

Teacher negotiation of educational change and sociocultural processes (re)defining teacher dialogue and practice

Even when actively collaborating, teachers need to connect new ideas about teaching and learning to their personal experiences to improve classroom teaching. However, researchers rarely consider how teachers' previous out-of-school experiences—especially childhood experiences—influence their change capabilities. Our pilot studies show that childhood demographics are more influential than current statuses in shaping teacher identity. This proposal seeks to understand how childhood experiences underpin professional identity formation, thus influencing how teachers connect intended change with practice. The concept of “identity grafting” has been developed by the PI (Lee*, 2017) to illustrate how childhood experiences people “graft” onto their professional identities consequently influence their values toward change and their practices. Identity grafting refers to connections people form with selected social groups, and the identities they consequently take on, which influence how they reconcile differing values and engage in professional practices. For example, some teachers mostly favor new ideas, grafting these to develop a blended pedagogical identity; others mostly disengage, seeing new ideas as unwelcome influences grafting on their identities (Keiler, 2018). Employing four constructs (blending, integrating, reversing, and repressing) that comprise the theory of identity grafting, this research will explore how teachers mainly engage in specific forms of negotiations, as individuals, among peers, and between schools and systems. We will conduct a survey sampling at least 300 teachers each in Hong Kong and Singapore. Survey results will provide an overview of identity profiles of teachers by teacher demographics, school, class, and teaching practices. Observations of teacher dialogues and interviews will provide insight into childhood experiences, teacher collaboration, and teacher-student interaction influences on the identity grafting underpinning teaching practices. Our research seeks to raise teacher awareness about their identity grafting strategies, to help them make critical decisions about educational change for improving student learning. It fills critical gaps in the research literature regarding how teachers experience and navigate educational change, drawing connections between their personal experiences (childhood demographics and memories and teacher dialogues) and teaching practices. This project will contextualize the social influences of teacher identity, many of which are shaped by childhood. It will examine teachers who (re)construct diverse, dynamic identities from childhood as active agents of identity grafting. Teachers may adapt these frameworks as tools for self-reflection—particularly regarding how they may tighten synergies between teacher collaboration, classroom collaboration, and their teaching practices.