
Language Teacher Educators as Learners: A Case Study of Collaboration

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Abstract: This qualitative study is set in the context of a two-week professional development summer institute for Chinese language teachers. This institute had the luxury of involving four language instructors, one from the U.S., one from Austria, one from Taiwan and one from China. In addition to different ethnic and academic backgrounds, they brought various personalities and connections with Chinese language teacher training. The purpose of this qualitative case study is to investigate how the instructors learned from their collaboration throughout the institute. Data sources include reflective journals, instructors' meeting minutes, videos of instruction and in-depth interviews. With constant comparative analysis, this paper explores the importance of multicultural collaboration among teacher educators and shed light on the nature of their learning.

Keywords: Teacher Education, Multicultural Collaboration, Learning

1. Introduction

Even though teacher education has received extensive attention, most studies evaluate the effectiveness of training programs, teacher educators themselves are often neglected [42, 50]. Teacher educators—those who teach the teachers—play an important role in designing curricula, implementing programs and facilitating a supportive professional development community to support teacher learning [8, 20]. But who trains teacher educators? Because there are not many courses available on how to lead teacher education or professional development experiences for others, how do teacher educators deliver quality training and how do they grow? It is common for schools to pair up more experienced teachers with new teachers in class, but this practice offers informal mentoring. In some cases, the mentor teacher may not teach the same discipline or understand the context of classroom.

This situation also holds true in the current context of Chinese language teacher education. With the rapid popularity of Chinese language learning, preparing qualified teachers is critical for the development and sustainability of new programs. More teacher training programs emerge and collaboration among teacher trainers is documented. Research

reveals that teacher educators are also learning through collaboration, on-going dialogues and collective reflections [4, 21]. This paper is interested in exploring what learning opportunities exist through collaboration, and what teacher educators can learn from this collaboration.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Background of This Study

There is much research on teacher education; however, scholars raise concerns about the scarcity of literature on the teacher educators themselves. “Less than two percent of all entries for teacher education in the Education Research Information Clearinghouse (ERIC) data base relates even remotely to professors of education” [50]. International attention is called upon in extensive publications to explore teacher educators' learning. For instance, Korthagen stated that “(f) or a long time it has been a cultural characteristic of teacher education that it was taken for granted that a good teacher would also be a good teacher educator without further schooling” [29], thus further research on teacher educators has been neglected. This is problematic because much knowledge is to be explored about teacher educators. They not only play an important role in helping the teacher

trainees to grow, but also have their own learning needs for personal and professional growth. Cochran-Smith suggested that:

The education of teacher educators in different contexts and at different entry points over the course of the professional career is substantially enriched when inquiry is regarded as a stance on the overall enterprise of teacher education and when teacher educators inquire collaboratively about assumptions and values, professional knowledge and practice, and contexts of schools as well as higher education, and their own as well as their students' learning. [8]

In other words, inquiries nurtured from teacher educators themselves and collaborative teacher education can yield to ample learning opportunities for the teacher educators [24]. As a Chinese teacher who is also becoming a teacher educator myself, it is my interest to explore what is available for the teacher educators to learn, how they learn and what they learn in a specific context.

2.2. Teacher Educators' Collaboration

Collaborative teaching is defined differently in various settings. One definition is "two or more people sharing responsibility for educating some or all of the students in a classroom" [46]. Robinson and Schaible recognize collaborative teaching as a form *throughout teaching and learning*, "any academic experience in which two professors work together in designing and teaching a course that itself uses group learning techniques" [41].

Despite the nuances in defining collaboration, co-teaching is a popular model in teacher education and many researchers believe that collaboration is an opportunity for teacher educators to utilize their unique expertise, to share resources and to negotiate their teacher identities. Each educator has unique professional knowledge and possesses only a small portion of the resources; by interdisciplinary and multicultural collaborating, personal and professional isolation is broken to acquire better skills of teaching [20]. Not only information and materials are shared, the interdependence of each other also yields learning from others' expertise areas [9, 33]. After reviewing extensive literature, Hendrix and his associates find that collaboration is a process of pedagogy and identity negotiation in various professional settings; it is important to acknowledge multiple identities in the classroom [23]. Additionally, Cochran-Smith examined teacher educators' learning by analyzing four types of teacher educator communities: unlearning racism, reinventing supervision, seeking social justice and facilitating inquiry. Her publication elucidates that teacher educators' learning is "a process of continual and systematic inquiry" [8], where teacher educators share the meanings of teaching in different cultural contexts, "question their own and others' assumptions and construct local as well as public knowledge appropriate to the changing contexts in which they work" [8]. Teacher educators seek a common ground for pedagogical thoughts and develop more complex perceptions of being a teacher. All of these provide learning opportunities for teacher educators.

2.3. Learning Opportunities for Teacher Educators

One of the reasons why research literature is remarkably silent in studying teacher educators may be that learning is considered to occur solely among the trainees; however, studies show that it is necessary and valuable for teacher educators to further their own learning as well. Weber conducted a phenomenological inquiry of six university professors of education to demystify the dual commitments of teacher educators: the students' learning and their own learning [50]. She thus suggested further research on collaboration to help teacher educators' growth. Over a decade later, teacher educators' learning was still calling for urgent attention. When Zeichner wrote about his journey of developing from a classroom teacher to cooperating teacher and then to a university educator, he stated, "one's expertise as a teacher does not necessarily translate into expertise as a mentor of teachers" [55]. His reflection also lends support to the significance for teacher educators to transform their skills as a practitioner into skills as a mentor. One way to achieve the goal is to cooperate with other teacher educators, conduct dialogues, reflect on self and grow from mutual learning.

