instance, Reay (2004) studied how aspiring migrants to English-speaking countries were frequently viewed as someone who were looking for easy money or greater opportunities without recognising women's invisible work such as supporting their children's learning and taking ESL classes. Feminist theory thus contributes to an analysis of women's complex decision-making within a migration and language discourse (Cuban, 2010).

As argued by Mackie (1999), most research in ESL tends to be positivist with "hierarchical and linear modes of organization [which] distances the researcher from the other research participants, [is] predominantly quantitative, and is unrepresentative of everyday classroom and institutional experiences" (p. 567). Therefore, applying feminism in ESL can create new research possibilities. When combined with a feminist approach which centres on the lived experiences of women, ESL research may even be "transforming" (Mackie, 1999, p. 569). More than a decade later, researchers continue to call for more feminist and critical research with the goal to provide a much-needed balance to applied linguistics (e.g. Lukkarila, 2012; Macdonald, 2013). Using such approach will mean "valuing teachers' and learners' everyday experience, [recognising] their various roles, and allowing for

diverse responses in ESL and TESL classes and research" (Mackie, 1999, p. 571), thereby creating space for a multiplicity of viewpoints and the potential for change within ourselves and our own communities (Kubota, 2020).

2.3 Ideologies influencing the identity formation of ELTs

2.3.1 Native-Speakerism

There are different ideologies which shape the identity construction of ELTs. One of these ideologies that has a profound effect on many teachers working globally is native speakerism (Aneja, 2016; Lindah & Yazan, 2019). According to Holliday (2005), native-speakerism is a pervasive ideology in English language teaching which promotes the belief that native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) represent a Western culture from which spring the ideals of the English language and the methodology for teaching it. This is echoed by Lowe and Kiczkowiak (2016) who define native-speakerism as the belief that native speakers of English are better language models than those who are perceived as non-native speakers. For many years, the NNEST/NEST dichotomy has remained the most prevalent way of theorising English language teacher identity (Menard-Warwick, 2008, p. 620). Under this dichotomy, non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) and students "are seen as culturally inferior and in need of training in the 'correct' Western methods of learning and teaching" (Lowe & Kiczkowiak, 2016, p. 3). Although not every white teacher who speaks English as their mother tongue condones native-speakerism or the prejudices it entails, their "native-ness" remains a major part of their professional identity (Holliday, 2013). Whether it is within or outside the English-speaking West, the native speaker ideal plays a widespread and complex iconic role in English language teaching (Holliday, 2006, p. 385). It is thus important to consider the influence of native-speakerism on the identity development of English language teachers across different contexts, especially concerning the identities of transnational teachers traversing different contexts where English is used.

As aforementioned, hegemonic ideology like native-speakerism is not without controversy. Many argue that there is limited linguistic support for the native/ non-native speaker distinction (e.g. Braine, 2010; Canagarajah, 1999; Holliday, 2006;

Jenkins, 2000; Solano-Campos, 2014; Swales, 1993). Some also condemn native-speakerism as an oppressive ideology which "manifests in beliefs and practices that serve to privilege the voices, institutions and pedagogical approaches of the Western 'native speaker'" (Lowe & Lawrence, 2018, p. 163). As reiterated by Holliday (2013), "[i]nherent to this ideology is a conviction that 'non-Western' cultural realities are deficient" (p. 17). Canagarajah (1999) even names native-speakerism as a form of linguistic imperialism, which is the use of ideologies and structures to legitimatise and effectuate an unequal distribution of power between English and other languages (Phillipson, 1992). Park (2012) also criticises the NEST/NNEST dichotomy as "essentially an 'othering' process [which minimised] and overlooked the multiple identities of NNESTs" (p. 129). Meanwhile, Houghton and Rivers (2013) argue that teachers who are labelled as native-speakers can also be negatively affected by the ideology, since it is a classification of language teachers simply based on biases and stereotypes, without considering whether the teachers themselves feel a sense of belonging to the native-speaker group or not.

Throughout the world, native speaker ideologies continue to manifest in various professional contexts such as employment practices (Clark & Paran, 2007; Selvi, 2010), proficiency assessments (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 2012), and students' preferences (Bonfiglio, 2010; Holliday, 2005). In many Asian societies, the English language has "strong association with higher education, internationalism, modernity and, at a personal level, job mobility and career development" (Kachru, 2005, p. xvi). In Hong Kong for example, speaking English with a local accent (i.e. Hong Kong English, or Konglish) is regarded as low-end English, which would not bring much benefit to the speaker (Luk & Lin, 2006). Specifically in English language teaching, any linguistic, pragmatic, or sociocultural differences between native and non-native speakers are often explained through a deficit lens, where deviations from the native-speaker norm are considered errors that result from incomplete L2 acquisition and require remediation or correction on the non-native speaker's side (Jenkins, 2006). As stated by Moussu and Llurda (2008), "even though a dichotomy vision of the NS–NNS discussion does not appear to be linguistically acceptable, it happens to be nonetheless socially present, and therefore,

potentially meaningful as an area of research in applied linguistics" (p. 316). Since English language teachers' professional identities are so profoundly shaped by their classification into native and non-native speaker teachers (Lowe & Kiczkowiak, 2016), it warrants a need to problematise the terms and untangle the biases and prejudices behind their use in English language teaching.

2.3.2 Review of studies on the impact of native-speakerism

Many researchers have underscored the negative impact of deficit framings of non-nativeness on both English language teachers and students (e.g. Aneja, 2016; Jenkins, 2006; Holliday, 2005). The following provides a synthesis of empirical studies which examined the impact of native-speakerism on the identity development of native and non-native ELTs (both preservice and in-service) in Hong Kong and other countries, then identifies existing research gaps to introduce the current study.

To examine the views of Hong Kong ELTs regarding the strengths and weaknesses of NESTs and NNESTs, Ma (2012) conducted a mixed-method study on 53 local Hong Kong English teachers. The participants first completed a questionnaire to share their views on the strengths and weaknesses of NESTs and NNESTs. Then, three of the 53 teachers were invited to participate in a 20-minute semi-structured interview. The interviews were conducted individually. The results suggest that the main strengths of NNESTs include good communication and rapport with their students, deep understanding of students' needs and difficulties, shared L1 with students, and familiarity with the local exam system. Their weaknesses include the lack of confidence in using English, reduced ability to motivate students to speak in English, and lack of English proficiency.

The findings show that many Hong Kong NNESTs still internalised and reinforced the NEST-NNEST dichotomy, which heavily influenced their identity formation. As critiqued by Selvi (2014), "associating teaching practices and competencies with contested and isolated concepts such as NEST or NNEST would be reductionist and simplistic ways to construe teaching competencies with little or no consideration of the situated, historical, global, and transformative facets of their identities" (p. 587). Ma (2012) did not delve deeply into the reasons behind these teachers' views towards

NESTs and NNESTs. To gain a better understanding of the factors influencing the identity construction of ELTs, the professional, situated, and personal dimensions of their identity should all be taken into consideration (Day et al., 2006). This is echoed by Freeman (2009), who argues that the formation of a teacher's professional identity cannot be separated from their socio-cultural contexts, as their social participation and professional engagement both influence their professional identity formation. Hence, one limitation for Ma's (2011) study is the lack of consideration of Hong Kong's historical context as a former British colony, and how that might have affected the ways Hong Kong teachers defined the strengths and weaknesses of NNESTs and NESTs in the study.

To examine the attitude of preservice ELTs towards different English varieties in postcolonial Hong Kong, Lai (2020) recruited 105 English preservice teachers to listen to four native (American, Australian, British, and New Zealand) and three Asian speech samples of English (Hong Kong, Chinese, and Indian). All of them were aged 18 to 22, born in Hong Kong, and educated in Hong Kong during the post-colonial era. Methods used to collect data included the Verbal-Guise Technique (VGT) and group interviews. The VGT examines attitudes towards different English accents by engaging respondents in listening to speech samples from authentic speakers, then expressing their opinions towards each speaker by answering a questionnaire without knowing the real purpose of the investigation. All participants were undergraduate students majoring in English language education at a university in Hong Kong.

After Hong Kong's handover from the British empire to mainland China, the notions of World Englishes (WE) and English as a lingua franca (ELF) were introduced to education students at the universities in Hong Kong. At the time of the study, the participants had already gained some knowledge of WE and ELF from compulsory courses at the university for over two years. After conducting the VGT, three group interviews (each group had five participants) were conducted to collect the participants' opinions for the patterns that emerged from their VGT survey. The results indicate that although most of the participants were confident in their own accent and displayed generally positive attitudes towards speakers of different English

varieties, they still showed a strong preference for American and British English over Asian English varieties. Specifically, American English was ranked as the best language model (followed by British English) and the speaker was considered to the "the most intelligent, competent, well-educated, friendly and honest" (Lai, 2020, p. 503) by the preservice teachers. The author hence concluded that a linguistic hierarchy (where American and British models are at the top) is still deeply rooted in the Hong Kong teacher candidates' mentality, influencing the way they viewed their own teacher identity and the future pedagogical approaches they might be adopting when teaching English to their students.

Lai's (2020) study is limited as only a small sample of recorded speeches and English varieties were presented to the participants. If the teacher candidates were to listen to a more diverse range of speech samples which could reflect World Englishes more comprehensively by including English varieties from Canada, France, Spain, and Singapore for example, the findings might shed more light on how the participants really viewed World Englishes.

ELTs' preference for native English models is not limited to the Hong Kong context. Lee and Kim (2021) examined the identity construction of 7 Korean ELTs, who were all transnational women aged 26 to 35. The main purpose of the study was to find out how Korean English teachers with transnational experiences positioned themselves regarding native speakership of English. These women ELTs have all lived and studied in English-speaking countries at a young age. Their English-speaking proficiency was also rated as near-native ("full professional proficiency" or "native or bilingual proficiency") by two native-speaking professors with more than 10 years of English teaching experience. Semi-structured interviews were conducted individually with each participant. Each individual interview lasted an hour and consisted of two parts. The first part focused on these women's English teaching and learning experiences in Korea and other countries; the second part included questions about their understanding of the NEST and NNEST constructs as well as vignettes to prompt their thoughts about their personal and professional identities. Critical discourse analysis of the interviews showed that despite being rated as near-native in their English-speaking proficiency, all seven participants identified themselves as

non-native English speakers. None of them positioned themselves on a continuum but rather relied on a dichotomous division between native and non-native when describing their teacher identity. Six of the participants emphasised race and nationality as the most important factors in determining whether one can be identified as a NEST, restricting the racial qualifications of NESTs to "whites only" in the Korean context. Most of them also showed preference for American English, naming it as the standard for English pronunciation. The findings imply that even highly competent teachers like the participants in this study were negatively impacted by the deficit framing of native speakerism, which positions non-native speakers as inferior to native speakers (Holliday, 2005; Jenkins, 2006). The authors concluded that the participants' perception of their teacher identity as NNEST was influenced by Korea's highly contextualised socio-cultural ideologies which celebrate native-speakerism.

The participants in Lee and Kim's (2021) study were all women, reflecting the dominance of females in language teaching field. However, their lived experiences as women were not presented. Interestingly, at least five of the participants named their father as the main reason for living in an English-speaking country when they were young. Since Korea is a patriarchal society with emphasis on filial piety and specifically defined gender roles (Park, 2001), it might be worthwhile to consider the lived experiences of these women ELTs and whether their lived experiences as daughters or women have played a role in their English learning experience, which might in turn affect how they positioned their professional identity.

Using a critical feminist ethnographic approach, Motha (2006) studied four K-12 public school ESL teachers for over a year in the United States to examine the implications of these teachers' native speaker status within an institutional culture that celebrates whiteness and native speakerism. Classroom observations, interviews, and regular tea gatherings at the author's home were cited as sources of data collection. Three of the four teachers were white, and one was Korean who was adopted by a white family when she was an infant. All of them identified as female and native speakers of mainstream English. They all completed the same Master of Education in TESOL programme at a public university and taught at four different public schools. Most of their ESL students were students of colour.

Katie, who was the only teacher of colour, emphasised how "her gender and racial identity contributed to a subtext of inequality in some interactions within her professional context" (p. 507). For instance, she mentioned that one of her colleagues, who was a white male, did not see her as a credible teacher:

> He doesn't see me as a credible teacher, as a credible equal peer. Because ... I'm a woman and I'm a minority ... How am I going to be able to advocate for my students? I'm not Caucasian, I'm not male, and I'm not a mainstream classroom teacher. It's a tough thing to negotiate. I just have to do what I can for my students. (Motha, 2006, p. 507)

Meanwhile, the other three teachers (Alexandra, Jane, and Margaret) felt the need and responsibility to use their privileged status as white and native-speakers to advocate for their students of colour, especially those who were speakers of a different English variety, such as African American Vernacular English (AAVE).

Another important finding from this study is that "[t]he silences surrounding language variation in these four public schools help to perpetuate racial inequity. The inseparability of Whiteness from standard English both reflects and reinforces White privilege" (p. 515). For instance, Alexandra described how her black and Latino male students were often subjected to negative stereotypes, and she felt the need to equip her students to confront those stereotypes within her school context. As she struggled to challenge the hierarchy that privileged white authority, she was concerned that her students were reading insufficient culturally diverse literature. She therefore exercised teacher agency and suggested her school to offer a class in multicultural literature, but wondered if she were not white, whether the school would still accept her suggestion. Hence, Motha (2006) emphasised, "The power of teachers, especially White native-English-speaking teachers in ESOL classrooms, should not be ignored or denied, but teachers should have a place in which to talk about what it means to use that power responsibly" (p. 514). Finally, she concluded that "identities shaped within the construct of ESOL are inherently racialized" (p. 514), and that English language teachers' identities are "not neutral in any interaction they have with students" (p. 498). Although Motha's (2006) findings are compelling and powerful, much of the focus was on how the three white female teachers advocated for their students of

colour who were speakers of different English varieties, while Katie, the only woman teacher of colour, whose experiences would require more representation, remained a very small part of the study. In particular, in analysing Katie's sharing of feeling disrespected by her male white colleague, more elaboration and unpacking might be required to reveal how her gender, race, and native-ness intersected in her teacher identity formation.

As aforementioned, one persistent challenge of ethnography concerns how to authentically represent the voice of another person or group, particularly if they are from marginalised communities (Adams et al., 2017). If the participants in the above study were to present their experiences as autoethnographers, the findings might have been even more powerful and authentic. However, a quick search on several prominent databases (Academic Search Complete, APA PsycArticle, ERIC, and PsychInfo) using the search terms "English teachers" and "autoethnography" yielded very few results, even fewer were autoethnographic studies on ELTs who were non-native speakers, and there was no autoethnography of Hong Kong ELTs.

One of the few autoethnographies involving NNESTs is the duoautoethnography by Lowe and Kiczkowiak (2016), who examined the effects of native-speakerism in their professional lives as ELTs. Both authors were white male—one of them was a native speaker (i.e. Lowe) and the other (i.e. Kiczkowiak) was a non-native speaker of English. Lowe was born in Britain and had been teaching in Japan since 2008, while Kiczkowiak was born in Poland and had taught in Europe and Latin America.

