



Context perspectives in a Taiwan junior high school



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HIGHLIGHTS

- Explores the complexities of learning to teach with numerous stakeholders.
- Investigates what Taiwanese identify as an “induction phase.”
- A context review situates perspectives that precede a school context placement.
- Narrative representations provide ways of understanding participants.
- Social interactions and relationships within educational environments matter.

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ABSTRACT

This article explores context perspectives of a student teacher, a cooperating teacher, and the teachers and teacher administrators within a Taiwanese junior high school during an “induction phase” experience. We offer a context review to situate the study in Taiwan during a period of educational reform and a literature review to situate the study internationally. Although studies discuss student and beginning teachers’ professional development with cooperating teachers and mentors, few explore the complexities of learning to teach by collectively describing numerous stakeholders’ perspectives within one context. Our article describes a learning-to-teach context where professional development is shared through stakeholders’ perspectives.

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There is continuing interest and increasing commitment to study novice teachers in context. Munby, Russell, and Martin (2001) contend that “What teacher educators and researchers plainly need is a clear understanding of how school contexts feature in teacher education. Without attention to context, teacher educators will not be challenged to reframe their own practices to rejoin experiences of teaching with the knowledge of teaching” (p. 895). More recently Ronfeldt & Reininger (2012) found “the quality of the cooperating teacher may have the strongest positive effect on perceived preparedness and efficacy, while the quality of placement school may have the strongest, positive effect on planned district persistence and underserved preferences” (p. 11). Numerous reviews call for research focus on teacher preparation, beginning teachers, and their context(s) (e.g., Liston, Whitcomb, & Borko, 2006; Wang, Odell, & Schwille, 2008). Although many studies and commentary

discuss student and beginning teachers’ professional development with their cooperating teachers, few explore the complexities of learning to teach by collectively describing the numerous stakeholders’ (i.e., members of teaching staff) perspectives within one context (Huang & Waxman, 2009).

This article expands the current literature and investigates what Taiwanese identify as an “induction phase” through stakeholders’ perspectives during a period of educational reform. We are particularly interested in the relationships among stakeholders within a Taiwanese junior high school. As the article unfolds, it will become clearer what “induction phase” means to the stakeholders within a particular Taiwanese context (and will seem for many that “induction phase” relies more on student teaching than induction experiences, *per se*). The following questions provide focus for our research: 1) What are the components and complexities of student teaching and induction teaching in a Taiwan junior high school? 2) How do perspectives of a student teacher, a cooperating teacher, and other teachers explain relationships in a specific school context and develop student teaching and learning experiences?

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1. Context review

We include a context review that is similar to a literature review in that it overviews the contexts that situate and precede the context of the school where the induction phase took place. We seek to understand Taiwanese teacher education and its development through the years. The compilation of various perspectives offers valuable insights and conundrums about Taiwanese policies, university programs, teacher education centers, and schools.

The transformation of teacher education in Taiwan is shifting from uniformity to diversification (Fwu, 1995; Ministry of Education [MOE], 1994). The Taiwanese government initially held complete control over teacher education to pursue political stability and teachers were trained to cultivate students' national loyalty (Fwu & Wang, 2002). Teacher candidates were recruited solely by normal universities and colleges based on their performance of academically-oriented Joint College Entrance Examinations. Teacher education was a five-year program (for which the government paid), teacher induction (full-time internship preceding graduation) was mandated, and the government was responsible for placing teachers during induction periods. This was the landscape in Taiwan before the introduction of the 1994 Teacher Education Act (MOE, 1994).

Between 1994 and 2003, teacher education was a four-year program with a one-year teacher induction phase following graduation (MOE, 1994). According to the revised Teacher Education Act subsequently published in July, 2002, the yearlong induction phase was further revised to six months of induction practices after 2004 (Hsueh & Chu, 2007). During this time and into the present of reforming teacher induction systems, the control of induction placements shifted to teacher education centers and their faculty to place student teachers in practicum schools. The teacher education centers send official documents inviting potential schools located in major cities and counties to build partnerships. With the consent from potential schools, teacher education centers further sign a contract with each site. Teacher candidates select their particular placement based on the vacancies provided by the practicum schools and the candidates' preferences for the local school's reputation and/or location. Within either the initial one-year induction phase (1994–2003) or 6-month (2004–present) induction practices, university supervisors at teacher education centers and cooperating teachers at practicum schools are assigned to help with student teachers' professional development, subject matter teaching, and homeroom-teaching and administration affairs.