Learning opportunities are reported to emerge from various facets of collaboration, one of which is the interaction and group efforts among the teacher educators [31]. Interaction is a dialogic process where teachers scrutinize their ideas, develop their rationale, meditate on pros and cons of their choices, conceptualize their practice and navigate optimal pedagogies. Especially in seeking issues related to social justice, teacher educators may constantly strive to balance between "commitment to collaboration" and raise "genuine critique of others' ideas and positions" [8]. This process helps to transform the image of teachers from being conventional and authoritarian to on-going learners. In other words, collaboration creates an opportunity for educators to negotiate how to shape the instruction for the trainees, and equally important to complement each other's limitations. An effective trainer is expected to integrate working into learning and to interact actively in the process to develop at the individual level and organizational level [28].

Another opportunity for learning to occur is the community dynamic that is formed to nurture deeper knowledge growth among the teacher educators. The teacher training reflects that learning is not isolated [20]. The collaboration among the teacher educators is a type of learning community itself. This natural and purposeful community expands the boundary of individual capacities to yield more powerful opportunities for the teacher educators to observe each other, assess each other, counsel each other and produce a vigorous collegial relationship [35]. In the last two decades, Wenger, along with his research colleagues, created and evolved the term *community of practice* to describe those practitioners who share similar interests and passion towards one goal and work collaboratively to achieve the goal, during which knowledge and expertise grow through interaction [51, 52]. It is this community that supports, facilitates and fosters teacher educators' continuous growth.

2.4. Review of Collaborative Models for Teacher Education

Scholars have proposed a variety of collaborative models related to teacher education. My review of this literature divulges five guiding perspectives on which the models are addressed.

The first one is the means of collaboration and the role of each teacher educator. Esterby-Smith and Olve suggested five types of collaborative teaching: Star, Hierarchical, Specialist, Generalist, and Interactive. Each stage indicates the role that each teacher educator would play in the team [13]. To be specific, Star model would feature one senior teacher in charge and the rest of the team members as guest lecturers; Hierarchical model is commonly seen in higher education where one senior teacher will give lectures after which students are divided into small groups for practice or discussion facilitated by junior teachers; Specialist model means that every instructor shoulders an equal major responsibility in instruction according to their individual specialty; in comparison, Generalist model is appropriate for trainings without strict subject boundaries because each teacher shares a part of the teaching process regardless of their expertise. Interactive style is different in the sense that instructors' contribution cannot be fully planned in advance so interaction with participants will have impact on collaboration. This model reflects the working styles and the extent of teacher educators' participation in the teaching.

The second perspective is to view the purpose for which collaboration would take place. Eisen identified eight types of collaboration: interdisciplinary-multicultural education, collaborative learning, community action, action learning, specialized delivery, professional development, research, and writing [14]. For example, teachers may collaborate for purposes of community action to solve a problem for the better life of the community; or for professional development that aims to fulfill the knowledge gap of in-service teachers. These models illuminate that a range of collaborative styles are available to suffice diverse learning needs but these purposes are not mutually exclusive. It is advised that teacher educators flexibly adopt and adapt one or more styles to achieve their purpose.

The third perspective is related to the procedure of practicing collaboration. Wenger, McDermott and Snyder [52] explained a four-stage model: potential, coalescing, maturity and stewardship. These four stages suggest that the collaborative process is a logical and meditated plan that addresses the needs of both the members and the organization.

The fourth perspective reflects the multifaceted implications of collaboration. Hadar and Brody [20] proposed a layered model for PDC (Professional Development Community) learning: 'breaking isolation' 'improvement of teaching' and 'professional development', after studying eight faculty members' collaboration to help with students' learning and their personal improvement in Israel.

The fifth perspective associates collaboration with the nonlinear trajectory growth in the teacher educators. Glaser [18] discusses the oscillation model where teachers would

experience fluctuation between newly acquired skills and previously learned habits. Brody and Hader echo with trajectory process by recognizing a four-stage model: Anticipation and curiosity, Importance of thinking as a teaching goal, Professional and personal growth and Closing a professional gap [4]. All of these three models highlight the nonlinear nature of learning in collaboration.

2.5. Overview of the Current Chinese Language Teacher Education

With China's tremendous economic growth and global impact, the number of Chinese language learners has skyrocketed. Hanban, also known as the Confucius Institute Headquarters, a public institution affiliated with the Chinese Ministry of Education, at its fifth annual conference in Beijing, reported that over 40 million foreigners around the world were learning Chinese in 2010, and the number has increased by 10 million since 2006 [6]. In the United States, incomprehensive statistics show that in 2006 there were 779 Chinese programs in K-12, a 200 percent growth since 2004; and there were 51,582 Chinese language learners at higher educational level, a 57 percent growth since 2002 [1]. The Center for Applied Linguistics [5] also presents the figures of language immersion programs, stating that a total number of 71 Mandarin immersion programs throughout the country places Chinese language at No.3 right after Spanish and French.