Using online conversations on social media, the two authors engaged in critical and reflective dialogue to investigate some of the complexities inherent in the ways that native-speakerism manifested in their lives as ELTs. The findings suggest that "the effect of native-speakerism on the professional lives of language teachers can be very varied and nuanced, depending not only on context and geography, but also on such factors as personal disposition and unpredictable events" (p. 12). For example, Kiczkowiak used his experiences of facing discrimination as a non-native speaker to find his own professional voice in order to fight the ideology, while Lowe's experiences confirmed that native speakerism also posed negative effect on the

careers of native speakers, though not as strong and widespread as the negative effect on non-native speakers.

As with other qualitative studies, the experiences of the authors may not be relevant to teachers from other contexts. The authors also acknowledged that since both of them are white, European teachers, the stereotypes they faced, and the consequences of such stereotypes might not be as adverse as ELTs from other ethnic backgrounds. Inevitably, different individuals in different teaching contexts would have experienced native speakerism differently. Hence, more qualitative studies should be conducted to gauge the effects of native speakerism on the lives of individual teachers from different backgrounds. The authors also advocated for more personal and provocative research methods, so that the experiences of ELTs can be appreciated by audiences beyond the academia and help spread awareness of such important issues.

2.4 Identifying existing gaps in identity research

As seen from the above studies, many researchers on ELT identity formation still heavily rely on a dichotomous division between NESTs and NNESTs (e.g. Ma, 2012; Motha, 2006). To better understand how different factors and ideologies influence the identity formation of ELTs, one should recognise that their "learning and practice involves negotiation, enactment, and (trans)formation of identities, and their professional identities are complexly intertwined and intersected with their other social identities" (Lindahl & Yazan, 2019, p. 2). Hence, in considering how native speakerism influences the ways language teachers construct their identities, one should also consider other ideologies it intersects with, such as race, gender, ethnicity, and nationality (Lindah & Yazan, 2019). However, most ELT research thus far has largely focused on "the rewards and challenges experienced by native-English-speaking teachers (NEST) as well as NNEST, yet attention to diversity within these groups has been limited" (Park, 2012, p. 129). Although Motha (2006) attempted to highlight the importance of teacher agency through presenting the experiences of four women NEST using an intersectional framework concerning race and gender, she largely focused on the white women teachers' challenges in advocating for their non-native speaker students, whereas the only teacher of colour, whose experiences require deeper probing and analysis, could have highlighted the diversity within the

NEST group. Similarly, both native and non-native teachers in Lowe and Kiczkowiak's (2016) duoethnographic study were white European male, which the authors themselves acknowledged, and called for more qualitative research with teachers from diverse ethnic, linguistic, and socio-cultural backgrounds.

Most of the above studies also took place in one geographical setting (e.g. Lai, 2021; Ma, 2012; Motha, 2006). Solano-Campos (2014) emphasises that many "studies have [only] looked at a particular group of teachers or students in a fixed geographical setting" (p. 414) and that there is limited research on NNESTs who "move from their home countries in the outer or expanding circles to teach in inner circle countries, and in particular about the political, economic, and social processes that take them to these countries and later enable them to either stay or return to their countries of origin" (p. 415). In other words, there is a lack of research on transnational English language teachers and learners who move across multiple geographical settings. Although two of the above studies involved transnational teachers (i.e. Lee & Kim, 2021; Lowe & Kiczkowiak, 2016), there was no detailed analysis on how their transnational background influenced their identity formation as ELTs. In the last decade, there has been an increasing trend in international teacher recruitment worldwide (Solano-Campos, 2014). With an increasing number of transnational teachers from diverse backgrounds, there is a pertinent need to better understand how their lived experiences influence their professional identity and pedagogical methods (Zacharias, 2019). Providing appropriate support and professional development to transnational teachers requires school administrators to understand their strengths and lived experiences as transnational and multilingual individuals (Gao, 2021).

In sum, researchers have generally argued that there is a paucity of research on non-native English teacher identity (e.g. Lindah & Yazan, 2019; Rose & Montakantiwong, 2018), and when there is any relevant research on NNESTs, most focuses on student perceptions of native and non-native English teachers (e.g. Ling & Braine, 2007; Yeung, 2021), without considering the voices of actual NNESTs. Specifically, Rose and Montakantiwong (2018) underscore the lack of research centring on teachers' voices in English as an international language (EIL), with most research focusing on students' attitudes towards classroom content. In addition, "[u]ntil very recently,

many of the studies concerning the effects of native-speakerism on the professional identities of English teachers have been quantitative" (Lowe & Kiczkowiak, 2016, p. 3). Many applied linguists therefore call for more qualitative approaches in examining the relationship between native speakerism and language teacher identities (e.g. Lindah & Yazan, 2019; Rose & Montakantiwong, 2018; Zacharias, 2019).

With the above research gaps in mind, this study aims to move beyond attempts to categorise individuals archetypically into native and non-native by examining how and why native-speakerism as a hegemonic concept is reproduced, understood, or resisted through my diverse lived experiences and negotiation of identities as I moved along different geographical settings. To better understand my lived experiences as a transnational woman ELT, a qualitative research design is adopted for this study using an autoethnographic approach. As aforementioned, at the time of writing this paper, there is still no autoethnographic research on Hong Kong non-native English teachers, yet there is an urgent need to recruit more ELTs, whether from within or outside Hong Kong, to compensate for the huge loss of Hong Kong teachers due to social and political uncertainty (Lai-LaGrotteria, 2021). Hence, this qualitative study appears to be the *first* which employs an autoethnographic method centring on Hong Kong English language teachers, which might shed light on some of the issues pertaining to ELT recruitment and retainment in Hong Kong and other similar contexts.

2.5 Research questions

Drawing on my autoethnographic account, this study has five research questions:

1. What are the critical events and identity claims in my life histories that are pertinent to the identity formation of an English language teacher (ELT)?
2. How can native-speakerism be reproduced, understood, or resisted through an ELT's everyday experiences (with students and colleagues) and negotiation of identities?
3. How do my social identities influence my pedagogical approaches and ability to relate to students' experiences in the classroom?

4. What can I offer to the field of applied linguistics with an investigation of my lived experiences as a Southeast Asian, Hong Kong-Singaporean Chinese, second language learner, English teacher, and transnational woman?

The central aim of this autoethnographic exploration is to answer a final question, which is:

5. How can I use my narratives to make recommendations for recruiting, supporting, and retaining English language teachers?

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Overview

This chapter details the research settings and overarching methodological approaches informing this study.

3.2 Research settings

As an international city, Hong Kong has embodied major trends of education change and reform from Western countries including Australia, the UK, and the US, but also adopts a highly selective, elitist, and exam-driven education system like many conservative Eastern societies such as mainland China, Japan, and Korea (Carless & Harfitt, 2013; Jensen, 2012; Pong & Chow, 2002). Due to its unique East-meets-West education setting, I chose Hong Kong as the focus of this study. To maintain Hong Kong's status as a globalised society, the Hong Kong government mandated all students learn English as a second language starting from kindergarten (Carless & Harfitt, 2013; Choi, 2003). This mandate is still currently enforced despite Hong Kong's return to China after 156 years of British rule (Lai, 2020). Therefore, a study on a Hong Kong ELT may offer teacher educators and researchers from similar educational contexts valuable insights into how to support and retain English language teachers in their respective settings. Since identity construction greatly affects teachers' decisions to exit or remain in the teaching profession (Trent, 2017), this study focuses specifically on my identity construction as an ELT in Hong Kong and the US.

3.3 Research design

This study presents an autoethnography where I reconstruct my own narratives of being a high school and university English teacher in two different geographical settings. This approach answers recent calls in applied linguistics research for more innovative research (Paltridge, 2020), which can be achieved by collapsing traditional boundaries between the researcher and participants. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2015), "qualitative research is generally based on the assumption that 'reality' is constructed by individuals, in light of their experiences; hence, in this view, there is

not one reality but many realities" (p. 45). This qualitative study aims at examining my teaching experiences, identity formation, and perceptions as an ELT in Hong Kong and the US. As a Hong Kong English teacher and English language learner who has been living and teaching in the United States for the last five years, my lived experiences present a reality that is constructed by me as an individual. I am also a mother of two who constantly struggled to balance my professional teaching career and personal circumstances. Hence, an autoethnographic research approach was deemed to be most appropriate for this study to unearth the lived experiences that underpinned my complex identities.

As explained by Chang (2008), "[s]temming from the field of anthropology, autoethnography shares the storytelling feature with other genres of self-narrative but transcends mere narration of self to engage in cultural analysis and interpretation" (p. 43). Since the late 1990s, autoethnography has been established as a qualitative research methodology in the field of social sciences (Yazan et al., 2020). As a research method and writing genre, autoethnography embodies a critique of positivist methodologies which emphasise the complex and interactive nature amongst self, the others, as well as the contexts in ethnographic research (Spry, 2001; Yazan et al., 2020). While "traditional positivistic research traditions perceive anything based on the self as subjective and distorting valid knowledge claims, autoethnography values the self as a rich repository of experiences and perspectives that are not easily available to traditional approaches" (Canagarajah, 2012, p. 260). Writing specifically about applied linguistics research, Yazan et al. (2020) explain that "autoethnographers rely upon self-narrative writing styles and analyse their own experiences to explore critical issues of particular cultures in which they are situated" (p. 4). In autoethnography, the "researcher's personal or lived experience is the point of departure" (Zacharias, 2019, p. 3). Here, the autoethnographer's own voice and stories are the legitimate knowledge generators (Canagarajah, 2020). Therefore, I am both the researcher and the participant in this study.

A strength of autoethnography is that it can serve as a powerful method to uncover experiences that might not be readily shared by participants via other research methods with outsider researchers (Ellis, 1999). For instance, introducing an

autoethnographic account of his experiences as a nonnative speaker of English in the TESOL profession, Canagarajah (2012) shared that the act of composing the narrative enabled him to explore "hidden feelings, forgotten motivations, and suppressed emotions" (p. 261). He continued to explain that autoethnography provides writers the agency to articulate their experiences, rather than letting others represent them. Agency is especially important for members of marginalised communities who "lack the resources and publishing outlets to articulate their knowledge and interests. Their knowledge is often presented by outsiders according to those outsiders' perspectives (Canagarajah, 2012, p. 262). Hence, autoethnography is a valuable form of knowledge construction in the field of applied linguistics, where TESOL professionals in diverse communities can use this genre to represent their professional experiences and knowledge in a relatively less threatening academic manner.

According to Ellis (1997; 1999), autoethnographies can be evocative or analytical. The former is written with the goal to evoke certain emotions from the readers, which might include personal and even traumatic details of the author in the form of stories. The latter adopts a more analytical lens using theories to break down the experiences. To ensure that my autoethnography is both authentic and informative, I attempted to reach a balance between evocative and analytical, hence my autoethnographic enterprise is a mixture of both.

3.4 Research procedure

For this autoethnography, I first perused several of my graduate student papers to begin my data collection process into my earlier development as a language teacher. I also used my own memories, flashback, as well as a total of six reflexive journals I wrote over the course of six months to complete my autoethnography. The reflexive journals can be found in the appendix. After completing the journals, I re-read all my journals and graduate papers to reconstruct my life history and identify critical events pertaining to the formation of my ELT identity. Table 2 presents the topics and summaries of the reflexive journals.

Table 2: Reflexive journal topics and summaries

Research Question(s)	Reflexive Journal	Summary
RQ1: What are the critical events and identity claims in my life histories that are pertinent to the identity formation of an ELT?	Journal 1	- Building an understanding of who I am. - My English learning experience and how that led to my decision to become an English language teacher. - My current position and how I view myself professionally.
	Journal 2	- An outline of my educational background and the qualifications I obtained in order to become an ELT. - Details on how my language teacher programme prepared me for my teaching career.
RQ 2: How can native-speakerism be reproduced, understood, or resisted through an ELT's everyday experiences (with students and colleagues) and negotiation of identities?	Journal 3	- The impact of my NEST/NNEST status on the way I interacted with others (students, colleagues, administrators, family, peers). - A few examples where I felt the need to negotiate, resist, or accept my identity as NEST/NNEST in those interactions. - The impact of those examples on how I viewed my own identity as teacher/ student/ native or non-native speaker etc.
RQ3: How do my social identities influence my pedagogical approaches and ability to relate to students' experiences in the classroom?	Journal 4	- I described my former and current students e.g. Their motivation in learning English, gender, need(s), age, ethnicity, L1, and abilities etc. - The reasons I used L1 (i.e. Cantonese) with my students during/outside my class. - How I motivated my students to learn English.
RQ2 and RQ3	Journal 5	- My experience of learning/teaching in the US. - The influence of my identity (as a native/non-native English speaker) on the way I interacted with colleagues, students, and parents etc. - I shared one example when my identity as a non-native English speaker hindered my interaction with others, and one example when my identity benefited the interaction.
RQ4: What can I offer to the field of applied linguistics with an investigation of my lived experiences as a Southeast Asian, Hong Kong-Singaporean Chinese, second language learner, English teacher, and transnational woman?	Journal 6	- A reflection on how the process of writing these journals have helped me learn more about my own identity e.g. language teacher, native/non-native speaker of English, Hong Konger, mother, transnational woman etc. - Some final thoughts to share.

In writing the autoethnography, I chose events and experiences from the past instead of merely focusing on the present. As explained by Ellis et al. (2011), "[when] writing an autobiography, an author retroactively and selectively writes about past experiences" (p. 275). Since autoethnographers rely on memory to reconstruct their past, it might result in selective memory and some might even "censor past experiences" (Chang, 2008, p. 53). Moreover, unlike a purely analytic autoethnography in which a certain level of objectivity is maintained and some efforts are made to limit subjective biases, I acknowledge that my autoethnography involves subjective perspectives and personal events that may trigger past trauma and evoke negative emotions (Ellis, 1999).

As declared by Denzin (2006),

> [Autoethnography is] not an innocent practice. Our research practices are performative, pedagogical, and political. Through our writing and our talk, we enact the worlds we study. These performances are messy and pedagogical. They instruct our readers about this world and how we see it [… and] by enacting a way of seeing and being, [autoethnography] challenges, contests, or endorses the official, hegemonic ways of seeing and representing the other. (p. 422)

In addition, referring to essays written when I was a graduate student allowed me to enhance the content richness of my recollection. I also compared them with my reflexive journals as a form of triangulation. Then, I researched appropriate theoretical frameworks to analyse my autoethnography, which are discussed below. After writing the first draft of my autoethnography, I consulted my supervisor, college advisor, course tutors, former professors and colleagues in Hong Kong, and current colleagues in the US so as to interrogate my own experiences and transcend these personal experiences by applying them to the field of applied linguistics. After receiving their feedback, I went back to read my reflexive journals and past student papers again and rewrote the entire autoethnography based on Alexander et al.'s (2009) framework, while also keeping in mind other relevant frameworks such as transnationalism, feminist theory, and pertinent literature concerning language teacher identity and native speakerism.