According to regulations mandated by the Ministry of Education (MOE, 1994) in Taiwan, the selection of cooperating teachers is mainly based on their teaching experience (at least with 3 years of teaching experience), professional ability, and willingness (Sun, 2006). According to some Taiwanese education researchers, there has been a lack of screening and training systems to select and cultivate cooperating teachers to foster student teachers' learning to teach (e.g., Chou, 2009; Li, 2009). Moreover, these researchers report most inservice teachers have limited motivation to serve as cooperating teachers as there is no salary for these additional tasks. Accordingly, the majority of cooperating teachers are either assigned or requested to fulfill the school's mission to assist future teachers (where school administrators have the authority to pair them with student teachers).

We also wish to acknowledge one further issue that surrounds cooperating teachers within Taiwan. The Chinese culture is rooted in Confucianism, which respects an authoritative nature of a teacher's (or a cooperating teacher's) role, and has a potential impact on the relationship between student teachers and cooperating teachers during induction programs of varying length. As revealed by Li (2009), most of the student teachers studied

appeared obedient in following cooperating teachers' instructional philosophies or methods that were different from what was learned in teacher education centers. Li suggests one of the major reasons this happens is because cooperating teachers have the power to evaluate student teachers' induction practices. Moreover, Li acknowledged that university supervisors respect cooperating teachers as authorities and tend not to interfere with how cooperating teachers guide student teachers' teaching with an aim to help student teachers safely pass induction.

As explicitly stipulated in the Teacher Education Act, the aim of teacher education in Taiwan is to cultivate teachers with professional knowledge, democratic spirit, and high virtues (MOE, 1994). Chang (2005, referring to Lin, 1996) further interpreted that a purpose of the MOE is to promote diversified channels for teacher development and to cultivate and create more "educationalists" rather than train more "teaching machines" (p. 1). Chang argued that the teacher education centers affiliated to different universities with individual education characteristics have the freedom to set up philosophical orientation(s) underpinning their education goals and curriculum, as well as consider what constitutes an induction phase or induction practices. Yet, according to a survey conducted by Wu (2006), most teacher training centers in Taiwan design curriculum by referring to one of four possible philosophical paradigms: competence-based, knowledge-based, reflective practice, or standards-based paradigms. When training centers adopted more than one, they reported usually pairing either competence-based or knowledge-based with reflective practice. Wu's research findings imply that philosophical orientations of teacher education programs in Taiwan were rooted in "cognitivist" and "humanist" models of teacher learning and expertise, and as Wu shared most teacher training centers had difficulties developing "constructivist" theories into practices, especially in terms of curriculum. Regardless of focus, it should be remembered that the centers, along with their partner schools had the ability to consider various induction processes for an induction phase or practices (especially when the induction phase between 1994 and 2003 was one year in length).

2. Literature review

Our literature review includes studies on student teachers and novice teachers to share the landscapes of student and induction teaching, both areas being of interest to what Taiwanese term "induction phase." Using broad strokes initially, though, throughout the twentieth century various socialization studies and theories of varying kinds have paved the way to better understand schools and those who are in them (e.g., Lacey, 1977; Lortie, 1975; Rosenholtz, 1989; Waller, 1932; Wenger, 1999). There continues to be support at the beginning of the twenty-first century for varying types of socialization, school culture, sociology of teaching, and learning community research (e.g., Craig, 2012; Rozelle & Wilson, 2012; Sato & Kleinsasser, 2004). In fact, Huang and Waxman (2009) specifically investigated school environmental influences on student teachers in Taiwan and noted that research in this area "has rarely focused on preservice teachers or investigated the impact of the school contexts where they practice teaching on their affective outcomes" (p. 235).

Worldwide in national, regional, and local contexts "student teaching" and "induction teaching" are variously configured. In American terms, student teaching usually occurs at the end of a program (undergraduate or graduate) of study, usually is a semester in length, and varies by institution, certification level, degree type, and/or preparation route (Ronfeldt & Reininger, 2012). Induction teaching usually means a first year or first years of teaching experience after completion of a university program (e.g., Griffin & Millies, 1987). Future teachers around the world may

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