The unprecedented interests and expansion of Chinese study, however, has outpaced the supply of qualified teachers. Quoted in Wang's study [48], the data from STARTALK, a U.S. nationally funded training program, elucidate that among the Chinese teacher participants in 2007, less than 4% were born in the U.S. and 97.78% held a 4-year undergraduate degree, 60% with an even higher degree, but these degrees were not all related to language teaching or education. These numbers convey the message that while these potential teachers have the language knowledge to teach, they do not necessarily possess the teaching skills. "Quantity and quality of Chinese language teachers remains the key bottleneck in building capacity" [1].

What challenges do the Chinese teachers face to become qualified teachers? Wang [48] conducted an insightful review of the situation and discussed issues such as lack of pedagogical training, balance of teaching content and language, understanding of U.S. educational system and sociocultural context, identities negotiation and English proficiency. Other literature concurs that beyond the typical challenges of becoming licensed in states across the U.S., the immigrated Chinese teachers encounter both language barriers and challenges in teaching Chinese in a new culture [7, 15]. To address the particular needs of Chinese teachers in the U.S., funding and initiatives of multiple sources, from the federal government to the non-governmental organizations, are invested to support the professional teacher training. Besides funding, effective training also requires quality teacher educators. However, lack of teacher educators in the Chinese teaching field is equally urgent. Some seasoned teacher educators are from other disciplines so they may have

difficulty understanding the particular needs of preparing Chinese teachers, while experienced Chinese teachers may lack the knowledge and skills to deliver training for others. Under this circumstance, collaboration among teacher educators can be a best way to elicit the strengths of teacher educators and to uncover new teacher education practices to meet the needs of this unique group of teachers.

2.6. Conclusion of Literature Review

In conclusion, the aforementioned review of literature underscores three important points: (1) Teacher educators are also learners through collaboration in training programs. They learn from interacting with other instructors and by forming a professional learning community [19, 20, 35]. The research cited above suggests that collaboration not only enhances teacher educators' instruction but also drives their personal development. (2) Learning opportunities emerge in many occasions and collaboration benefit the teacher educators at several levels, through on-going dialogues, innovating ideas and group reflections [28, 34, 35]. Each teacher educator may grow in dissimilar path, and the trajectory is not linear. (3) Chinese language study undergoes a dramatic demand, but there are urgent calls from professional training programs to prepare qualified Chinese teachers to meet the program needs in schools. However, like other research on teacher education, little light is shed on the teacher educators themselves. It is noteworthy to study the teacher educators and their collaboration; therefore, this project investigates the following research questions within the context of collaboration:

1. How do the language teacher educators view learning and collaboration?
2. What learning opportunities are available for the instructors in the collaboration?
3. What do the language teacher educators learn through the collaboration?

3. Research Design

3.1. Theoretical Framework

This study adopts two theoretical frameworks to examine the collaboration among the four teacher educators: sociocultural theory in learning and collaborative learning [25, 27, 32, 47, 51].

The author aligns with the sociocultural perspective for various reasons. Opposite to the cognitive models of learning which emphasizes learning through individual's minds in one setting, sociocultural perspective stresses that learning occurs in social settings and cultural settings, where learning is impacted by social relationship, cultural differences and interpersonal relationship [30, 44, 47]. These perspectives believe that new ideas emerge from not only individuals but also a supportive culture where members interact and scaffold each other [4, 26]. Sociocultural framework in learning also suggests that teacher educators are not only teachers but also learners [21, 42]. It is believed that teacher educator's growth can be better understood in a social context [4]. Sociocultural

perspective views learning as a non-linear process but a community-driven process. It is a process of gaining knowledge in practice. Learning happens among the teacher educators through working together, exchanging ideas and enhancing the students' learning. By facilitating the participants' learning, they also facilitate each other's learning by establishing a professional learning community themselves.

The study also draws on theoretical knowledge from collaborative learning. Johnson and Johnson [25] listed five elements with which collaborative efforts are more productive than competitive and individualistic efforts to yield to better learning. These five elements include: Clearly perceived positive interdependence; Considerable promotive (face-to-face) interaction; Clearly perceived individual accountability and personal responsibility to achieve the group's goals; Frequent use of the relevant interpersonal and small-group skills; Frequent and regular group processing of current functioning to improve the group's future effectiveness.

The sociocultural perspective and collaborative learning perspective do not conflict but rather complement each other. They both mirror Vygotsky's belief in the social nature of learning [47]. Sociocultural theory perceives teacher learning through a broader lens to argue that learning occurs in social contexts and cultural contexts; collaborative learning, from a more specific angle, takes a step further to view learning that happens in interpersonal relationship. These two theoretical frameworks share one essential common belief that learning is not isolated or individual. On the contrary, better learning results are driven by cooperation, interaction and communication. These two theoretical frameworks are suitable for this research as this paper looks at the learning opportunities through collaboration among instructors.

3.2. Methodology

The methodology for this inquiry is a qualitative case study. This methodology is used as point of departure because this methodology has a "focus on the field or the world of action, while embracing considerable diversity in theory and practice" [3]. A case study enables me to achieve rich knowledge of these individuals and gain in-depth understanding in the real-life situation [39]. It is a context-bound inquiry method to attain in-depth understanding of particular situation in real-world settings [54]. It matches the purpose of study because this inquiry is based in a particular context and is intended to gain understanding through thick description of the instructors within this context. It is not the author's intention to make general conclusion on universal activities, so case study is appropriate for my study by generating concrete and context-dependent description.

3.2.1. Context and Participants

This study is set in a two-week Chinese teacher training based in a large Mid-west research institute with the theme on Cultural Integration in Proficiency-oriented Mandarin Instruction in Practice (CIPOMIP). The program consisted of

in-class lectures, interactive activities, a field trip for the participants to search for authentic materials, and ended with a final presentation of their lesson plans.