3.5 Data analysis

3.5.1 Analytical frameworks

As explained by Zacharias (2019), "[u]nlike other qualitative methods, the data collection and analysis in autoethnography go hand in hand" (p. 4). In other words, my data collection and analysis processes took place concurrently and informed one another in a "web-like fashion" (Chang, 2008, p. 8). As aforementioned, my autoethnography enterprise is both evocative and analytical (Ellis, 1999). For the analytical part, in order to analyse my own journey to becoming an ELT and the changes in my identity construction, the four dimensions of learning proposed by Alexander et al. (2009) and the fluctuating teacher identity scenarios model suggested by Day et al. (2006) were adopted in tandem with salient literature on teacher identity, such as McDonald (1992), Alexander and Fives (2001), and Day and Gu (2007).

Alexander et al. (2009) argue that "any comprehensive theoretical perspective of learning should be constituted of at least four dimensions that are continuously interwoven and interactive, represented by the *what*, *where*, *who*, and *when* of learning" (p. 180). In this autoethnography, I applied these four dimensions in tandem with salient literature in the field of teacher education to capture my learning to teach experiences and analyse the changes in my identity development as an ELT in Hong Kong and the United States.

3.5.2 Critical Event Narrative Analysis

For autoethnographic analysis, Cooper and Lilyea (2022) suggest that one can draw from several qualitative traditions such as ethnographic research, narrative inquiry, and general qualitative research. I decided to draw from a traditional narrative inquiry approach in analysing my autoethnography. In order to choose the most appropriate method to analyse my lived experiences, I went back and forth over several methods of data analysis before settling on the critical event narrative analysis, which focuses on critical incidents and points of tension and conflict (Janesick, 2010).

An advantage of using critical event analysis is that critical events can reveal "a change of understanding or worldview by the storyteller" (Webster & Mertova, 2007,

p. 73). As defined by Webster and Mertova (2007), a critical event "is almost always a change experience. This change experience can come about as a storyteller encounters some difficulty in integrating their idealised worldview with the reality of their experience" (p. 75). A critical event may have positive or negative impact on "the performance of the storyteller in a professional or work-related role" (p. 73). It may also have a traumatic component and is often "intensely personal with strong emotional involvement" (p. 83). Based on these defined characteristics of a critical event, critical event analysis seemed to be a good fit for my autoethnographic study, which is both personal and analytical in nature.

According to Polkinghorne (1995), "[t]he result of a narrative analysis is an explanation that is retrospective, having linked past events together to account for how a final outcome might have come about" (p. 16). Hence, the autoethnographic data was first sorted chronologically from my early English learning experience to my current English teaching career. Second, the data was sorted according to the critical events that I experienced, especially events that resulted in a change of identity formation. Identity conflicts that I experienced and the relationships between these conflicts were analysed as well. This process involved reorganising different flashbacks to explain the critical events I experienced as a learner and a teacher. Finally, the data were analysed according to the theoretical frameworks stated before.

3.6 Positionality and Reflexivity

My positionality stemmed from my identity as a Southeast Asian woman. My mother is half Malaysian and half Singaporean, while my father is Hong Kong Chinese. To reiterate, an autoethnography does not claim neutrality or objective representation of the self because it entails an introspective writing process which examines the intersection of our identities and the communities or cultures we are situated in (Adams et al., 2015; Yazan et al., 2020). Although there is no triangulation in the traditional sense in autoethnography, "the process of triangulating internal thoughts and external [behaviours], current memories with past notes or artifacts, descriptive facts with visceral emotions, and so forth is key to creating the ability to observe oneself and thereby, allowing for beneficial contrasts and comparisons" (Cooper & Lilyea, 2022, p. 202).

According to Berger (2015), reflexivity in autoethnography means acknowledging the researcher's positionality within the study and reflecting on their active role as both researcher and participant, thereby addressing their biases and subjectivity. As an autoethnographer reflects on their personal experience which is infused with political/cultural norms and expectations, they engage in rigorous self-reflection to "identify and interrogate the intersections between the self and social life" (Adams et al., 2007, p. 1). Adams et al. (2017) also emphasise that, despite their possession of insider knowledge, autoethnographers do not articulate more truthful or more accurate knowledge than outsiders. Rather, as the authors of their own experiences, autoethnographers can tell their stories in novel ways as compared to how others may be able to tell them.

Another limitation of autoethnography is that it might end up being too self-indulgent (Davies, 1999). Some critics even condemn autoethnographers as naval-gazing, self-absorbed narcissists (e.g. Coffey, 1999; Madison, 2006). To keep myself in check, I submitted multiple drafts of my autoethnography to my supervisor and revised my draft numerous times to ensure a good balance between evocative and analytical styles. I also shared my autoethnography with my American colleagues and former Hong Kong colleagues to gather their perspectives on some of the critical events as a means of fact-checking.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussions—My Autoethnography

4.1 Overview

This chapter, my autoethnography, presents my life history and the critical events that were crucial in the construction of my professional identity as a transnational woman ELT. In discussing the findings, I applied Alexander's (2009) four dimensions of learning (the *what, where, who,* and *when* of learning) in tandem with salient literature on teacher identity to capture my learning to teach experiences and identity development in Hong Kong and the US. My life story and the critical events are important to my identity construction as they represent a continuity of struggles from acquiring the knowledge and skills of becoming an ELT to claiming my professional identity through engagement with the teaching profession and with my socio-professional communities.

4.2 A Tale of Two Cities—My Learning to Teach Experiences in Hong Kong and Bridgeport

My students and their parents from the States used to give me curious and doubtful looks when I told them I am an English teacher. In fact, I have had many inquisitive students asking, "Aren't you Chinese? Why don't you teach Chinese instead of English?" To many, my nationality, ethnicity, and accent simply did not match with what my jobs entailed—teaching Shakespeare to high school seniors, discussing American poetry with international students, writing and directing annual school plays in English, and conducting English academic writing courses at American and Hong Kong universities.

Alexander et al. (2009) posit that "any comprehensive theoretical perspective of learning should be constituted of at least four dimensions that are continuously interwoven and interactive, represented by the *what, where, who,* and *when* of learning" (p. 180). My identity construction as an ELT also involved the *what, where, who,* and *when* of learning, which are analysed hereafter with salient literature concerning teacher education and language teacher identity.

I. The *What* of Learning: From Childhood Dream to Preservice Teacher Preparation

My early English learning experience—Growing up in a family of teachers

Alexander et al. (2009) postulate that the *what* of learning includes acquired habits and conditioned responses, concepts and practices a learner accumulated through daily interactions with others, as well as the scientific knowledge gained from formal education. I was born and raised in Hong Kong by a Hong Kong Chinese father and Singaporean-Malaysian mother in the 1980s, a time when Hong Kong was still a British colony. The colonial government in Hong Kong mandated all students learn English starting kindergarten (Carless & Harfitt, 2013; Choi, 2003). Despite Hong Kong's handover to mainland China in 1997, however, all students were still required to learn English, but we also had to learn Mandarin as well, while Cantonese remained the most frequently used language within Hong Kong families and communities (Lai, 2020). Naturally, Cantonese is my native language (L1), English became my second language, and Mandarin my third language. Since my mother was born and raised in Singapore where the official languages are English, Mandarin, Malay, and Tamil, she could not write that fluently in traditional Chinese even though she could speak conversational Cantonese with us. My mother would ask me to proofread for her from time to time, especially when she had to write in traditional Chinese to communicate with our Hong Kong relatives and friends during Chinese New Year and other special occasions. As her translator, I became interested in both languages and identified as a Chinese-English bilingual speaker. Growing up, I read both English and Chinese books, but preferred Chinese novels as my reading speed in Chinese was much faster than English.

With both of my parents being English teachers, I was immersed in an English environment regardless of my native level of English. My childhood memories of helping my mother grade her students' English homework and observing my father tutor his students at our home provided me with basic concepts of what an English teacher does. Although the daily interactions with my parents, who were both English teachers, provided me with a basic understanding of what teachers do, it was not until my high school years when I confirmed teaching as my lifelong career.

My teenage years—An influential teacher

During my senior year at high school, my father lost his teaching job due to school closure. In the 1980s and early 90s, there used to be a relatively equal distribution of schools that used English as the medium of instruction (they were called EMI schools) and schools that used Cantonese/Chinese as the medium of instruction (hence the name CMI schools). My dad was a teacher at one of the EMI schools. After the handover in 1997, the new Hong Kong government enacted a new language policy that allowed only a select number of schools to keep their status as 'EMI' schools, with the majority of schools adopting Chinese (Cantonese and Mandarin) as the medium of instruction (Li, 2017). My dad's school was one of the former EMI schools that had to switch to CMI. The rebranding resulted in a drastic loss of students whose parents were worried about the future job prospects of their children, as English was still seen as the language of prestige. Eventually, the school could no longer stay open. As explained by Day et al. (2006), the professional dimension of a teacher's identity reflects the social expectations of what a good teacher is and the policies or education system the teacher is situated in, which might affect the personal identity of the teacher, such as their family and social roles. Having just bought an apartment under a huge mortgage with the expectation that my dad's teaching position would be permanent, my parents were having such tremendous financial difficulty to the point that they were no longer able to afford my tuition. Here, policy changes led to a negative effect on my father's personal identity (i.e. his family life).

Having witnessed my parents' struggle, I took on as many part-time jobs as I could and would study past midnight. My health deteriorated to a level that I fainted one night while going to the bathroom, which resulted in my temporary absence from school. It was Ms. Chan (pseudonym), my English Literature teacher, who helped me during that moment of tension and vulnerability (Dewey, 1986). I was supposed to turn in my English Literature portfolio for the Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination, but because of my health I was falling behind in one of the written components of the portfolio. Knowing that I was still recuperating from the fall, Ms. Chan came to visit me to complete the portfolio. I was still very weak at the time, so Ms. Chan asked me to verbalise everything that I wanted to be included on my

portfolio as she did the typing on her laptop. The fact that Ms. Chan went out of her way to help me truly moved me. Rather than treating me as just a student, Ms. Chan saw me as an individual and catered for my personal needs. With Ms. Chan's help and acts of kindness, I achieved high scores on my A-level examination. I was told that I had the scores for law school, but I had already made up my mind.

I wanted to make a difference just like Ms. Chan did with me. I wanted to help students conquer their fear towards a language that might sound foreign, challenging and intimidating, but would turn out to be extremely intriguing and rewarding if they had the right mentor to guide them on their learning path—That was how I decided to become an English teacher.

My college years—Fulfilling my dream

Although my parents and Ms. Chan served as positive influences for my chosen career, it was not until my teacher education programme that I formally learned how to teach. According to Alexander and Fives (2001), acclimation is the first stage of professional development which entails a period of orientation to the complex field of teaching. My acclimation took place at the University of Hong Kong (HKU), where I was accepted into their Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Education (double degree) program to learn how to become an ELT. At HKU, my professors built my theoretical knowledge of teaching and contributed to my accumulation of subject matter knowledge (i.e. English language). For example, one teacher educator emphasised the importance of teacher language awareness (see Andrews, 2008, for such work), while others lectured about aligning teaching goals with the state-mandated curriculum (see Carless & Harfitt, 2013).

Although Dr. Andrews, Dr. Carless, and Dr. Harfitt all instilled in me important theories and concepts about teaching, one teacher educator has particularly inspired me in my journey of becoming an English teacher. She is Ms. Nicole Tavares, a veteran teacher who introduced us to different innovative ways of teaching. During the first year of my teacher education programme, Prof. Tavares organised multiple microteaching sessions where she guided my cohort to teach neighbouring secondary school students at our university. Afterwards, Prof. Tavares and the teacher of the

secondary students would discuss the lesson with us. All of these culminated in the *what* of my learning experience.

Mills and Fives (2018) argue that acclimation is also a time for prospective teachers to ask questions and make mistakes while constructing a schema for practice and knowledge about different school contexts. I remember feeling discouraged when the activities planned by my microteaching group did not interest the students. Although the session was unsuccessful, my teammates and I tried to break down the experience to figure out why the lesson did not engage the students.

As reiterated by Mills and Fives (2018), "[p]reservice teachers may have knowledge of subject matter but little knowledge of pedagogy or child development" (p. 179-180). Although my teammates and I were confident English language learners, we were not competent English language teachers, and our understanding of Hong Kong secondary school students was limited at the time. Having peer discussions allowed us to reflect on the lesson and think of what could have been done differently to make the activities more interesting and appropriate for the students. In our joint reflection, my team realised that the activities we planned were too difficult, and that because we insisted on using only English for the entire lesson, the students were unable to comprehend some of the more complex vocabulary and sentence structures taught in our lesson. As McDonald (1992) said, teachers "should work as we like to think doctors do: Figure out what's wrong, then fix it" (p. 5). By the end of the debriefing, we were all hopeful that our next microteaching session with the same group of students would be better if we used some Cantonese to explain the more sophisticated vocabulary. My microteaching experience and group reflections have taught me that one should not feel defeated just because of one unsuccessful lesson as "everyone who teaches has days like this. They serve as signs of the tentativeness of one's grip, the fragility of one's control" (McDonald, 1992, p. 37).

At HKU, there was also a two-month teaching practicum once every academic year of our four-year teacher preparation programme. During my final year of teaching practicum, I was given a new challenge as I was assigned to complete my student-teaching at an all-boy high school. Coming from an all-girl background and having only sisters but not brothers, my experience with boys was limited. On my first day of

teaching, I had trouble finding a restroom that I could use as the staff restroom was located on the highest floor and my classroom was on the first floor, where all the restrooms were "Men Only". Kennedy (2016) highlights the challenge to accommodate the personal needs of teachers. She argues that "[if] a teacher cannot find a way to create an atmosphere that he or she is comfortable living in, he or she is not likely to remain teaching for very long" (Kennedy, 2016, p.13). This can be applied to my teaching practice experience as I was too timid to voice out my personal need to the administrators.

Notwithstanding the minor inconvenience of not having immediate access to a restroom, my teaching practicum proved to be one of my most crucial learning opportunities to becoming an ELT. As a student-teacher, I wanted to impress my students by applying the innovative teaching methods that Prof. Tavares covered in her course. Without first getting to know my students and the culture of my school, I created the context of an anti-bullying week where students had to make a public service announcement (PSA) to spread awareness and stop bullying at school. The students were so excited by this project that one group even came up with the idea of using the school's swimming pool. Their idea was to have one student push another student[1] into the swimming pool, and a third student would change into a superman suit to save the drowning boy.

