



ELSEVIER

Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](#)

Learning, Culture and Social Interaction

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/lcsi

Full length article

The developing knowledge and identity of an Asian-American teacher: The influence of a China study abroad experience

Cheryl J. Craig^{a,*}, Yali Zou^b, Gayle Curtis^b^a Texas A&M University, United States^b Asian American Studies Center, University of Houston, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Minority teachers
Social interaction
Teacher identity
Teacher knowledge
Travel study abroad
Narrative inquiry

ABSTRACT

This narrative inquiry examines the way learning, culture and context shape the knowledge, identity and social interactions of teacher, Shi Tan. Through using broadening, burrowing, storying-restoring and fictionalization, the work chronicles how Shi, a child of Chinese immigrants, forms her 'stories to live by' over time. Early tensions surface between her parents' traditional lifestyle and what she came to know in the American context. Weekends in Chinatown, Chinese Saturday School, and summers in Asia reinforced the plotlines Shi's parents carried with them from their homeland. Concurrently, Shi's American public school and university experiences instilled in her different modes of knowing and being. A pivotal change occurred when Shi participated in a China Study Abroad trip alongside mostly White educators. While visiting Chinese schools and universities and interacting with Chinese locals, Shi's understanding of herself deepened. She questioned why the trip became a liminal space where she storied and restored her knowledge and identity differently. The significance of this research lies in its narrative rendering of identity; its unearthing of social complexities lived in cross-cultural communities; its lifelike characterization of how minority teachers/students navigate familial, social and cultural situations; and its advancement of knowledge that increases learning.

1. Introduction

This is who I am and why I do what I do.

(Social Media Posting, 2013)

This *Facebook* comment, posted by U.S. teacher, Shi Tan (譚诗), captured our attention as researchers, causing us to flashback to 2011 when we embarked on a China Study Abroad trip with her Curriculum and Instruction doctoral colleagues and her. Shi stood out in the 40-member cohort, not only because she was the youngest educator (less than 30 years old and nearly completed her doctoral degree), but also because she was the only Chinese American and, unlike the others, was engaged in travel study to her parent's homeland. In this article, we focus on the short- and long-term impact of the China Study Abroad experience on Shi Tan's developing knowledge, learning, social interactions and identity-in-the-making (Greene, 1995) as a teacher. To address this research interest, we use archival journal entries, field notes and assignments from 2011 as well as ongoing social media evidence in the public domain. We also draw on a digital artifact Shi shared with her doctoral cohort colleagues and us, which we intersperse with excerpts from interviews our research team conducted with her. We begin by presenting our literature review and research methodology. Next, we contextualize the study by describing ourselves, our connections with Shi, the purpose and itinerary of the 2011 travel study

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: cheryljrcraig@gmail.com (C.J. Craig), yzou@uh.edu (Y. Zou), gayle.curtis@att.net (G. Curtis).

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lcsi.2017.09.002>

Received 25 November 2016; Received in revised form 19 August 2017; Accepted 16 September 2017

2210-6561/© 2017 Published by Elsevier Ltd.

abroad excursion, and Shi's early cultivation and learning in her Chinese American family. After that, we present Shi Tan's narrative account of her China Study Abroad trip and how it contributed to her emerging knowledge and identity differently than several earlier trips she took to China with her family. We follow with what Shi had to say three years later about the China trip's longitudinal influence on her learning. Lastly, we highlight overarching themes that speak to travel study abroad as a powerful pedagogical tool for enriching teachers' knowledge and shaping-reshaping their identities, an approach that readies them to work with diverse youths in America's urban schools and to reach out to a 21st century world in need.

2. Literature review

2.1. Education, experience, and life

Life is experience and education likewise is experience (Dewey, 1938). In this work, Shi Tan's travel study experience is an integral part of her life and contributes intentionally to her education. According to Dewey (1938), each new experience takes up new learning from the experience that came before it, informing it in instructive (“educative”) or non-instructive (“non-educative”) ways. Thus, experience has both active and passive elements, where the active is the “trying” and the passive is the “undergoing”. Put differently, when we experience something, we act upon it and undergo its consequences (Dewey, 1916, p. 163). Furthermore, ongoing experiences develop capacity for future experiences (Dewey, 1938). Over time, experience cumulatively shapes how we live, how we learn and ultimately who we are. This point is important because Shi Tan's realm of experience expands in this work, shaping and re-shaping how she lives, how she learns, and ultimately (as Dewey explained in the literature and Shi foreshadowed on *Facebook*) who she is.