There were four instructors in this specific program, Mary, Helen, Fang and myself. We are all females from different countries, speak multiple languages and have dissimilar professional backgrounds. Mary, Helen and I knew each other before the institute because Mary is our advisor, but Fang is a new addition to the team. Among us four, only Fang and I understand Chinese and have prior Chinese teaching experience; however, Mary and Helen have more practice in teacher education. Our distinctive backgrounds and practice in Chinese teacher education constitutes the uniqueness of the instruction team and seem to have been a catalyst for a great deal of our learning.

3.2.2. Data Collection

There are two main data sources, semi-structured interview with each of the instructors and the instructors' reflective journals throughout the program. Two supplementary data sources include the observation notes from me and another external researcher, and the video of classroom instruction.

The instructors met two times as a complete team to get to know each other, share each other's strengths, revise the curriculum and design the syllabus for each day's discussion topic. During the preparation period, Mary, Helen and I decided to use self-reflective journals to study the professional growth in ourselves, so we suggested the voluntary journal activity. Fang opted not to participate in the reflective journaling but she agreed to be interviewed by me for her insights. At the end of the workshop, I collected 2 instructor's journals from Mary, 10 from Helen, and 6 from myself. Reflective journals are a useful instrument of collecting data because they are material facts that timely recorded the instructors' thought and reflection after each class.

I then had a semi-structured interview with each of the instructors and all the interviews were audio-recorded. I designed a semi-structured interview protocol with open-ended questions, which gave the interviewees flexibility to generate responses without choosing from a fixed list of answers, and also reduced interviewer effects and bias [39]. Semi-structured interviewing was used for two other purposes: one to provide an opportunity for each participant to reflect on the entire training program and share their thoughts that were not documented in their reflective journals, and the other to share with the participants my initial interpretation of their reflective notes and class observation, and then have them to explain or clarify their own interpretation. Because I was a participant myself, I responded to the interview questions in detailed, reflective writing.

Observational notes and classroom teaching video are two supplementary data sources. Even though I did not teach every day, I observed every other instructors' classes and recorded my participatory observational notes. At the beginning of the program, another Chinese PhD student Andie participated as our external observer. Andie's presence was helpful because it helped me *make the familiar strange* [43]. Because I was too

familiar with the setting and the people involved, when I observed, I may easily make assumptions as to what was going on, instead of seeing what was really there. By comparing my observational notes with Andie's, it challenged me to see what was hidden and what might be different from my assumptions.

Another supplementary data source is the classroom instruction video recording. This recording served as a material artifact that allowed me to capture the most authentic happenings in the classroom, and it was useful for me to identify the significant moments and trace the possible disparity between what participants said and what participants did. It helped me to analyze the participants' experience hidden from language. Various methods of data collection gave me diverse perspectives on the same phenomenon, as "triangulation of observations and interviews can provide a more complete and accurate account than either could alone" [37].

3.2.3. Data Analysis

Constant comparative method [17] was used to for data analysis. Even though constant comparative analysis is known as to generate ground theory, I adopted this method to increase the credibility of my interpretation of the data. Through this "back-and-forth, cyclical process of comparing new data with previous data that have been collected and coded" [11], I hope to avoid biased understanding of the data. Constant comparative analysis happened both within each case and across cases. In other words, as I collected data, I scrutinized the data from each participant vertically and created analytical coding; in the meanwhile, I constantly compared all of the participants' data horizontally to identify shared themes.

To begin with, I started viewing and coding the reflective journals along the workshop to create preliminary coding. Gradually, I discovered some possible patterns and created preliminary categories, then went back to the data, including the reflective journals and class teaching videos, to compare the incidents applicable to the categories and integrate the categories with their properties [12]. As I conducted the within-case analysis, I went back to my observational notes to identify significant vignettes that reflect my initial coding and further analyze so as to make my assertion.

Secondly, I revisited the categories and compared them with the new data from the individual interview. After finishing each individual interview, I compared the transcript with that particular participant's reflective journal and my coding. I color coded the corresponding responses, underlined inconsistency and generated second coding. After analyzing four individual data, I then laid out the analysis on the table and examined the categories across four participants. For instance, in response to individual learning style, my initial coding included independent learning, mediation of materials and interaction with people. When seeking data for learning opportunities, I generated categories as learning through reflection, through observation and through participatory teaching. For the last question regarding growth, I grouped data in terms of emotional change, "A-ha" moment, change of

views on teaching, on self, on subject and on effectiveness of collaboration. During the analysis process, I used a variety of strategies, within-case and cross-case analysis, visual display and theoretical memo. In discussing the sources of learning, I also adopted a frequency chart to identify seven constantly mentioned terms from the interview data. All of these help me answer my research questions much more clearly.

4. Findings and Discussion

In this section, I will display findings from each instructor in response to the three aspects of my research questions: perception of learning and collaboration, available learning opportunities and what is learned.

Mary: "I feel like I did the best teacher education that I have done for a long time."

Mary has been the lead instructor for the same institute for the last three years and this year. She is an Associate Professor and experienced teacher educator in this large Mid-west university. She is white, and from the US with 13 years of teaching background, ESL, EFL and Spanish. She was in the Peace Corps before she became a teacher educator. She has conducted extensive research work in teacher education nationally and internationally. She has traveled to China before and has many Chinese doctoral students. She does not speak Chinese.