The boys took the initiative of asking the lifeguard of the pool to stand by and watch carefully as they videotaped the whole PSA in English. Being a novice teacher and eager to try out new teaching methods, I approved their plan without thinking any further. Then came the day of the video-shooting. The boys did everything that they planned to do, but I forgot to do the most important thing: seek permission from school administrators. There were CCTV cameras everywhere at the school. As our very responsible security guards were watching the CCTV, they thought there was a real bullying incident going on. The efficient head of security informed the principal right away, and within five minutes a whole team of security guards and all the school administrators were at the pool. It was such an embarrassing moment as the school

[1] All students involved in the PSA were advanced swimmers.

administrators all gathered around me to find out what had happened. Although they all understood the situation and forgave me for my grave error, I can vividly recall how concerned and upset they were.

When I reported the swimming pool incident to Prof. Tavares, thinking she would fail my teaching practicum, she chuckled, "Sounds like you've had learned a great deal from your teaching practice!" As argued by Kennedy (2016), "When we define teaching by the visible practices we see, without attending to the role these practices have in the overall lesson, novices are likely to use their newly acquired practices at the wrong times, in the wrong places, or for the wrong reason" (p. 9). Although it was a fun activity to do with my students, the method that I adopted was inappropriate and it was also the wrong time and place to do so. Even though the idea of making a PSA in the swimming pool was somewhat innovative, I would be "hard-pressed to insist that any particular curriculum portrait was the correct or best procedure for teaching any particular bit of knowledge" (Kennedy, 2016, p. 10). Yet, paradoxically, it is also in this "messy situation" where I learned to be a more responsible teacher, to adopt "a view of teaching that takes the teacher's self seriously—in all its commitment, ambivalence, and contrivance—necessarily also takes seriously the sources of this self's construction in the lively uncertainties associated with the teacher's students and subject" (McDonald, 1992, p. 20).

My teacher preparation programme and teaching practice have shaped me to become a more creative, flexible, and responsible teacher and individual—these are all important dimensions of my professional identity as a preservice ELT. After my teaching practicum, I would always remind myself to look at teaching from different perspectives: students, teachers, administrators, and parents. In sum, while my early childhood and high school experiences inspired me to become a teacher, the microteaching sessions, my teaching practicum, and the scientific knowledge gained from university professors constituted the *what* of my learning to teach experience during teacher preparation. In turn, the *what* of learning also contributed to the development of my identity as an ELT.

II. The *Where* of Learning: Where Dreams and Reality Do Not Match

The *where* of learning is the context in which learning occurs (Alexander et al., 2009). Day et al. (2006) emphasise that schools serve as primary sites of learning, *where* a teacher develops the situated dimension of their identity. The situated identity of a teacher is affected by school's conditions such as student behaviour, leadership style, and support (Day & Gu, 2007). After completing my preservice teacher training, I began teaching at a vocational school as a first-year teacher, which served as my learning site (i.e. the *where* of learning). Day et al. (2006) caution that schools could provide favourable or unfavourable learning environments, which would enhance or prohibit prospective teachers' motivation to learn and commitment to teaching. Unfortunately, my induction experience at the vocational school had hindered my motivation to learn, which resulted in low self-efficacy during my first year of teaching. Unlike my student-teaching experience at the all-boy school, which was anchored in the *what* of learning (i.e. important lessons about being an accountable and responsible teacher), the following experience is anchored in the context, or the *where* of learning.

Vocational Institute of Commerce (VIC) is the fictitious name of a for-profit high school where I taught English in 2010. I was assigned to co-teach four classes of 30 students with my cooperating teacher Ms. Lam (pseudonym). On my first day at VIC, Ms. Lam assigned all 120 students' English writing portfolios for me to grade over the weekend. I told Ms. Lam I might not be able to complete all the grading, but she said it would be good training for me. This reflects how "[n]ew teachers are often expected to do everything well, even from the first day of their professional careers" (Alexander & Fives, 2001, p. 300).

According to Alexander and Fives (2001), "[if] teachers are to progress in their professional development, it is essential for them to feel that they are increasingly the captain of their own fates" (p. 295). Having a rudimentary understanding of my chosen profession as a novice teacher, I was completely reliant on Ms. Lam to get me acculturated into the community of English language educators (Alexander & Fives, 2001). As I struggled for acceptance within the professional community, guiding my students to master reading or grammar took a backseat. My poor relationship with Ms.

Lam further manifested in my lack of confidence and self-doubt, which resulted in "negative self-efficacy beliefs" (Alexander & Fives, 2001, p. 295). My experience was opposite to my mum's first teaching job in Hong Kong, where she felt appreciated and empowered. Mum was hired by a Hong Kong elementary school as a NEST by name without any benefits that a NEST in Hong Kong would normally receive. Although she did not receive housing allowance and a higher renumeration, she was treated as a NEST by her principal and students. She was told by her principal to not let students know that she could understand Cantonese to encourage them to speak with her only in English. I fondly remember all the beautifully-wrapped presents that mum would bring home, with messages of heartfelt gratitude from her students such as "Thank you for helping me improve my English", and "You're the best teacher". Hoping to emulate mum's successful teaching style and overcompensate for my feelings of inadequacy, I began pretending that I could not understand Cantonese so my students would think that I was a native English speaker. Instead of resisting or questioning native-speakerism, I internalised and reinforced it by assuming the role of a NEST. I was hoping that doing so would help me gain respect from my students, but my pretentiousness only worsened my relationship with them.

At the same time, VIC was on the verge of closing, which resulted in a stressful learning environment. Jurasaite-Harbison and Rex (2010) argue that a positive school culture is essential in supporting teachers' professional learning and development. Although I had acquired some subject matter knowledge, none of the courses I took during my teacher education had prepared me for the complex office politics nor equipped me with the interpersonal skills required for survival at VIC. VIC therefore served as an important learning site, *where* I learned that as teachers, our desires and expectations may not always be realised in the way we hoped.

III. The *Who* of Learning: Developing My Professional Identity

In delineating the *who* of learning, Alexander et al. (2009) posit that learners "are influenced by, and at the same time push back, take from, change, control, and create the environment in which learning is situated" (p. 180). Here, the *who* and *where* of learning are closely intertwined. Although VIC was probably not the most ideal

learning site, I (i.e. *who*) also held the responsibility of creating an environment conducive to learning. As argued by Alexander and Fives (2001), every new teacher must experience acclimation, no matter how frustrating or unpleasant that prospect may seem. As a novice ELT, I ought to accept that it would require substantial time and effort before I became a competent English teacher, and I did not have to rush the process by creating false identities to win the students' respect. After the closure of VIC, I eventually earned a tenured position at St. Joseph's Academy (fictitious name), where I further developed my professional identity (Day et al., 2006). The seasoned teachers at St. Joseph's often invited me to observe their lessons so I could learn from them. They would also observe my class and provide feedback on my teaching. One of the senior teachers who I frequently interacted with was Mr. Reynolds (pseudonym), an older white male from the US. Even though many of my colleagues spoke fluent English and could technically be regarded as native speakers, the only recognized NEST at our school was Mr. Reynolds, as he was officially hired by the school under the Hong Kong NET scheme.[2]

Because of Mr. Reynolds's NEST status and his wealth of experience, many colleagues would reach out to him for advice or request his help to proofread our exam papers. Sitting right next to Mr. Reynolds, I always felt the need to work harder on my tone, accent, and pronunciation—I constantly tried to match his standard. My proximity with Mr. Reynolds also meant that I had the chance to witness how other teachers interacted with him. In general, everyone treated Mr. Reynolds with credence and respect. He exuded a sense of authority, whether due to his many years of teaching experience or NEST status. Although Mr. Reynolds was like a father-figure to me, I also felt somewhat inadequate when I compared myself to him—reminiscent of a deficit perspective that results from using nativeness as a benchmark in English language learning (Jenkins, 2006). By constantly trying to match the standard of a NEST and feeling inferior to Mr. Reynolds, I ended up internalising and reproducing native-speakerism.

[2] The Native English Teacher (NET) Scheme is an international recruitment initiative by the Hong Kong Education Bureau to recruit native English teachers from English-speaking countries, especially the UK, the US, Australia, and Canada, by offering them a competitive renumeration package, which includes an attractive salary, housing allowance, and year-end gratuity.

To continue my professional development, I returned to my alma mater to complete my Master's in English Language Education (MEd), where I attended courses taught by my beloved professors again. With supportive colleagues and school culture at St. Joseph's (i.e. the *where*) as well as my own initiation to improve the *who* of learning by continuing my teacher education, I was able to develop a relatively positive sense of efficacy, high morale, and great job satisfaction, all contributing to the development of my professional identity as an experienced and competent ELT (Day et al., 2006).

IV. The *when* of teaching—The unexpected changes in life

In examining the *when* of learning, Alexander et al. (2009) emphasise that "it is not time itself that matters but the flow of experiences or the availability of human and nonhuman resources that come with the flow of time" (p. 185). In other words, as teachers move across different time and space, their frame of learning is shifted by the different experiences and constant changes of human and nonhuman resources that are available to them. Here, the *what*, *where*, and *who* all intersect with the *when* of learning.

Can a woman have it all?

As I accumulated more years (i.e. *when*) in the teaching profession, I became more confident and competent in my teaching. However, my personal life also began intersecting more frequently with my professional life. As explained by Lindahl and Yazan (2019), our social identities as ELTs are multifaceted. Being an ELT was not my only identity, I was also a part-time MEd student and the mother of a newborn. All these identities intersected with one another and in turn influenced my pedagogical approaches and ability to relate to my students' experiences in the classroom. After the birth of my daughter, it became challenging for me to balance career and family. Day et al. (2006) argue that the more fluctuations there are in a teacher's personal and professional dimensions, the more energy it takes for a teacher to manage their teaching profession. Having to balance my personal life with work and study tested my commitment and resilience. I was teaching full-time at St. Joseph's, studying part-time, while taking care of a newborn at home. Initially, I was

able to manage most work-life tensions due to understanding colleagues and a supportive spouse, who served as valuable human resources in the *when* of my learning. For instance, if I had to stay after school to supervise the Drama Club at St. Joseph's, my spouse would take care of our daughter. If he was unavailable, my colleagues would offer to supervise the Drama Club instead. However, it became increasingly difficult for me to focus when I had to consistently pump breastmilk for my daughter at work, grade my students' papers, while completing my MEd assignments. In the end, I made the decision to sacrifice my tenured position at St. Joseph's.

After my daughter's first birthday, I found a part-time position at my alma-mater as an adjunct professor and supervisor of preservice teachers. As a supervisor and instructor of preservice teachers, I was given the precious opportunity to mentor student-teachers who reminded me of my younger self. Most of them were fluent speakers of English. Half of the class were Hong Kong students born and raised in Hong Kong, while the other half were from different countries including Malaysia, Korea, and the US. I also supervised their student-teaching practicum and gave them feedback on their lessons. What I found most effective as I went through the lessons with some of these student-teachers was when we would converse in Cantonese instead of English. I remember several student-teachers feeling nervous about getting judged based on their lesson and decided not to share honestly about how they thought the lesson went at first. However, as soon as I started talking to them in Cantonese instead, they became more comfortable to share what they truly felt about the lesson. In response, I shared with them my personal experience when I was a student teacher myself, and they were happy that someone was willing to share so vulnerably and honestly with them about their past successes and failures. From this critical incident, I realised that my social identity as a Cantonese speaker could in fact be utilised to build rapport with my students. I reflected on how I stubbornly insisted on using only English to communicate with my students at the microteaching workshop or the vocational high school, which resulted in negative classroom experiences for both my students and me. However, once I recognised the importance of using L1, I was able to communicate more effectively with my student-teachers.

Although I was able to build better rapport with my students, the tension between my work and family life remained a challenge, constantly testing my commitment to teaching (Day et al., 2006). Being a part-time university lecturer, part-time MEd student, and a mum, I felt guilty for being over-ambitious and felt in debt to my spouse and my mother for taking care of my daughter while I was at the university. Fortunately, being able to work and study at the same university saved me some time for traveling. However, life is full of surprises. I became pregnant with our second child during the second year of my MEd study. In August 2016, I completed my MEd dissertation a week before giving birth to our second child. I was awarded a distinction and invited to give the Valedictorian speech at the graduation ceremony. In front of my students who were also getting their degrees for completing their Bachelor of Education programme and my fellow MEd colleagues, I thanked my spouse, parents, and professors for their support. Without them, I would not have been able to complete my MEd study, and collectively they contributed positively to my professional identity as an English teacher educator.

An International Move—A Change of Dimensions

In December 2016, three months after my son was born, my family decided to move back to the States, my husband's home country due to my father-in-law's deteriorating health. Although it was painful to bid farewell to my beloved family and friends in Hong Kong, this international move led to a change of time and space, and new possibilities of human and nonhuman resources in the *when* of my learning. As a non-white ELT, I was worried that no American schools would hire me as their English teacher. My worry was echoed by several applied linguists, who explored how native speaker ideologies continued to manifest in employment practices (Clark & Paran, 2007; Selvi, 2010) and students' preferences (Bonfiglio, 2010; Holliday, 2005). Eventually, I was hired as an English and Drama teacher at Connecticut High (fictitious name), a co-educational high school in Bridgeport, Connecticut. Bridgeport is a highly dense city with the main demographic population being African American, so most of my students were children of colour. At Connecticut High, all international students lived in the school dormitory, which was below all teachers' apartments where my family resided, so my students would visit me from time to time. Moll et al.

(1992) argue that a teacher who shares the same home-based context with their student(s) would know them as a 'whole person', and not merely as a 'student'— this is because the teacher would be able to learn about "the multiple spheres of activity within which the child is enmeshed" (p. 134). As a newcomer to the States, I found myself gravitating towards my students, and came to see them as my family during the three years that I had lived with them. However, many colleagues would categorise most of my students as hopeless, toxic, and incorrigible, which did not sit well with me.

At Connecticut High, I also found myself playing a more active role in questioning and resisting the concept of native-speakerism. On the first day of school, a student came up to me and asked, "Aren't you Chinese? Why don't you teach us Chinese instead of English?" Although it was not out of malicious intent, I was quite taken aback by the bluntness of that question. After that experience, I always made sure to give a long introduction about my English learning background before teaching a new group of students—I had to prove to my students that I was *qualified* to teach English. To a certain extent, I was resisting native-speakerism by showing my students that NNESTs can be as qualified, or even more qualified than NESTs. I also wanted to offer a unique curriculum to my students that would inspire them to fall in love with English just like I did. When we read *Frankenstein* in our English class, many of my students found it tedious and irrelevant to their lives, and they ended up just chitchatting for the rest of the class. One student even suggested for me to give the noisy students some colouring pages like their previous teacher did, so I could focus on those who wanted to listen.

According to Anyon (1981), the American education system is so highly stratified and segregated in such a way that students from higher social class backgrounds are constantly exposed to legal, medical, or managerial knowledge, while those of the working classes, who are often students of colour, are offered a more practical curriculum such as clerical knowledge and vocational training. This is echoed by Ladson-Billings (2013), who made the same critique on American education after thirty years. However, I firmly believed that my students deserved a balanced curriculum where there were both academic and practical aspects, and that there were

ways to make high school English curriculum inclusive and relevant to different social classes and races.