2.2. Teacher knowledge

Two approaches to teacher knowledge exist: (1) the knowledge-for-teaching approach and (2) the teacher knowledge approach. The knowledge-for-teaching perspective subscribes to the view that there is a body of knowledge that every teacher should learn, know and do. For proponents of knowledge-for-teaching, such knowledge can be determined by others and “tested, packaged, imparted and sent like bricks across country to build knowledge structures that are said to accumulate” (Eisner, 1997, p. 7). In this view, teachers like Shi Tan, regardless of their cultural backgrounds and personal understandings, merely implement others' plans and the knowledge they deem important (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992). In this scenario, teachers are vessels through whom authorised knowledge declarations pass.

Standing in contrast to the knowledge-for-teaching stance is the teacher knowledge stance, which aims to understand teaching in teachers' own terms. From this standpoint, teacher knowledge is the knowledge that teachers produce in the throes and, as a product of, their daily activities. In short, it is knowledge borne of experience that understandably differs among individual teachers. Even knowledge-for-teaching becomes reconstituted through the lens of experience in this teacher knowledge approach where the image of teacher as curriculum maker is privileged (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992; Craig & Ross, 2008). Fenstermacher (1994), in his landmark review, named three leading schools of thought—Russell and Munby (1991), Connelly and Clandinin (1985), and Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1990)—promoting this view of teacher knowledge. While somewhat different, each honors how teachers personally, socially and professionally learn as minded human beings (Dewey, 1908, 1938).

Situated on the Connelly-Clandinin research line, our research niche not only subscribes to the conceptualization of teacher as curriculum maker, it views teacher knowledge as “a narrative construct, which references the totality of a teacher's personal practical knowledge gained from formal and informal educational experiences” (Xu & Connelly, 2009, p. 221). According to Connelly and Clandinin (1988), a teacher's personal practical knowledge is “...in the person's present mind and body, and in the person's future plans and actions...It is seen and found in...practice...” (p. 25). Reduced to its essence, what teachers like Shi Tan organically say and do is their personal practical knowledge in action, which, in turn, shapes their teacher identities, the strand of literature we discuss next.

2.3. Teacher identity

In addition to studying Shi Tan's developing knowledge, this article explores the fluid nature of her identity as a teacher (Palmer, 1997; Miller Marsh, 2002; Zembylas, 2003a, 2003b). This includes her cultural identity (Fong, 2006; Fong & Chuang, 2004) as a Chinese American educator whose ethnic group is typecast as “perpetual foreigner” and “model minority” (Ng, Lee, & Pak, 2007; Tuan, 1998) by non-Chinese and as ‘banana people’ (stereotypic image meaning yellow outside/white within) by native Chinese (Anonymous Personal Communication, 2014). In this work, Shi's identity unfurls in the midst of her narrative accounts of her early youth, her China Study Abroad trip, and her retrospective reflections on her learning from the excursion three years later. In narrative research, the term, “stories to live by” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999), signifies teacher identity. The concept of ‘stories to live by’ means “our identities [are] composed and improvised as we go about living our lives embodying knowledge and engaging our contexts” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999, p. 4). Identity is a “set of reifying, significant, endorsable stories about a person” (Sfard & Prusak, 2005, p. 14). These ‘stories to live by’ are both personal—reflecting a person's family and life history, and social in nature—reflecting the milieu, the local and global places in which the teacher interacts (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). In other words, Shi Tan's ‘stories to live by’—her identity-related narratives—are shaped by her personal practical knowledge forged in multiple contexts. Concurrently, Shi Tan's ‘stories to live by’ are affected by her changing professional knowledge landscape (Clandinin & Connelly,

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6844143>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6844143>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)