When asked how learning occurs, Mary used her experience as a language learner and teacher educator to indicate that learning occurs in a context, through meaningful activities and through reading. She recalled her experience as a French learner, and explained that she was not a very successful classroom language learner but learned Spanish quickly as a Peace Corps volunteer living in a Spanish-speaking context. Learning through communication became a principal even after she became a teacher educator. She said that most of her work is done collaboratively and she would do her best work that way. In her words, this institute is the best teacher education that she has done in a while. Furthermore, she explained why she thought the program was such a success,

We don't know because divide-and-conquer, I don't, again, you can get your job done, but you don't necessarily learn a lot. And you don't have the chance to teach each other as much as if you are both present. So I feel like my new collaboration style is to be more present in the collaboration.

She elaborated that her understanding of best collaboration shifted from divide-and-conquer to being present throughout the process because everyone's presence provides opportunity to talk through issues and plan out the workshop together. She practiced this idea in her leadership of this institute. She organized the entire team to meet several times before the actual workshop and after each day's class. She regarded this as a way for team building and to get to know each other, which she believed could not be replaced with on-line communication.

Even though Mary was the most seasoned teacher educator and was the advisor to two other instructors, she still

discovered learning opportunities for herself. She attributed the learning to diversity of experience, diversity of language backgrounds and diversity of teacher education experience. She explained that this diversity was not only beneficial for the participants to see various perspectives, but also good for instructors to complement each other. Despite the fact that she did not understand any Chinese, she thought her expertise in teacher education could provide insights on how teachers learn; in the meanwhile, Fang and my knowledge about Chinese culture and Helen's innovative ideas help to demystify the theories she delivered to the participants. An example can be found in Mary's journal on the fourth day where she reflected on the fishbowl activity co-facilitated by her, Helen and me. Participants were so engaged in the discussion of multicultural education that we gave it twice as much time as planned. In this activity, Helen raised some thought-provoking questions to elicit participants' discussion; I demonstrated Chinese perspectives on multiculturalism with my own teaching experiences and Mary related everyone's response to certain theories. The entire activity allowed participants to make sense of theories and it was an ideal integration of theory and practice. Mary wrote in her journal that "this activity was excellent" in helping her further understand Chinese teachers' reaction to multiculturalism in society and schools.

From observing others' instruction, Mary shared in the interview that she was more motivated to connect theory with daily life experience to help the participants to construct the meaning of culture. For instance, she was impressed by Fang's use of kimono and by how Helen and I used skit to help the participants understand theories. Mary felt that the class time was spent very productively because the participants were making meaning out of the readings. Through communicating with two Chinese colleagues, Fang and me, Mary felt that she grew more appreciative of Chinese culture and Chinese people. She stated,

I mean I feel like I use all of the techniques that we used, but I get reminded of how good they are, so now I feel professionally more challenged to use more constructivist teaching techniques. So like I am reminded and challenged to do that. And personally, maybe just like having a greater appreciation for Chinese culture, and my Chinese students and my Chinese friends too.

Mary further explained that her deeper understanding of the complex Chinese culture inspired her to conduct more constructive learning among her participants. Her personal and professional growth was inseparable and was the result of working with colleagues from various cultural background and professional experience.

Helen: "It was the dream team."

The second instructor is Helen, who is an advanced PhD candidate. This multilingual teacher educator is from Europe with five years of teaching experience in a bilingual high school in Vienna before coming to pursue her doctoral study in the United States. During her PhD study, she also supervised perspective teachers, so she has some practice in teacher education. She did not speak any Chinese. It was her third year

as an instructor in the summer Chinese teacher training program.

Helen described herself as a social learner. She found herself learn better with people. In the meanwhile, she was very explicit about her personality; she considered herself as an opinionated and confident person in a team. On one hand, she was highly motivated to push the team forward; on the other hand, she admitted that she could be dominant and loud in the group. She believed that deep learning occurred through debating, challenging and being challenged. She said,

There were some debates on where the program should go and how much pop culture we should include in the workshop, how much we can get away from the national culture, the big C culture and to talk about everyday culture. I didn't think we were debating, but we were all arguing for the same point, but I do think that is really cool and important.

In this comment, she was referring to the several planning meetings we had to figure out what needed to be deleted, changed and added for that particular institute. She appreciated the argument for the best interest of the participants and the program. In other words, she discovered learning opportunities through working with honest, confident and equally self-driven people.

Furthermore, Helen said she gained tremendous learning through planning meetings, observing others' teaching and consulting Fang and me, the two Chinese speaking teacher educators on the instruction team, about cultural explanation for her confusion. In particular, she pointed out her frustration after her first day of teaching because she found no response or questions from the Chinese participants. In her daily reflective journal, she recorded that "Around lunch I felt frustrated about myself and my way of giving directions. I feel like I am causing participants to be confused and overwhelmed. I felt very uncomfortable when the participants were very silent after my directions". She didn't know if the participants understood her or not, and her dissatisfaction towards the class was obvious to the rest of the team. After she shared her feeling with us at the daily debrief meeting, I explained to her that it could be a cultural reaction to teaching because Chinese students do not always ask questions in front of everybody. They may ask her for clarification after class. It proved to be true when the participants approached her after class and Helen felt that she learned more about Chinese culture through this instance. Additionally, Helen explained that she learned to be more critical about her own teaching and her opinion through watching others' teaching. She learned to be more focused on the context and participants from Mary, learned to integrate traditional teaching with innovative teaching from Fang and learned to appreciate students' different values from me. She regarded this learning most beneficial to herself as a person.