The opportunity to test my philosophy came when I received an email inviting high schools from around the state of Connecticut to participate in a regional drama competition, one of the most prestigious competitions for high school students in our state. After discussing with the administration, I decided to enter my English class students into this competition. It was the first time our students had ever represented our school in any form of competition outside school. I vividly remember the day of the competition. As our team walked into the massive theatre, some of my students commented how they stood out amongst their all-white peers from other schools in Connecticut. Many of them felt uncomfortable and self-conscious. Some of them even said, "The other kids are staring at us, they're making fun of us." They became worried that they would not receive fair judgment from the all-white adjudicator panel.

Swan (1994) posits that good teaching involves "monitoring what one is saying with the listener's ears, and using the feedback to shape and adapt one's words from moment to moment so that the thread of communication never breaks. This is art, not science" (p. 55). As moral actors, teachers have an important role to serve as their students' best examples. It took patience and empathy to convince my students that they were deserving to be at the awards competition, and to remember how proud the school was of their accomplishments already. I tried to approach each student and reminded them that we encourage students to get out of their comfort zone. I told them, "This is exactly one of those moments," but if they wanted to withdraw from the competition instead of showing the world what they got, I would not hold anything against them. I was already proud of who they were. When the group decided to perform on stage after a short discussion amongst themselves, it was a truly groundbreaking moment for our school—my students won the *Outstanding Costumes* award. As a small, independent school in Bridgeport, it was the first time our school had won an external award, not to mention an award which was usually given to schools with bigger student bodies and overall productions. Although they did not win first place, my students did their best on stage, impressing the entire

audience. Several adjudicators later came to shake hands with my students, giving them the highest level of compliments. In retrospect, if we chose to withdraw from the competition, I would be removing my students' equal access to knowledge and eliminating such an incredible experience in the world of theatre. However, it was in giving them *the choice* and empowering them to take ownership of their lives that highlights my experience as a moral leader and agent of change.

According to Taylor et al. (2015), when teachers authentically engage with young people, they together nurture a "pedagogy of possibility" (p. 240). The climate my students were growing up in is a multicultural, interreligious, and multi-national country, let alone the changing world landscape, that opening doors is not the only mechanism for growth, but rather empowering students, particularly my students of colour to act in their best interests rather than "being told how to behave" elucidated my great opportunity to teach my students. It would be remiss of me for not respecting these talented students for who they are, recognising their strengths, and encouraging them to fight for what they truly deserve.

Feiman-Nemser (2001) argues that having taken-for granted beliefs based on prior teaching experience may mislead teachers into thinking that they know more about teaching than they do, thus making it harder for teachers to form new ideas and new habits of thought and action. If I had stuck with the assumption that these students are incorrigible and gave up on them, I would have missed out on this "pedagogy of possibility" to create a place of hope for both my students and me.

Three years after teaching at Connecticut High, I moved on to teach ESL at a private university in the same city. This experience changed my perception and attitude toward native-speakerism. Instead of submissively accepting the dichotomy between NNESTs and NESTs, I began to challenge it. As an immigrant teacher, I often had colleagues and students who were surprised by my spoken English. Some comments that I received were: "You don't sound like you're from Hong Kong", "You speak really good English" and "You speak with a nice tone". The underlying message was that I did not have a foreign accent or the accent of an English learner. At first, I politely thanked them, thinking that the comments were complimentary. Eventually, I realised that if I took their remarks positively, it would mean that I was also

acknowledging that Hong Kong immigrants or immigrants from other countries have a foreign accent, thereby admitting that non-native English-speaking immigrants were different from, or even inferior to their native counterparts (Holliday, 2005; Jenkins, 2006). This feeling of defeat was a powerful learning moment as it reminded me that I am an incomplete being (Freire, 2000). As an incomplete being, I must keep learning in order to serve as an agent of change.

The opportunity to serve as a change agent came while I was conducting a lecture with a group of adult ESL learners at the same university. A student had come to me to complain about a grouping with several coursemates from a different country. She mentioned that those students had bad odour and spoke poor English, and requested to switch to a group with better English speakers. I listened, but in her sharing, she wound up alienating herself from the rest of the class as most of the students could hear this student's comments on others' linguistic and ethnic backgrounds, which many saw as offensive and even racist. While an uncomfortable situation, and however unlikable the student might have been to her peers, the teacher should act as the moral compass to her students (Freire, 2000). As a minority and an immigrant, I had encountered similar prejudicial attitudes, even from this same group of students who compared my teaching ability with other professors who were white, native English speakers. However, my negative experiences should not discourage me from giving this student the same access to knowledge, but perhaps more profoundly, rather than penalizing the student, I gave her additional guidance after class. In private, she shared with me her own insecurities about her English-speaking skills. I encouraged her to apologise to her coursemates and share honestly with them her difficulties and challenges in learning English. The classroom environment gradually changed from hostile to harmonious. This critical incident has allowed me to appreciate how race, ethnicity, and language intersect with one another in a teacher's pedagogical decisions and philosophies, which can in turn influence their students' attitudes and approaches towards learning (Hammerness & Matsko, 2013).

As explained by Pantić (2015), the way that "teachers act in a particular environment is likely to result from complexly interdependent relations of their personal and professional beliefs and dispositions, degrees of autonomy and power, and

interactions with other actors within the social contexts in which they work" (p. 760). Had I reacted differently with that particular student and class, the outcome might have been starkly different. This incident also highlights how it is often what we do as educators, not what we say, that allows for internal growth as the moral leader of the classroom (Freire, 2000). Teacher agency has shown me that every human can serve as a powerful actor in mobilising change within social structures (Pantić, 2015).

4.3 Summary

Moving from Hong Kong to the States resulted in changes in all four of my learning dimensions. Having to navigate new school and culture (i.e. *where*), acquire new knowledge pertaining American education system and students (i.e. *what*), and utilise different human and non-human resources that came with the flow of time (i.e. *when*), I have re-developed my identity as a transnational woman ELT (i.e. *who*). Initially, my teacher identities were shaped by my prior experiences as an English language learner. My identity development changed as I became a preservice teacher, which changed again whilst I entered the teaching profession as a novice. These changes were initially negative due to contradictions between expectations and reality, and discrepancy between teacher preparation and classroom practice. My teacher identity construction was also shaped by sociopolitical contexts such as the social status of NESTs and NNESTs, and my family responsibilities, which influenced my commitment to the teaching profession both positively and negatively.

My teaching experiences in Hong Kong and the US have also demonstrated how native-speakerism as a hegemonic concept could be reproduced, understood, and resisted through the negotiation of my identities and everyday experiences with students and colleagues. Therefore, it is imperative that I partake in continuous professional development and accept help from like-minded colleagues who can enrich my understanding of what it means to be an ELT across different national borders. Table 3 provides a summary of the critical events, significance of the events, and identity claims pertinent to my identity formation in different stages of my professional life as a transnational woman ELT.

Table 3: Critical events, Significance, and Identity Claims

Professional Stage of ELT	Critical events	Significance	Identity Claims
Learner	Both parents as teachers	Taking an insider's look into teachers' lives through observing my parents and translating for my mother	English language learner, translator
Learner	- Father lost job - Parents' financial crisis - Received teacher's (Ms. Chan) help	Inspired me to become a teacher like Ms. Chan	A poor girl who needed to save her family; a high school English learner; an aspiring teacher
Preservice teacher	Microteaching	First experience of teaching Hong Kong students	A preservice teacher, a university student
Acclimation: Student-Teacher	Teaching practicum (swimming pool incident)	First experience of teaching in an all-boy school	A student-teacher who made a grave mistake; a female teacher in an all-boy school
Induction: Novice teacher	- Poor relationship with mentor - School closure	Witnessed discrepancy between teacher preparation (university courses) and actual classroom practice	A first-year teacher, a novice, a mentee, a self-proclaimed NEST
2nd to 5th year teacher	- Seat adjacent to a NEST - Going back to school (Master's programme) - Quitting tenured position	Influenced my perception of English native speakers: Superior, knowledgeable, well-respected, and authoritative. Inflicting self-doubt about my own English and NNEST status.	A non-native English-speaking teacher (NNEST), a wife, a mother, a student again (postgraduate study)
Teacher educator/ more experienced teacher	- Lesson observation	Appreciating the use of my L1 to support my student-teachers	A mentor, an English language professor, a teacher educator, an examiner/ teaching practicum supervisor
6th to 9th year teacher	- International move - Drama competition	Returning to the status of a novice teacher in new dimensions and contexts	A newcomer to the United States; an immigrant teacher; a novice teacher (in US context)
University teacher	- Overcoming stereotypes of an immigrant and non-native English speaker	Realising that there was still a lot to learn about my new situation, new culture, and new students; Recognizing the need to learn more and bring change at the same time	An agent of change

Table 3 shows how I began my journey as an English language learner who learned English from my parents and teachers, then progressed along the professional continuum from a novice to a more experienced ELT as I accumulated more years of teaching experience in Hong Kong, ultimately realising that there was still much more to learn as I transcended borders to teach in a new country.

In essence, the four dimensions (*what*, *where*, *who*, *when*) proposed by Alexander et al. (2009) have aptly captured my learning to teach experience and ELT identity development. Although Hong Kong and Bridgeport are vastly different cities, there were similarities in the ways I learned how to teach. Particularly, the countless mistakes that I made (i.e. *what*), my commitment to teaching and learning (i.e. *who*), and the care and guidance that I received from others over the years (i.e. *when*) have all helped me learn and grow. My learning experiences in Hong Kong and the United States (i.e. *where*) have also shown me that, so long as I can "embrace this journey toward expertise with joy and abandon" (Alexander & Fives, 2001, p. 305), it does not matter if I am a native speaker or non-native speaker of English—those are merely stereotypes others impose on English language learners and teachers. I should be proud of myself for who I am: An international educator, a transnational woman, a multilingual learner and speaker, a competent ELT, and the mother of two beautiful children.

Chapter 5 Conclusions

5.1 Overview

This final chapter aims to provide potential answers to the research questions, followed by implications, significance, limitations, and future research.

5.2 Revisiting the research questions

5.2.1 What are the critical events and identity claims in my life histories that are pertinent to the identity formation of an English language teacher (ELT)?

The critical incidents and identity claims that were pertinent to my identity construction as an ELT constituted the *what*, *where*, *who*, and *when* of learning (Alexander et al., 2009) and followed the six professional life phases proposed by Day and Gu (2007). I began my ELT journey as an English language learner who observed how to teach from my parents and secondary school teachers. As a preservice teacher, my teacher education courses and teaching practicum were crucial in the construction of my teacher identity and building of classroom competence. Many mistakes were made during acclimation, including an unsuccessful microteaching experience and a misunderstanding at an all-boy swimming pool.

As I entered the teaching profession, I continued learning how to develop one's teacher identity and classroom competence while negotiating my identity between the polarising terms of NESTs and NNESTs. Whereas I assumed the status of a NEST at the vocational school due to low self-efficacy and my mother's influence, I gradually came to accept my identity as an NNEST after teaching at the private secondary school and the university. At the same time, being a more experienced teacher also meant that I had to define work-life balance and manage work-life tensions by making necessary sacrifices. As I transcended national borders and became an immigrant teacher in the US, I learned how to adjust to changes and re-develop my professional identity with unfamiliar people and new surroundings. Finally, being a university teacher again in a different country allowed me to strengthen my commitment to the teaching profession while attempting to serve as an agent of change. Table 4 revisits my identity claims in accordance with Day and Gu's (2007) professional life phases.

Table 4 Revisiting my identity claims in accordance with Day and Gu's (2007) professional life phases

Professional life phase	**Geographical setting**	**Relevance to ELT identity**	**Identity Claims**
Learner	HKSAR	Learning English as a second language	English language learner, an aspiring teacher
Preservice teacher/ Student-teacher	HKSAR	Learning to build identity and classroom competence	A preservice teacher, a university student; A student-teacher who made a grave mistake; a female teacher in an all-boy school
Novice teacher (First-year teacher)	HKSAR	Learning to build identity and classroom competence	A first-year teacher, a novice, a mentee, a self-proclaimed NEST
		Developing professional identity	
2nd to 5th year teacher	HKSAR	Developing professional identity	A non-native English speaking teacher (NNEST), a wife, a mother, a student again (postgraduate study)
		Defining work-life balance	
Teacher educator	HKSAR	Managing work–life tensions	A mentor, an English language professor, a teacher educator, an examiner/ teaching practicum supervisor
6th to 9th year teacher	USA	All of the above, Adjusting to change	A newcomer to the United States; an immigrant teacher; a novice teacher (in US context)
University teacher	USA	Strengthening commitment	An agent of change

5.2.2 How can native-speakerism be reproduced, understood, or resisted through an ELT's everyday experiences (with students and colleagues) and negotiation of identities?

My teaching experiences in Hong Kong and the States have confirmed some of the criticism applied linguists made against native-speakerism (Holliday, 2005; Lowe & Kiczkowiak, 2016). As reiterated by Holliday (2005), native-speakerism is a pervasive ideology in English language teaching which promotes the belief that native English-speaking teachers represent a Western culture from which spring the ideals of the English language and the methodology for teaching it. For instance, because Mr. Reynolds was a white male and a native English speaker, my colleagues at St. Joseph's Academy chose to defer to him whenever they had any English-related questions, even though they were fluent and competent English speakers themselves. This is echoed by Lowe and Kiczkowiak (2016) who define native-speakerism as the belief that native speakers of English are better language models than those who are perceived as non-native speakers.

I also had such low self-efficacy as a first-year teacher that I assumed the role of a NEST, hoping that it would lead to an improvement in my relationship with my students or create the impression that I was a competent teacher. By assuming that my students would give me more credence and respect by pretending to not understand Cantonese, I ended up reinforcing native-speakerism.

As I became an immigrant teacher in the States, my students and their parents also unknowingly reproduced the same ideology by questioning my ability to teach English. To resist the hegemonic concept, I took on the responsibility to serve as an agent of change by encouraging my students to represent themselves and their school at a prestigious drama competition. In leading my students of colour at the drama competition and encouraging my adult ESL learner to share her difficulty of learning English with her coursemates at the private university, I rose to challenge the NEST-NNEST dichotomy by attempting to prove that beyond the so-called "native" and "non-native" speaker, it is our own lived experiences that ultimately define our identity, which is multifaceted, dynamic, and intersectional (Lindahl & Yazan, 2019).

5.2.3 How do my social identities influence my pedagogical approaches and ability to relate to students' experiences in the classroom?

My social identities are multiple and intersectional. Initially, I did not utilise my identity as a Cantonese native speaker to build rapport with my students. Whether it was the microteaching workshop at the university or my first-year teaching experience at the vocational high school, I insisted on using only English to communicate with my students, which resulted in negative classroom experiences for both my students and me. Once I recognised the importance of using our mutual L1 to communicate, I was able to interact more effectively with my students, especially my student-teachers who were able to share with me their anxieties and concerns about the lesson observation.