Fang: "这次合作很好, 我可以从你们不同人的身上学到了不同的东西"。(Translation: It was a pleasant collaboration and I've learned different things from each one of you.)"

The third instructor is Fang, who has been a Chinese immersion teacher for over 20 years. She is a native Chinese speaker, originally from Taiwan, and served as an elementary

school teacher before coming to the United States. She has tremendous teaching experience in immersion language programs but has little experience in teacher education other than training a few new teachers in her school. It was her first time to join the instructors' team for teacher development and first time for her to meet us three instructors.

Fang did not say much about how she defined learning but she was very happy with the collaboration for the institute. She shared that at the beginning she had no idea of what to contribute to this workshop, but after attending the planning meeting and observing our instruction, she identified her strength as an experienced immersion teacher and helped the participants tackle some practical issues in teaching language and culture. After two weeks of working together, she developed a connection with us and developed immense appreciation for collaborative teaching.

有时候可以从他们当中可以通过他们外国人的眼光和思维来想我们自己的文化。没有好或者不好, 但是能提供很多不同的方法来教学...我就真正地学到了很多。我平时很少回来反看我自己的东西, 其实很多方法我都有实践这些理论, 但是没有那么多反过来看自己。(Translation: Sometimes we can reflect on our own culture through the westerners' lenses and perspectives. There is no good or bad, but there are more options to facilitate teaching. I truly feel that I've learned a lot. I rarely reflect on my own teaching. In fact I have practiced many of the theories (introduced in the institute), but I just never referred to them.)

She said that co-teaching with others helped her see other perspectives of education and helped her position herself better in the team. She also grew more confident in her teaching because she had an opportunity to reflect on her practice in reference to the theories introduced by Mary. She was pleased to see that many of her teaching approaches were actually applauded by theories and she was more convinced of her practice.

Kaishan: In a group of three people, there is always something I can learn from. Choose to follow the strengths of others, use the shortcomings to reflect upon ourselves. --Analects of Confucius

I was the fourth instructor in the team, playing a dual role as a researcher for this study. Like Helen, I was a PhD student advised by Mary at the time. I am from the south part of China and speak both Cantonese and Mandarin. I had five years of English teaching experience at the university level in China and three years of Chinese teaching experience in the United States, including K-12 schools, university, community programs and weekend Chinese programs. I had a little knowledge and practice in teacher education, but I was invited to join the instructional team because I was a participant in this workshop as a Chinese teacher a few years ago; my insights as a former participant and my Chinese teaching experience at various levels was considered as valuable addition to the instructional team. In one of my reflective journals, I wrote,

I see learning happening anytime, anywhere and from any person. As the Chinese philosopher said, there is always something to learn from people around you. I believe that learning does happen individually and independently, but I see

more learning opportunities within a group. Discussion, debate or even argument can create sparks to inspire learning; then individuals can internalize the knowledge independently. I also believe that learning is not restricted in a formal setting like a classroom; instead, a conversation during the break or in a coffee shop would stimulate learning.

Following this entry, I shared a learning opportunity that occurred during a lunch conversation between Helen and me. When we were planning a lesson on cultural taboos, I used the very traditional way of thinking to discuss some taboo topics in Chinese culture, such as unlucky number and color. However, Helen challenged me to uncover something more deeply rooted and discussed more contemporary cultural aspect. Helen challenged me to think critically of Chinese culture, and to connect cultural values with human rights and corruption. It was difficult for me at the beginning because politics are very sensitive topics in Chinese culture. One intriguing finding was discovered when I compared my reflective notes with Helen's. In our journals on the first planning meeting, I discovered a mismatch of our expectations on discussion in the workshop. Here is my entry,

She wants to challenge the participants to talk about other types of culture, such as taboos, controversial topics like Tibet, human rights and politics. Before challenging the participants, am I comfortable to talk about these issues? As Chinese people value face and would like to keep the ugly side of the family inside, I agree that we should challenge the gullibility and encourage critical discussion, but how much can we push the limit? Even before the actual instruction, the first few meetings already challenge myself to think deeper about the connotation of culture and my personal cultural experience.

And here is Helen's comment on the same discussion,

I will never forget what Kaishan said in the meeting, when I mentioned wanting to talk about human rights, money, sex, politics, etc. If I remember correctly, she said Chinese people like to keep the messy things inside the house. Wow. I could feel my heart skip a beat and at then start to race. It was exactly what I had tried to find words for. And exactly what I had hoped I would not hear.

Apparently we both recognized the importance of going beyond the superficial cultural topics such as festivals and food, but we also realized the difficulty of discussing controversial issues. However, over the many follow-up talks, I challenged myself to take initiative to discuss these topics as a Chinese and an instructor, while Helen also tried to contextualize Chinese participants' reactions. Our dialogue reaffirmed to me that society practice and mentality are formed in sociocultural context and using current everyday issues would be more inviting and meaningful for the participants. In the end, we co-delivered a very well received class on teaching culture and language critically.

The learning curve for me was to get out of my conventional Chinese thinking and complicate my own understanding of culture. I grow professionally by learning about how to facilitate discussion, how to treat the participants as our students and colleagues, and how to complicate participants' perspectives. I grow personally by becoming

more confident to utilize my expertise, to discuss with my professors equally and to challenge myself.