In the US, my identity as an immigrant teacher of Southeast Asian descent has allowed me to build a sense of familiarity with my students of colour. Being a newcomer to the country myself, I treated my students like family and enacted a relational approach where students could visit my home anytime they wanted. Though my students questioned my English-teaching ability at first, I was able to convince them and their parents that I was competent and qualified to teach English by my inclusive teaching approach. Being an English language learner myself, I was also able to empathise with my adult ESL learners at the private university, which allowed me to act as an agent of change by serving as their role model and moral compass, especially during moments of conflict and uncertainty.

As a woman and a mother, whether I could manage work-life tensions became the ultimate test to my teaching commitment. Although I was able to manage some of the work-life tensions, my experience at St. Joseph's while studying for a postgraduate degree showed that sacrifices would have to be made when one failed to manage those tensions. To perform my duty as a mother and a postgraduate student, I had to give up my teaching commitment temporarily. If I chose to stay in the teaching profession, my students might suffer from my poor decision-making as I would not have been able to focus on my students and classroom teaching.

5.2.4 What can I offer to the field of applied linguistics with an investigation of my lived experiences as a Southeast Asian, Hong Kong-Singaporean Chinese, second language learner, English teacher, and transnational woman?

My experiences as a transnational teacher have echoed Trueba's (2004) claim that transnational individuals possess "a unique capacity to handle different cultures and lifestyles, different social status, different roles and relationships, and to function effectively in different social, political, and economic systems" (p. 39). As a transnational ELT, my pedagogy or way of teaching English reflects my multiple identities due to my complex migratory and linguistic histories (Rumbaut, 2002).

As a transnational woman educator, I am also filled with the "passionate desire" to include the everyday, personal side of my own reality to provide a complete research picture of my ELT journey (Christ, 1987, p. 55). In writing this autoethnography, I was given the opportunity to validate and honour my own life, particularly when the "status quo reflects a version of reality that often excludes women's everyday experiences" (Allen & Piercy, 2005, p. 157). Specifically, my experience at the all-boy school and my temporary absence from the teaching profession may resonate with mothers and women worldwide who have also sacrificed their ambition to manage work-life tensions. My intersecting identities as a Southeast Asian, Hong Kong-Singaporean Chinese, second language learner, and transnational woman therefore show that beyond native or non-native, it is the intersection of multiple identities that define an ELT as they negotiate these intersecting identities in different sociopolitical and professional contexts.

5.2.5 Implications: *How can I use my narratives to make recommendations for recruiting, supporting, and retaining English language teachers?*

The implications for this autoethnographic study are highlighted through this final research question. My negative teaching experience at VIC and positive teaching experience at St. Joseph's Academy suggest that schools could provide favourable or unfavourable learning environments, which would enhance or prohibit prospective

teachers' motivation to learn and commitment to teach (Day et al., 2006; Day & Gu, 2007; Jurasaite-Harbison & Rex, 2010). My low self-efficacy was closely related to my poor relationship with my mentor, which underscored the importance of a supportive mentor or teacher educator, who can be life changing to a teacher's identity development (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). To provide novice teachers with better support, more emphasis should be placed on finding suitable mentors to ensure both groups are well catered for. When assigning a mentor to a mentee, teacher educators or school administrators should consider the work ethics, competence, confidence, and individual interests of both the mentor and mentee. A clear job distribution should also be established, and more incentives could be provided to encourage competent teachers to serve as mentors.

As teachers progress along the professional continuum, they will have different desires and needs. Some might aspire for further promotion, while others might wish to remain in the classroom to fulfil their calling to make a difference (Day & Gu, 2007). The former may appreciate professional training to develop their managerial responsibilities, while the latter may choose to focus on refining their knowledge repertoires for teaching and learning (Day et al., 2006). Therefore, professional learning opportunities need to align with teachers' differentiated learning needs accordingly.

Furthermore, socio-emotional support is vital, especially during the early stages of the professional continuum. Teacher educators should follow up with their students even years after they graduate from the teacher education programme, providing them with professional and socio-emotional support along the continuum. Investing in teacher education requires allocating more resources and support on finding suitable practicum schools, recruiting qualified and seasoned mentors, and providing socio-emotional support to teachers at multiple points even after they enter the workplace.

Since ELTs' capacity to construct their identity is crucial to their decision to remain in the teaching profession, school administrators and teacher educators should consider implementing ways to improve teacher retention by supporting identity formation. As reiterated by Day and Gu (2007), a positive school culture is essential in promoting teachers' professional identity and development. School administrators and teacher

educators should work together to create a positive school environment and culture which can facilitate the construction of a positive teacher identity among novice teachers, thereby improving teacher retention. Teacher educators and researchers should also reconsider and reconceptualise dominant discourses of teaching (e.g. native speakerism) that position novice teachers in different educational settings and examine their impact on teacher retention across multiple international contexts.

5.3 Significance

This autoethnographic study signifies that my identity as an ELT is dynamic and constantly changing due to different contextual factors and dominant discourses e.g. native speakerism. While the same may or may not be applicable to other ELTs as every individual teacher is different, my teaching and learning experiences imply that if teachers could receive more support along the professional continuum, they would be more likely to form a positive teacher identity, which might in turn strengthen their commitment to stay in the teaching profession (Day et al., 2006; Day & Gu, 2007; Feiman-Nemser, 2001).

Most importantly, more than our social identities as NEST or NNEST, it is our lived experiences and multiple intersecting identities (e.g. social class, years of teaching, gender, ethnicity, nationality) that ultimately shape who we are as teachers. Hence, instead of confining ELTs to a binary and dichotomous division between native and non-native, or focusing merely on one of ELTs' many identities, multiple identities should be considered when school administrators and teacher educators decide how to support their language teachers along the professional continuum.

5.4 Limitations and Future Research

As aforementioned, a major limitation of autoethnography is that it is subjective and biased. However, given the paucity of autoethnographic research pertaining to Hong Kong ELTs, this study serves as a direct response to recent calls for more authentic and personal qualitative research in the field of applied linguistics (Canagarajah, 2020; Zacharias, 2019; Yazan et al., 2020). As ELTs came from different

backgrounds, more autoethnographic studies should be conducted to present more diverse voices and lived experiences from teachers of different ethnicities, nationalities, gender, and social class, with particular focus on teachers from marginalized communities. To balance the subjectivity from an autoethnographic approach, future researchers might consider complementing the autoethnography with a narrative inquiry on teachers who share similar background with the autoethnographer, so that more perspectives can be included. Future researchers might also want to compare the identity development of English teachers in Hong Kong and other countries such as the United States using comparative analysis. There is potential for longitudinal investigations on how cultural and sociopolitical contexts impact English language teacher identity over time and across multiple international contexts.

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Appendices

Journal 1

What was my experience in learning English? What made me decide to become a language teacher? Describe my current position and how I view myself professionally.

My students and their parents from the States used to give me curious and doubtful looks when I told them I am an English teacher. In fact, I have had many inquisitive students who would ask me questions such as, "Aren't you Chinese? Why don't you teach us Chinese instead of English?" To many, my nationality, ethnicity, and accent simply did not match with what my jobs entailed—teaching Shakespeare to high school seniors, discussing American poetry with international students, writing and directing annual school plays in English, or conducting English academic writing classes at American and Hong Kong colleges etc. I wish I had the time to explain my journey of how I became an English teacher, but to get to that point I would have to first talk about my learning experience as an English language learner, with reference to John Dewey's *Experience and Education*.

In Hong Kong, being a native or competent speaker of English carries a certain level of prestige and glamour others do not share. Perhaps due to Hong Kong's former status as a British colony, most Hongkongers took pride in the fact that we "used to be British"—at least before the 1997 handover, when Hong Kong was returned to Chinese sovereignty. As a Hongkonger born and raised before 1997, I was constantly reminded by my surroundings of how important learning English was, and several people have played significant roles in defining my learning experience as an English language learner: My parents, my aunts in Australia, and my teachers in Hong Kong. They have all greatly influenced me in how I viewed English and have also served as motivating (and demotivating) factors for me in my language learning process.

I was born in Hong Kong to two loving parents. I remember my parents contemplating to move to Australia before the 1997 handover. When we first arrived in Brisbane, Australia, I found it difficult to adjust to life in Australia. I did not

understand a word my Australian-Chinese relatives were saying and was soon labelled as a "problem child" who needed to be locked in a dark room. My new family would also yell at me if I did not speak to them in English, not understanding that I simply lacked the ability to communicate without using Cantonese, my native language. Perhaps to my aunts, we should just be grateful that we could have a place to stay in Australia, having the right of abode in such a beautiful country and feeling safe from the political chaos and environmental pollution in Hong Kong. Yet sadly, my learning and living experiences in Australia have demotivated me so much that I developed a phobia towards speaking English and even resentment towards those who tried to push me to learn English. I missed my home with all the tall skyscrapers, the hustling and bustling of our busy streets, and my bubbly Cantonese-speaking friends. As mentioned by Dewey, "[t]he educator is responsible for a knowledge of individuals and for a knowledge of subject-matter that will enable activities to be selected which lend themselves to social organization, an organization in which all individuals have an opportunity to contribute something, and in which the activities in which all participate are the chief carrier of control" (p. 56). By locking me up in a dark room to discipline me, my aunt had failed to see me as an individual, deprived me of the opportunity to contribute and denied my access to serve as a carrier of control.

My dad really wanted me to overcome my fear of learning English. He had the firm belief that someday, my knowledge of the English language would come in handy for me. My dad eventually decided for us to stay in Hong Kong for good. In order to secure a better future for my sister and I, my mother got us enrolled in an all-girl private school where every single class except Chinese was conducted in English. Once again, after going to the secondary section of the all-girl private school, I had a hard time transitioning, but my teachers were so patient and encouraging that they completely transformed my attitude towards English. I fondly remember Ms. Poon who would offer me a cup of warm tea and chat with me after school. Ms. Poon was born in Hong Kong but educated in the UK, so she would use English to teach us in class but chat with us in Cantonese outside classroom. With Ms. Poon, I became less fearful of English and began to treat it as a subject to study and analyse. I would ask

Ms. Poon questions regarding the right use of tenses and the meaning of different sophisticated vocabulary that I came across in newspaper and class readings. Ms. Poon inspired me to become a teacher. She was understanding, humorous, and never judgmental. I remained close in contact with her until she retired from the teaching profession. Ms. Poon was also the first English-speaking person whom I associated with admiration and fondness rather than anxiety, fear, or resentment. This reminds me of Dewey's "category of continuity" or "experiential continuum" (p. 33). I would say that according to Dewey, my learning experience with Ms. Poon would fall on the "worthwhile" end of the continuum, while my experience in Australia would unfortunately be found at the other end of the continuum.

To get into the elite class at the all-girl private school, students had to constantly perform well in their exams. Consequently, my Year 9-12 English learning experience was all about drilling, and as Dewey so eloquently articulated, those who "acquired special skills by means of automatic drill" would only end up limiting "their power of judgement and ability to act intelligently in new situations" (p. 27). As we had to memorise an inordinate number of grammar rules and recite countless sample essays, it dawned on me that I was only learning for the sake of staying in the elite class. I began to wonder why I was learning and what I had learned until I met Miss Meimei during my junior year of high school. Miss Meimei was not a typical teacher you could find in Hong Kong. Most teachers would insist on formality, but Meimei would ask us to call her by her first name. She would show us interesting poems and share her personal experience with us all the time. She was also the one who introduced me to classic stories such as *Snow Falling on Cedars*, *Wuthering Heights*, and even *Frankenstein* in the most interactive and authentic ways. Meimei's teaching simply turned these texts from "authoritative" to "internally persuasive" for me. Instead of asking us to memorise rules or giving us tedious assignments with no benefits for the future, Meimei would ask us to write poems about our everyday life and ask us wittily which character we would like to go on a date with. She would create ample imaginative space so we would feel as if we were the characters in those novels. I had always appreciated her detailed and constructive feedback on each of our poems and essays. Because of Meimei, I began to appreciate the intrinsic value of learning

English. I even took an acting role in *Twelfth Night*, a drama production led by Meimei, and that led to my later passion in English drama. Suddenly, English became fun, and I no longer saw English as just a means for examination. To borrow Dewey's words, Meimei was exactly the kind of teacher that would "arrange for the kind of experiences, which, while they do not repel the student, but rather engage his activities are, nevertheless, more than immediately enjoyable since they promote having desirable future experiences" (p. 27).

During my senior year at the all-girl private school, my parents were having such tremendous financial difficulty that they could not afford the expensive school tuition. Our principal was so generous to sponsor our studies at the time. She used her own money to finance our studies. Having witnessed my parents' struggle with making ends meet, I came to the naïve conclusion that "money is everything" and in order to make money, I just had to get the highest-paying job when I finished high school so I could give my parents a comfortable life. I tried to take on as many tutoring jobs as I could and would study until way past midnight. My health deteriorated to a level that I fainted one night while going to the bathroom, which resulted in my temporary absence from school. It was Meimei who helped me during that moment of tension. We were supposed to turn in our English literature portfolio for assessment (in Hong Kong, the advanced level examination is the most important exam which determines which college we go to), but because of my health I was falling behind in my writing of the portfolio. Knowing that I was still recuperating from the fall, Meimei came to visit me to complete the portfolio. I was very weak at the time, so Meimei asked me to verbalise everything that I wanted to be included on my portfolio, while she did the typing on her laptop. The fact that Meimei went out of her way to help me really inspired me. As Dewey would say, Meimei saw me as an individual and catered for my personal needs. Thanks to Meimei's help and high scores on my Advanced level examination (a public exam which is similar to SAT in the States), my teachers told me that I should consider applying to law school, and that I would definitely be accepted. I was told that I would make a lot more money if I decided to major in Law school or Business, at least that was how the mainstream Hong Kong society viewed "success", but I had already made up my mind.

I wanted to make a difference just like what Ms. Poon and Meimei did with me. I wanted to help students like me to conquer their fear towards a language that might sound foreign, challenging and intimidating, but would turn out to be extremely intriguing and rewarding if they had the right mentor to guide them on their learning path.

I was accepted by my first choice: Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Education at the University of Hong Kong. From there it began my journey of becoming an English teacher.

Journal 2

Describe my educational background. What qualifications did I obtain in order to become a language teacher? Did my language teacher programme sufficiently prepare me for my teaching career?

With one of my students inside the school's swimming pool, three security guards and concerned school administrators all surrounding the swimming pool, I was feeling utterly embarrassed by what McDonald (1996) would call a "messy" teaching practicum moment. My teaching practicum experience and my teacher preparation professor have influenced me greatly as a teacher and a human being. With references to Kennedy (2016) and McDonald (1996), I would be sharing my journey of how I learned to become a teacher.