It was indeed a learning curve for me because I had least experience in teacher education compared with Mary and Helen, and I have way less Chinese teaching experience than Fang. How to position myself in the team was a predicament for me. On one hand, I desired to share my perspectives as a veteran teacher, a scholar and an immigrant, which I think will enrich the concept of multiculturalism; on the other hand, I lacked confidence and felt less qualified when I was working with Mary as my professor, Helen as a senior PhD student and Fang as a seasoned teacher. What can I contribute to the team was haunting me for a while. However, similar to Fang's experience, constantly meeting with the team and working through the syllabus together gave me an in-depth understanding of my strength. Throughout this process, I grew to be more critical as a thinker and more confident as an educator.

4.1. Deeper Learning Through Collaboration and Negotiation

A distinctive explanation for the positive experience for the four instructors was their shared perceptions on learning. Mary, Helen and I all thought that even though learning could occur while working alone, deeper learning is attained through working as a group. Knowledge is formed in particular sociocultural contexts and sharing ideas leads to more holistic sense making. Our views on learning echo the sociocultural explanation that learning is a process crossing time, people and settings [32, 40].

Although Fang did not explicitly defined learning in her interview, after comparing her previous professional experience as an authority figure and playing as a team member this time, she learned by talking *with* others in lieu of talking *to* others. As a result of this shared understanding, we acknowledged and appreciated what others brought to the discussion, and our unique model was naturally formed. Our model was a combination of Specialist and Interactive [13]; in other words, each one of us had our expertise and the entire institute was created through interaction. For example, Mary had the most experience in teacher education; Helen brought in her innovative ideas and critical thinking; Fang shared her tremendous experience in the field, and I brought in international and intercultural perspectives.

We truly believed in power of teamwork; no one was dominating the process. As a lead instructor, Mary intentionally engaged everyone to build a team throughout the workshop. She explained the reason,

I wanted everybody to meet, to try to start building the team, as well as just to talk through the syllabus, kind of like the logistics, and the schedule. So we had to do that ahead of time and I think that was best done face-to-face, rather than online, which we could have done too. I think we can't replace face to face stuff with everything on line.

From planning meetings to daily debriefing, there was constant discussion on setting up proper expectations and adjusting content. Each instructor had a chance to

demonstrate their expertise and resources while other instructors were also present for support. Sometimes there was disagreement, which was normal because “teaching is not static but dynamic. It involves constant shifts, negotiations, actions, and responses to a myriad of variables” [16]. Believing in contextual and collaborative learning in a respectful environment was the secret of the successful collaboration in this specific institute.

4.2. *Different Sources of Learning Opportunities*

Three sources of learning opportunities were revealed across the four instructors: (1) learning through observing others’ instruction. All instructors expressed that they learned something unique from watching others’ teaching. As Mary mentioned in her interview, she particularly emphasized being present through the whole process. Therefore, different from previous years’ institute, all of the instructors were in the classroom most of the time for learning and scaffolding. As a novice teacher educator, I considered myself as the one who needed to learn the most, but data reveal that all instructors learned from each other. One example that Mary and Helen both referred to was their learning from observing Fang’s instruction using a kimono. They thought the way Fang taught was more traditional, but Fang created opportunities to allow students to explore interesting information through traditional artifacts. Mary saw an opportunity for her to view traditional pedagogy with new lenses and learned how to better utilize authentic materials. Similarly, Helen also stressed that Fang’s conventional pedagogy was also an opportunity for her to rethink the value of traditional way of teaching.

Additionally, Mary identified the synergy between Helen and me as one of the best teaching moments. Helen and I used many skits to visualize concepts, and we utilized our strengths to facilitate discussion. In particular, when we were co-teaching the topic of complicating culture, I was leading the discussion while Helen synthesized the opinions to a list of questions that are applicable to various topics. It was a well-received class; Mary expressed her appreciation of our collaboration and was inspired to do more constructivist teaching in the future. Helen and I also benefited tremendously from this lesson and grew more confidence in constructive learning and collaborative teaching.

(2) Learning through others’ multicultural background was emphasized in everyone’s interview and field notes. For both Fang and me, we learned from Mary’s Spanish teaching background and prevalent theories in teacher education in the United States; and from Helen, her creativity and multilingual teaching background divulged the European perceptions for us. Similarly, Mary and Helen both elucidated that our insights in Chinese culture facilitated their teaching. Our holistic knowledge gained from social and cultural experience became our *teacher knowledge* to benefit each other [38, 53].

When these four instructors were given this teaching assignment, they entered the meeting with different concerns. Mary and Helen had more experience in teacher education but had no Chinese language background at all; Fang and I are native Chinese but had minimal experience in teacher training.

As a result, our weakness did not become deficit in the success of the workshop; instead, our strength really facilitated each other’s learning.

(3) Learning through working as a pair or a group. When teacher educators collaborate to design and implement training, the process itself is constructing and re-constructing their own knowledge. Fang indicated that by working with the group, she was exposed to diverse ways of teaching, and her own perception of culture was also complicated by her colleagues’ questions and discussion. I concur that working with partners with diverse background and personality was a chance for me to grow more resilient and tactful as a team player. As Helen repeatedly pointed out, she had a chance to learn to be more polite by working with people of different work style. Working in a group is an opportunity to share knowledge, learn to negotiate ideas and reconstruct knowledge. Tamir believes that “the actual behavior of a person in his or her professional field is a result of interaction between professional and personal knowledge” [45]. In this context, my colleagues and I brought in various knowledge to unpack, to share, to negotiate and to repack; therefore, our actual instruction in class was different because our knowledge was enriched through learning from each other.