When we were in our teacher preparation programme, Professor Nicole Tavares, a veteran teacher and a fantastic educator, served as our teaching practicum supervisor. She would visit all 30 of us student-teachers and observe us at least twice, not to mention student-teachers from other programmes that she was teaching as well. We were assigned to different schools all around Hong Kong, so she would have to travel long distance to visit each of us. Her professionalism and passion have always inspired me. Since she tried her utmost to establish a close relationship with us, this really adds to the relational aspect of our learning. She would always encourage us to think outside the box when planning lessons and activities for our students. She is also a big advocator of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT). When Nicole first introduced TBLT to us, I had to say I was uncertain about it. It is interesting how McDonald stated that "an acknowledgement of fundamental uncertainty can enhance practical confidence and directedness, foster productivity and accountability, even raise hopes" (p.7). At that time, I told Nicole about my uncertainty and doubt on how I could practically incorporate TBLT in my own teaching, especially in schools with rigid curriculum. Personally, I was getting very anxious about trying something too creative in my teaching as most of my high school teachers were fairly rigid in their teaching (with a few exceptions). To alleviate our concerns, Nicole would demonstrate to us how to incorporate TBLT in a lesson. For instance, in one of her lectures, Nicole would provide a context where we had to imagine ourselves as

students, teachers, parents or administrators and she would give us an imaginary scenario e.g. teacher-parent meeting, staff development day, and crisis committee. We had to discuss with each other in those roles. She would also cut up different paragraphs of the readings and ask us to re-arrange them as in a jigsaw task and ask us to circle different quotes that are particularly relevant to our imaginary roles. Things could sometimes get very messy as we glued the different pieces on a big poster, only to find out that some pieces were missing, or that some pieces were glued on the wrong place. But as messy as things could get, we would always feel a sense of fulfilment (and relief) as we completed the tasks. I believe this sense of fulfilment is what McDonald calls productivity, accountability and even hope.

When we were in our teacher preparation programme, we would have something called micro-teaching once a month. Nicole would invite real high school students to come to our university and we had to take turns in teaching these students in our university classroom. We would be involved from the beginning to the end, including bringing these students to our campus, giving them a tour of our campus, serving them lunch, teaching them, and finally escorting them back to their school buses. I remember during one microteaching session, we did not order enough sandwiches for the kids, the activities that we planned did not seem to interest them, and the kids were so bored that even their teacher who brought them here seemed disappointed at how the lesson went. As we looked at their stone-dead faces, we knew that we had lost them. Perhaps what Kennedy said about "a resistant audience" can be applied here, she said that "[s]tudents may respond to their captivity in one of three ways: They may actively engage, they may actively resist, or they may cooperate, in the sense that they remain quiet and polite, but do not really engage with their lessons" (p. 11). In our case, our students were quiet and polite, but definitely not engaged. In hindsight, my coursemates and I should have done something when we saw that the students were getting restless. I could have taken the initiative to make adjustment to our lesson. Like Kennedy said, "despite how well teachers design their lessons, they still need to make continual adjustments within each lesson as they see students' attention wander, see that students have misunderstood a concept, or see that students are getting restless" (p. 14). During our debriefing with Nicole, some of my

coursemates started blaming each other. It is hard to imagine a group of university sophomores behaving like this in front of our professor, but it was at this moment that we were vulnerable with each other. Although we did not share that moment with the high school students that we were having the microteaching session with, the fact that we were able to share this moment with our professor makes me feel that this is what McDonald meant by "students and teachers were encouraged to engage genuinely in the messy and uncertain business of thinking, collaborating, and creating" (p.6). Together with Professor Tavares, we started to plan another microteaching session with the same group of students by reviewing the mistakes that we made and trying to figure out why the students were not interested in our activities. As McDonald said, "Teachers should work as we like to think doctors do: Figure out what's wrong, then fix it" (p. 5). By the end of the debriefing, we were all hopeful that our next microteaching session would be better. It is important for us not to get defeated as "everyone who teaches has days like this. They serve as signs of the tentativeness of one's grip, the fragility of one's control" (McDonald, 1996, p. 37).

Similar to the States, there is a a two-month teaching practicum once every academic year of our four-year teacher preparation programme. During my final year of teaching practicum, I had a particularly hard time as I was assigned to complete my student-teaching at an all-boy high school. Coming from an all-girl background and having only sisters but not brothers, my experience with boys was limited. On my first day of teaching, I was shocked and perhaps a little intimidated to find out that most of my students were taller than me. I also had trouble finding a restroom that I could use as the staff restroom was located on the highest floor and my classroom was on the first floor, where all the restrooms were marked "Men Only". With a high number of female teachers at this school, I have to say I found this rather surprising. Kennedy (2016) mentioned the challenge to accommodate the personal needs of teachers. She said that "If a teacher cannot find a way to create an atmosphere that he or she is comfortable living in, he or she is not likely to remain teaching for very long" (p.13). This can definitely be applied to my teaching practice experience as I was too timid to voice out my personal need to the authorities.

As a student-teacher, I was also trying very hard to please my professor and impress my students, so I immediately tried to implement TBLT in my first week of teaching without first getting to know my students and the culture of my school. I created the context of an anti-bullying week where students had to make a public service announcement (PSA) to spread awareness and stop bullying at school. The students were so excited by this project and one group even came up with the idea of using the school's swimming pool. Their idea was to have one student push another student (the student who was being pushed into the water is skilled at swimming) into the swimming pool, and another student who would change into a "superman" suit to save the drowning boy. The boys took the initiative of asking the lifeguard of the pool to stand by and watch carefully as they videotaped the whole role-play. Being a novice teacher and eager to try out new teaching practices, I approved their plan without thinking any further. Then came the day of the video-shooting. The boys did everything that they planned to do, but I forgot to do the most important thing: seek permission from the school administrators. There were CCTV cameras everywhere at the school, and of course the whole interaction was caught on those cameras. As our very responsible security guards were watching the CCTV, they thought there was a real bullying going on! The head of security informed the principal right away (I was very impressed by how quickly they reacted to the situation, as worried as I was about the whole fiasco), and within five minutes a whole team of security guards and all the school administrators were at the pool. It was an incredibly embarrassing moment as the school administrators all gathered around me to find out what had happened. Although they all understood the situation and forgave me for what I did in the end, I can still vividly recall how concerned and upset they were. When I reported this to Nicole, thinking that she would fail my teaching practicum, she laughed and said, "Sounds like both you and the students have learned something!" As Kennedy explained, "When we define teaching by the visible practices we see, without attending to the role these practices have in the overall lesson, novices are likely to use their newly acquired practices at the wrong times, in the wrong places, or for the wrong reason" (p. 9). Although it was a fun activity to do with the boys, the method that I adopted was definitely inappropriate and it was also the wrong time and place to do so. Moreover, the activity might work with one group of students but not another,

so I should have first tried to get to know my students before jumping the gun on trying something new. Even though TBLT was what my professor highly encouraged us to try out in our teaching, I "would be hard-pressed to insist that any particular curriculum portrait was the correct or best procedure for teaching any particular bit of knowledge" (Kennedy, 2016, p. 10). Yet it is also in this messy situation where I learn to be a more responsible teacher, to adopt a "view of teaching that takes the teacher's self seriously—in all its commitment, ambivalence, and contrivance—necessarily also takes seriously the sources of this self's construction in the lively uncertainties associated with the teacher's students and subject" (McDonald, 1992, p. 20).

My teacher preparation programme and teaching practice have shaped me to become a more creative, flexible, and responsible teacher and individual. I will always remind myself to look at teaching from different perspectives: students, teachers, administrators, and parents. Teaching can involve so many layers all at once, and sometimes it is really hard to strike a balance among all these different aspects, but the uncertainty is all worth it if it means we could make a difference in our students' lives.

Journal 3

How did my NEST/NNEST status affect the way I taught English and the way I interacted with others (e.g. students, colleagues, administrators, family, peers)? Give examples where I felt the need to negotiate, resist, or accept my identity as a NEST/NNEST in those interactions. How did that influence the way I viewed my own identity (as teacher/ student/ native or non-native speaker etc.)?

I have always struggled with the labels NEST and NNEST. I remember mum, who is Singaporean, used to share with us how she was hired by a Hong Kong elementary school as a NET. She was told by her principal to not ever let any students know that she could understand Cantonese. Mum was born and raised in Singapore, she would talk to me in Cantonese, but mostly writes in English. She could not write that fluently in Chinese, so she would ask me to proofread for her from time to time, especially when it came to occasions where she must write in Chinese to communicate with her Chinese-speaking relatives and friends.

With mum being an English teacher, I was constantly immersed in an English environment regardless of my native level. After graduating from university, I attended many job interviews where I was complimented for "not having an accent" by various panel heads. I remember feeling proud of myself (and feeling a sense of superiority) without fully understanding what those statements actually implied. In a way, I received a lot of teaching job offers partly due to my academic performance, but mostly due to my English-speaking skills as demonstrated in all those job interviews which were conducted in English. Being able to speak English fluently did bring me advantage in the job market, even though I was not a legitimate NET according to the definitions of the Hong Kong Education Bureau. However, as impressed as those panel heads were at my English skills, when asked if they would consider hiring me as a NET (NETs have higher salary and housing allowance), they would immediately quote the standard by EDB, stating that they could not hire me as a NET.

After many job interviews, I decided to teach at a private secondary school for my novice teaching years. It is a prestigious school, and all subjects were taught in

English except Chinese and Chinese history. However, even though many of my colleagues speak fluent English and could technically be regarded as native speakers, the only recognised NEST at our school is Mr. R, as he was officially hired by the school under the Hong Kong NET scheme. Because of his NET status and his wealth of experience, most of the younger teachers (me included) would always come to him for advice, seeking his help to proofread our exam papers. Sitting right next to Mr. R, I always felt like I had to work harder on my tone, accent, and pronunciation—I constantly tried to match up to his standard. My proximity with Mr. R also meant that I had the chance to witness how other teachers interacted with him. In general, everyone treated Mr. R with credence and respect. He exuded a sense of authority, whether due to his many years of teaching experience or NET status. In all honesty though, Mr. R was like a father-figure to me. Whenever I had a hard day at work, or had to deal with difficult students or colleagues, Mr. R was always there to give me support.

It wasn't until I worked at the second school that I felt completely confident about my teacher identity. At the second school, I spoke to my students and colleagues in the most comfortable way. However, there was never a need for me to claim "nativeness" with my students. Perhaps mum's experience influenced me in a way because when I interacted with my students, I would 'pretend' that I don't understand Cantonese so as to motivate my students to use English only in my lessons. In a way, I think my students just kind of assumed that I was "a native speaker of English" because of the way I behaved or the way I spoke. From time to time, I did feel a sense of guilt for pretending that I didn't understand Cantonese, especially since Chinese has always been my favourite subject at school. I didn't come clean with my students until after I left the school. After leaving the school to become a university instructor, I would meet up with my former students over coffee. That was when I finally revealed to them that I could understand every single word that they said about me in Cantonese. We had many long chats in Cantonese and felt that our relationship became closer.

Sometimes I wonder, would our relationship be different, if I had revealed that part of my identity sooner? Would I lose my authority, credence, and respect?

Journal 4

Describe former and current students, focusing mainly on university students (e.g. Are they interested in learning English? What are their interests, gender, needs, age, ethnicity, L1, and abilities?). How often did I use L1 during/outside my class and why? How did I motivate my students to learn English?

I have taught at three different universities over the last seven years. From 2015 to 2016, I was an assistant lecturer at the University of Hong Kong. Interestingly, most of my students in the Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) course were fluent speakers of English, some were from English schools in Malaysia, some from Singapore, and a few international school students from HK as well. Half of the class were Hong Kong students born and raised in Hong Kong. They're not very interested in the grammatical aspect of English, so teaching PCK to them proved to be a challenging task at first. To stimulate their interest, I tried using realia such as signs with spelling mistakes or grammatical mistakes to see if they could point out the errors and explain the errors. To them, preparing for the English teacher benchmark exam was the most challenging part of the course as it required them to conduct error correction where they did not only have to circle the errors in a sample student essay but also use metalinguistic terms to explain the errors. Therefore, I tried my best to prepare them for the benchmark exam by devising different ways to help them memorise different metalinguistic terms. Since they were preservice English teachers, I also supervised their student teaching practicum and gave them feedback on their lessons. What I found most effective as I went through their lesson with student teachers whose mother tongue is Cantonese, was when we conversed in Cantonese. I remember several student teachers feeling nervous about getting judged based on their lesson, and hence did not share honestly initially about how they thought the lesson went. However, as soon as I started talking to them in Cantonese, they became more comfortable to share what they truly felt about the lesson. I was able to share with them my personal experience when I was a student teacher myself, and they were happy that someone was willing to share vulnerably and honestly with them their past successes and failures.

From 2018 to 2020, I taught ESL at a vocational college in the US. Most of my students were native speakers of Spanish. They were extremely talented baseball players from Puerto Rico, Argentina, and Panama who were scouted or recruited by hundreds of American baseball coaches. However, they were not as interested in learning English as their main concern was to stay on the baseball team and represent the college on the field in national level college baseball matches. To understand their culture and language better, I asked one student to teach me Spanish. It did not go very well as I could not speak the language fluently no matter how hard I tried. This reminded me of when I first learned English and no matter how hard I tried, I was still told that I have an accent. Feeling defeated, I wonder if my students felt the same and therefore were not motivated in learning English. Thanks to my husband who is an avid baseball fan, I learned the different terms about baseball such as homerun, strike etc. I began conversing with my students in their language i.e. sports. From time to time I used some simple Spanish phrases to get their attention. Eventually they became more interested in class, they stopped dozing off in class and even asked me questions about English. This experience made me realise that to motivate my students I should respect their culture, language, and tradition.

Finally, I taught ESL to mainland Chinese students and Indian students at a private university from 2019 to 2021. Many of my Indian and Chinese students felt homesick and found the weather in Connecticut to be too cold for them. They also felt homesick and really missed their food. Although Mandarin is not my mother tongue, I can speak Mandarin with my students. After class, I would talk to them in Mandarin to make sure they understand the class readings. With my Indian students, I talked to them in English since that's our mutual language. I taught my students presentation skills. What I found to be most helpful about my non-native English speaker background was when I would share with them my experiences as an immigrant in the States. I shared with them how I often could not catch some of the jokes from my American colleagues, even now, especially when they would quote movie references and I would just pretend to laugh because I did not want to embarrass myself. My students told me they appreciated that because it made them realise that they were not alone. I remember one student asking me in Mandarin, "What should I do if someone asks me

‘how are you’ in English?” It opened up such an interesting discussion because I explained to the class how when an English speaker asks, ‘how are you?’, they do not really expect a ten-minute answer of how you are doing and that a simple response such as “I’m fine and how’re you?” would suffice. I remember having a good laugh with my students because we all understood the mismatch in cultural discourse even in such a simple question as “how are you”. I told them honestly that when I was first asked the question I literally froze because I was too nervous to give a wrong answer. Being able to share my experience as a non-native speaker with my students helped them understand that they are not alone in adjusting to a new culture and a new language.

Journal 5

Describe my experience learning/teaching overseas (i.e., outside Hong Kong). How did my identity as a native/non-native English student/teacher influence the way I interacted with professors, coursemates, colleagues, or students? Share one example when my identity as a non-native English speaker hindered my interaction with others, and one example when my identity benefited the interaction.

In 2016, I moved to the United States from Hong Kong to teach English at a small private high school in Bridgeport, Connecticut. It was my first time teaching American students, designing US curriculum, and interacting with American parents, so I was full of anxiety and anticipation as our plane landed at the JFK International Airport. In retrospect, labelling everything as American probably did not do fair justice to this diverse school of 60 students, as there were also many international students studying in this school from all parts of the world such as China, Colombia, Japan, Korea, Tunisia, Ukraine, and Vietnam.

At this school, all students except domestic students resided in the school dormitory, which was located just one floor below the teacher apartments, so I often had students visit my home. Because these international students did not have their family with them here, I would have the pleasure of taking the dorm students out to the mall or the cinema during the weekends. During some special occasions such as Chinese New Year and Thanksgiving, I would also invite myself to their dorm to cook dumplings and bake cookies together. It is interesting how González et al. (2006) mentioned that the teacher in a home-based context of learning would know the child as a whole person and not merely as a student (p. 133), because I do feel that these dorm students had become my family after living and working with them for three years.

Notwithstanding the convenience of working and living in the same building, it was a challenge to build trust with my students and colleagues at first, and I had made so many painful mistakes as an educator. Although I am not white, Sleeter's (2008) argument on their lack of familiarity with communities of colour is somewhat relevant to my first year of teaching at this school. She said that many white teachers are unable to build bridges between students and curriculum because of a lack of

familiarity with communities their students of colour come from, but instead of trying to make up for that unfamiliarity, they attribute their students' lack of engagement as disinterest in learning, and their academic problems as inability to learn (Sleeter, 2008). This is so poignantly true as I recalled some of the advice that my well-intentioned colleagues gave me during my first faculty meeting about several troublemakers in my homeroom who all happened to be African American students. One colleague said, "Dequinn is really lazy, don't ever expect him to hand in anything to you, Phylicity always has an attitude, don't get on her bad side, Ramona is never on time." In fact, they told me that their former homeroom teacher had such a bad experience with this group of students that she resigned from her position after teaching at this school for 15 years. According to Hammerness and Matsko (2012), it is of central importance that teachers learn about the role of culture, ethnicity, and educational background. It was surprising to me that as a school with such diverse student body, the school administration had given its teachers no professional development on "culturally relevant teaching" (Hammerness and Matsko, 2012, p. 559). As argued by Feiman-Nemser (2001),"[if] we want schools to produce more powerful learning on the part of students, we have to offer more powerful learning opportunities to teachers" (p. 1013-1014). Due to a lack of familiarity with and professional development on teaching students of colour, many of my colleagues would call this group of students "hopeless, toxic, and incorrigible". Being an immigrant teacher and a person of Southeast Asian descent, I did not fit in with the all-white faculty and confidently assumed I would be able to build rapport with this group of students very easily, only to find out later how arrogant and ignorant I was.

One particular incident with my student Phylicity has significantly influenced the way I teach. Before teaching this group of students, I did not know how much effort it would take for some of my students to make their hair look nice and neat every day and that mentioning their hair could be offensive to them. Phylicity skipped an important test one day and came back to school the next day with shiny permed/straightened hair. She asked me if she could make up for the test and said she did not have time to study for it. Thinking that it was odd that she had time to do her hair but no time to study for her test, I said thoughtlessly, "You would have the time

to study for the test, if you didn't spend so much time on your hair." Phylicity's face suddenly turned red, then she started screaming at the top of her lungs about how inconsiderate I was. I asked her to stay after class to figure out why she was so upset and came to realise how hurt she was by my insensitive comment. She explained to me that she would wake up at the break of dawn to braid her hair. If she did not braid her hair, it would look "too Afro" and her friends would mock her for it. She had gotten so sick and tired of all those jokes and insults that she decided to just perm it to save her time from braiding her hair in the long run. However, as her mother was very busy working all the time and Phylicity did not have a good relationship with her stepfather, it was not easy for anyone to take Phylicity to the salon and she finally had the chance on the day of the test, when her mum had a day-off from work. Phylicity's experience was embedded in a home and world "continuous with [her] family's history and in a culture that is at times discontinuous from that found in school" (González et al., 2006. p. 137). As I reflect on this incident, I am so glad and somewhat relieved that I took the courage to ask her to stay after class to talk instead of blaming her for being rude and rough around the edges. As Feiman-Nemser (2001) explained, teachers should "do more listening as they elicit student thinking and assess their understanding and for students to do more asking and explaining as they investigate authentic problems and share their solutions" (p. 1015). Although it was such an embarrassing and ignorant mistake to make on my part, it was through listening to Phylicity that I learned the valuable lesson on some of the daily struggles that she faced and how hair is closely connected with her sense of identity, family, and culture.

Because of my previous teaching experience in Hong Kong, I also became overconfident towards my ability to teach international students at this school—I arrogantly assumed that the way I taught in Hong Kong could be applied to this group of students as well. Kayoung is a half-Colombian half-Chinese girl in my class who had studied in Korea for several years before coming to the States. Seeing that Kayoung was hesitant and uncomfortable in my class, I thought she might be homesick and perhaps a little shy, so I would eagerly try to get her to talk, just like I did with my introverted students in Hong Kong. What I did not know was: what I saw

as being welcoming and enthusiastic on my part turned out to be a constant reminder of her traumatic experience when her Korean teacher would use a ruler to slap her fingers if she did not speak Korean in class. As Feiman-Nemser (2001) argued, having taken-for granted beliefs based on prior teaching experience may mislead teachers into thinking that we know more about teaching than we actually do, thus making it harder for us to form new ideas and new habits of thought and action. Just because certain teaching strategies worked with my previous students in Hong Kong does not mean I could just assume all students with Chinese background are the same. In fact, I would have never found out the reason behind Kayoung's reluctance if I did not talk to her father, hence having close communication with parents is also very important as we attempt to get a better understanding of our students. As González et al. (2006) argued, "teachers need not work alone" (p. 137). Looking back, I could have visited Kayoung's home like the teacher-researchers did in Moll et al.'s study, as it is the teacher "who is ultimately the bridge between the students' world, theirs and their family's funds of knowledge, and the classroom experience" (Moll et al., 2006, p. 137).

As someone who is deeply passionate about English literature, I wanted to offer a unique curriculum to my students that would inspire them to fall in love with the subject just like I did. When we did Frankenstein in our British Literature class, many of my students found it tedious and irrelevant to their lives, and they ended up just chitchatting for the rest of the class. One student suggested for me to just give the noisy students some colouring pages like their previous teacher did, so I could focus on those who wanted to listen. According to Anyon (1981), students from higher social class backgrounds may be exposed to legal, medical, or managerial knowledge, while those of the working classes may be offered a more "practical" curriculum such as clerical knowledge and vocational training. I believe there are merits to both academic and practical curriculum and there are ways to make high school English curriculum inclusive and relevant to both social classes. To make the novel more authentic to my students, I first did a hot seating activity where I took the role of Dr. Victor Frankenstein to talk about my post-traumatic stress order after creating the monster. The students had to take the role of Robert Walton, the narrator of the story.

I turned up the air-conditioner to make the classroom really cold, hoping it would imitate the setting of the novel in the Arctic Ocean. I pretended to shiver and talk so nonsensically to the point that some students were convinced that I was actually cold and offered me their jacket! I believe that this activity was helpful in getting my students to sympathise with Dr. Frankenstein, the protagonist of the story. Nevertheless, I still found it rather embarrassing for me to wear a fake beard and talk like a crazy person, not to mention some students were laughing so hard while I was pretending to sob. After the hot seating activity, I organised a mock trial where one student took the role of the monster in Frankenstein who was being prosecuted for murdering several characters in the story, and another played the role of the prosecuting attorney. Ramona was the defence attorney and Phylicity and some others were the witnesses, but everyone laughed when I invited Dequinn who was always being labelled as "the lazybones" to be the judge. Yet, to everyone's surprise, Dequinn took the role very seriously. Not only did he binge-watch several seasons of "Law & Order", but he also downloaded a gavel app on his phone so he could make a gavel sound during the mock trial. Taylor et al. (2015) stated that by thinking out of the box, teachers can create classrooms that are places of hope, where both teachers and students catch a glimpse of the kind of society that students can learn the academic and critical skills needed to make it a reality. With simple re-arrangement of the classroom chairs and some borrowed props from the costume shop, a courtroom was created for my students to explore the world of Frankenstein. If I had stuck with the assumption that these students are incorrigible and gave up on them, I would have missed out on this precious opportunity to create a place of hope for both my students and me.

My teaching experience at this school has allowed me to see how "race, ethnicity and language can influence one's teaching decisions" and how "the philosophies and approaches of different school types can influence attitudes and approaches towards learning" (Hammerness and Matsko, 2012, p. 561). If I were given a choice, I would have stayed in this school and continued to learn from my students, but I was laid off by the school due to financial crisis after teaching and living there for three years. Although I was laid off, I still maintain close contact with many of my former

students—I will never forget my students/family who have helped me grow as an educator.

Eventually, I was able to secure another English teaching position at an American university. As a Hong Kong immigrant teacher working at a private American college, I sometimes encountered colleagues or professors who would say that I have a nice "tone". I think what they mean is, I do not have a foreign accent or the accent of an English learner, despite the fact that I am an English learner. It is hard to respond to 'compliments' like that sometimes, because if I take their compliments positively, it would mean that I am also acknowledging that Hong Kong immigrants or other immigrants from other countries have a 'foreign' accent—that we are different. I wanted to tell them that everyone has an accent, and that just having an accent does not mean that our English is poor. I never confronted them, but I wish I did.

I remember co-teaching with an experienced, older white female teacher at the private university. In retrospect, working with this particular colleague was probably one of the biggest challenges I have encountered in my academic career. We were supposed to facilitate a Business English class together. The students just finished giving their presentations, and as co-instructors, we were expected to offer them both verbal and written feedback. She gave her verbal feedback first, and then I tried to offer mine. All of a sudden, she stopped me and said, "We don't need two people giving feedback." Later on, a student approached me to ask about the presentation. When my colleague saw that the student was asking me for additional feedback, she pulled me aside and said bluntly, "You're not the instructor, have the students direct all questions to me." After that, she handed me some readings and asked me to make thirty copies for the class. When I finished photocopying the readings, she sent me away again, requesting me to get ten whiteboard markers of different colours. That was when I realised that no matter how hard I tried, it did not change who I am—my skin colour, my age, my accent, and first language were all seen as inferior, rendering me a 'non-instructor' in this course even though we were supposed to be co-instructors.

I decided to confront her in front of our director, but hesitated as I was worried that I would be seen as unprofessional, thereby proving her point that I am unqualified to teach. While trying to compose myself, I wrote down what I was going to say in front of the director and my co-teacher on a piece of paper. I rehearsed in front of the mirror in the bathroom so I would sound eloquent, clear, and professional. After rehearsing my speech several times, I took a deep breath and asked both of them for a meeting to clarify my role. She was shocked at my confidence, demeanour, and strength while maintaining a level of professionalism as well. To the programme director, I said, “Professor A, I need to clarify my role in this course because my understanding is that Professor B and I would be co-teaching this class but seems like Professor B had the impression that I would be her teacher assistant. My contract stipulated that we are co-teachers, unless I misunderstood?” Professor B was red in the face, she could not say a word. The programme director looked at her, then said to both of us, “Of course, both of you are the instructors, there is no question about that. Did someone say otherwise?”

I looked back on that day, the day I stood up for myself. Had I been timid, I might still have been serving as Professor B’s de facto TA right now. I stood my ground and secured my position as an equal with my colleagues. After one semester, I was given my own course to teach as the sole instructor.

Journal 6

Final thoughts: What did I learn about my identities from writing these reflexive journals?

The past six months of engaging in reflexive journals have been such a powerful and meaningful journey for me. On a professional level, I am particularly grateful for the opportunities to engage in academic dialogue with the *self* and *others* pertaining to my identity construction. On a personal level, my journaling experience has helped me tremendously in beginning the healing of past trauma, allowed me to reflect on how to support and empower my students, and reaffirmed my teaching beliefs and identities.

Years before I was born, my dad was an international college student in South Carolina. His brother, one year older than him, was studying at the same university. My grandfather, who founded and owned an electrical company in Hong Kong, sold most of his assets just so my dad and uncle could study in the States. On one snowy day back in the 70s, my father was strip-searched at an American prison. He would later get thrown out of the American embassy, simply for fundraising for a newfound religious movement. The police who saw him selling flowers door-to-door called him a "Chinaman" and put him to jail even though it would not have been a problem if he were white. Spending a weekend in jail meant he automatically lost his student visa, and he was deported soon after he got out of jail. Because of his sudden deportation, my father was unable to be with his brother during his final moment—his brother died of muscular dystrophy in his dorm room.

Countless years after Dad was deported, he would still spend days drafting letters to appeal his case. I never understood my father's love for America. What makes it so appealing to my dad, that he's willing to keep trying, at all means, to appeal his case to come back to the States? If I were him, being treated like dirt in this country, I would never want to come back. Yet, Dad said, although he was being mistreated and abused, he had absolute faith in America's democracy that they would serve him justice and clear his "criminal" record, for he did not actually commit any crime. With my father's traumatic experience, I told myself I would never step foot on this

country. The irony is, about thirty years later, I would meet my partner for life, who happened to be American. He was doing his master's at my university as an international student when we first met.

Back to my father, after his unsuccessful attempt to become a journalist/writer in the States, he met my mother who was an electrical engineer from Singapore. After some long-distance courtship between Hong Kong and Singapore, my parents decided to settle down in Hong Kong and I was born. Thinking that they would be able to spend more time at home with me and my sister, both of my parents decided to leave their original professions and join the teaching force as English teachers. Although teaching was never my parents' ideal job, as time went by, both of them became very passionate about teaching and I remember constantly feeling inspired by the close bond between my parents and their students as a little girl. When I told my father that I wanted to be a teacher, he was so proud of me.

The writing of these journals has played a significant role in beginning my healing process and helping me in making decisions about what kind of teacher and teacher educator I want to be. Things that I was unable to verbalise with anyone before, I was finally able to put them in writing, and reading the feedback from my supervisor, former professors, and colleagues always gave me a sense of relief, as if some of my past resentments (and maybe dad's too) were suddenly liberated.

Writing these journals has also reaffirmed some of my beliefs in teaching, especially in teaching and supporting students of colour and international students who are non-native speakers of English. As I contemplate past tensions concerning my NEST/NNEST identity, I realise that it does not matter if I am a native speaker or non-native speaker of English—those are merely stereotypes others impose on English language learners and teachers. I should be proud of myself for who I am: An international educator, a transnational woman, a multilingual learner and speaker, a competent ELT, and the mother of two beautiful children. I hope I can replicate this experience with my students and community, so they feel as empowered as I do, and take pride in their unique culture, language, and identity.