4.3. *Professional and Personal Learning in Collaboration*

All of these four instructors developed powerful learning as a teacher educator and as a person. Professionally, we all learned compelling teacher education pedagogical knowledge from each other. Among all of us, Mary had the most experience in teacher education and she demonstrated superb pedagogical skills in engaging participants and utilizing context in teaching. She stressed the importance to consider the participants in constructing meanings and her class design was appealing to the participants to share their personal stories. An example in point was when she adopted her personal experience to demystify the essential questions in class. Helen, Fang and I were impressed and inspired by Mary’s demonstration and made improvement in our teaching. As a result, the participants, including those quiet ones, were active in participating in the discussion. Some recalled their struggles with stereotypes, some sought advice on balancing teaching and communicating with parents, and some broke down with frustrations at work. Mary’s pedagogical knowledge as a teacher educator is demonstrated through concrete experiences, which is “an effective way of communicating and modeling a useful teaching strategy to novice teachers” [45]. Not only we benefitted from Mary’s instruction, other participants also expressed their desire to replicate this approach in their own classrooms.

Additionally, one of the most popular activities in the institute was cultural quilt. It means that everyone in the class visualized the trajectory of their understanding of culture by decorating their cultural quilt. Every day we documented the changes on everyone’s cultural quilt, addition, deletion and alteration. In the final meeting, every participant and four instructors all shared the journey of complicating our understanding of culture. The cultural quilt idea was a product

of brainstorming in several planning meetings, and we expanded our knowledge about culture, about teaching and about us as cultural beings in the process.

Moreover, we grow as persons. For Mary and Helen, they both agreed that their appreciation of Chinese culture was enhanced. This experience exposed them to very nuanced differences reflected in different regions of China, and working with Fang and me nurtured their cultural sensitivity. If there were no colleagues from the target culture, they may have misconception of some of the reactions and responses. Our roles as intercultural people between Chinese and American cultures provided invaluable alternative explanations to some challenging phenomena for them. Likewise, Fang and I became more confident with ourselves through this collaboration. We both joined the instructional team for the first time with minimal practice in teacher education, so we were uncertain with what we could contribute. However, our knowledge about Chinese culture and teaching experience were valued and played an important role in the team. Fang was pleased to see that her practice was reflected in theories and I sensed my transformation from a practitioner to teacher educator by theorizing my practice and conveying to the participants. In all, we all feel that our professional knowledge and personal experience were precious resources for the participants and each other to learn. Our experience resonates with the notion that professional knowledge consists of more than instructional competencies; rather, it encompasses teachers' personal experience and knowledge [10].

There is no doubt that all four instructors have learned and grown from the collaboration over two weeks; however, we cannot ignore some of the challenges yet to overcome in the workshop. One of them was our different personality. Mary and Helen were outspoken and expressive with their emotions and opinions; Fang was not confident with her English proficiency and therefore she was quieter. I was an indirect communicator and was more reliant on Mary and Helen to take the lead in class focus and decision-making because they did the workshop before. Our personality and way of communication also reflect our cultural background and may require efforts to make adjustment. Another challenge was the shortage of time for planning. By the time we knew this workshop was funded, we had less than a month to plan; however, this limitation was compensated for by us being together in class throughout the entire institute.

5. Conclusion

Admittedly, there is prolific research on teacher education and co-teaching; however, studies with a focus on teacher educators are scarce, particularly in the field of training Chinese language teachers. With the unprecedented popularity of Chinese language learning in the United States, one of the salient problems is the lack of qualified Chinese language teachers. As a result, numerous professional development programs were financed to suffice the need. These programs attended to diverse topics, such as curriculum design,

learner-centered approaches, development of materials and assessment.

This study was conducted in one of the government funded teacher training programs. The results of this study reveal that this institute was a beneficial collaboration for four instructors, including myself. Even though we brought in very diverse ethnic backgrounds, not everyone had prior practice in teacher education and not everyone understood Chinese language, the shared determination in better learning in collaboration and openness within the group created ample learning opportunities for all four of us. Our co-teaching model was not divide-and-conquer but constructive learning and sharing; the unique dynamic allowed each one to present their strength to complement others' lack of knowledge. Our community exemplifies the sociocultural perspective that we were all involved and adapted to social and cultural dissimilarities. In the meanwhile, a dynamic learning community was formed to support teacher educators' knowledge growth [27].

By sharing what we already knew, what we wanted to know and what we needed to know, the meaning of culture was negotiated and fluid; our teaching knowledge was gained and shaped in a multifaceted context, social, educational, cultural and professional. We all advanced our knowledge as a teacher educator, enhanced our appreciation to cultural diversity, matured our personality to work better in a team, and became more confident with our professional identity. Through solving problems together, we produced continuity and support to foster learning [22].

This paper does not intend to generalize any results; these results came from a very unique context: collaboration among four instructors with different cultural backgrounds, different levels of teacher education experience and language resources. These conclusions may not apply to other contexts. However, this paper is illuminating in three aspects: firstly, each collaborative team has potential learning opportunities for team players to discover as long as you are open to learn; secondly, teacher educators may not need to know everything on that particular topic; having instructors from diverse background could create sparks in deep learning for the students; and thirdly, teacher educators are also learners.

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