From a "Sesame Street" Model TA to a University TA: Investigation of an International Teaching Assistant's Second Language Socialization over Time

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Abstract

Prior research on the professional development of International Teaching Assistants (ITAs) focuses mostly on ITAs' language skills (e.g., Rounds, 1987; Nelson, 1989) and pedagogical development (e.g., Bailey, 1984, with little investigation of ITAs' identity formation. Nevertheless, as Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop (2004) argue, teachers' professional identity, namely the relationship between teachers' self-image and the teacher role they have to play (Volkmann &Anderson, 1998), is the basis for teachers' meaning-making. Consequently, exploring how ITAs understand and develop their professional identities is essential. This study, drawing on a second language socialization perspective (Duff, 2011; Kim & Duff, 2012; Duff & May, 2017), examines how a focal ITA's professional identity develops over time in one quarter as she teaches a class and negotiates with students during class discussion sessions, and attends TA discussions with other TAs. Data were gathered from multiple sources, including audio recordings of the focal ITA's ("Fay") TA discussion sessions over one quarter and a bi-weekly interview with Fay to allow triangulation of data, which were analyzed using discourse analysis. The focal ITA's professional identity transformed through three phases—from the "Sesame Street model" to the "parent-like model," and finally to "students' achievement-oriented model." Across these three phases, Fay actively constructed her understanding of her professional identity through (re)examination and (re)negotiation of the differences among several different models of teaching, some encountered back home in Taiwan and some encountered here in the United States. I conclude that Fay's language socialization process of learning to be an ITA is a complex one which involves multiple identities and hybrid practices.

Keywords: International Teaching Assistants, second language socialization, professional identity

Introduction

International Teaching Assistant's teacher role

Starting from the 1980s, International Teaching Assistants (hereafter ITAs), the "non-U.S. citizens or recent U.S. residents" (Smith, Byrd, Nelson, Barret, & Constntinides, 1992, p. 11) who pursue their post-graduate degrees and are employed to teach university introductory undergraduate courses or lead discussion sessions have drawn scholarly interest in higher education due to the increasing number of ITAs sharing teaching in American universities. Prior research has examined ITAs' teacher roles mostly by observing their classroom practice or their interaction with the students, yet little has been investigated regarding ITA's professional identity (e.g., Gee, 2000; Geijsel &Meijers, 2005). Teachers' professional identity refers to their beliefs in teaching and learning as self-as-teacher (Beijaard, Meijerm, & Verloop, 2004), which serves as the basis for the meaning-making and decision-making in their pedagogical styles and their positioning as a TA in relation to their students.

Three main characteristics have been identified in discussing teachers' professional identity formation. First, teachers' professional identity formation is not a static entity. Rather, it is a process involving interpretation and reinterpretation of one's experiences (Coldron & Smith, 1999; Beijaard *et al.*, 2004; Flores & Day, 2006). Second, the construction of teachers' professional identity is a negotiation process between multiple identities (Beijaard *et al.*, 2004) in which relationships among multiple identities could also be found (Gee & Crawford, 1998). Some studies have argued that the "sub-identities" (Mishler, 1999, p. 8) can finally be "harmonized" and "well balanced" (McCarthey, 2001; Beijaard *et al.*, 2004), while others have argued that the formation of professional identity is a "continuing site of struggle" between conflicting identities (MacLure, 1993, p. 313). Lastly, the teachers' active location can be undermined by school policies or institutions that require conformity (Moore, Edwards, Halpin, & George, 2002), but human agency—such as how teachers actively explained and justified their experiences—could transcend contextual factors (Tsui, 2007).

Second language speaker teachers' professional identity

As nonnative speakers of English, ITAs' beliefs and practices associated with the education system in their first language and culture come into play regarding their professional identity formation. The first type of study regarding second language speaker teachers' professional identity focused on how second language speaker teachers developed professional identity as mastering second language or the teaching competency associated to the second language (e.g., Duff &Uchida, 1997; Mayhinny & Xu, 1997; Harklau, 1999; Kim & Duff, 2012; Tsui, 2007; Anderson, 2017). Studies showed that although second language speaker teachers can encounter difficulties about cultural issues and teaching practices in the process of developing the professional identity due to their unfamiliarity or imperfect command of the L2 language or teaching practices associated to L2 language (e.g., Duff &Uchida, 1997; Menard-Warwick, 2008; Kobayashi, Zappa-Hollman and Duff, 2017), new professional identities could be formed through meeting standards of L2 oral proficiency and classroom management skills in English-speaking settings (e.g., Mawhineey & Xu,1997; Duff, 2015), adjusting their teaching practices to suit their new teaching settings (e.g., Verity, 2000) or developing hybrid teaching practices by resolving conflicts between their preferences and competence in adopting different teaching practices (e.g., Tsui, 2007). In another line of the research, which examined how second language-speaking teachers developed their professional identities in social positioning as legitimate teachers (e.g., Verity, 2000; Johnson, 2001; Pavlenko, 2003; Park, 2006; Eng, 2008) indicated that while tensions and struggles emerged in the process of their positioning themselves as "legitimate teachers," such as their self-positioning as "language learners" rather than "language teachers," some of them utilized their agency to go beyond contextual limitations.

Prior studies about ITAs and second-language speaking teachers shed lights on the construction of their professional identities. They developed professional identities through incorporating the teaching practices required by the new teaching community or learning to legitimize their position as a non-native teacher in their new environment. However, for second language speakers in the workplace, they have to learn two things at the same time—workplace discourse as well as the second language and cultural practice that relate to the workplace discourse—a process termed as "double socialization" (Li, 2000; Roberts, 2010, p. 211; Okuda & Anderson, 2017). This dual socialization process is complex and the two elements could influence each other. To understand the process, the theoretical framework "language socialization," in which children and other novices are socialized via the use of language as well as how they are socialized to use language (Ochs & Schieffelin 1984; Duff & May, 2017) should be discussed first.

Language socialization

Research into language socialization (hereinafter LS)—a theoretical framework for investigating children's oral pragmatic or grammatical development through participating in the "interactive routines" (Peters & Boggs, 1986)—started in 1970s in reaction to "the lack of culture in language acquisition studies" (Kulick & Schieffelin, 2004, p. 350). One of the key tenets of LS is that it emphasized the fact that language and culture are inseparable. As suggested by Ochs and Schieffelin (1984), language socialization research is concerned with how children and other novices are socialized through the use of language as well as how they are socialized to use language (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984).

Nevertheless, children or adult novices are not merely passive recipients of pragmatics and cultural values (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1996; Watson-Gegeo, 2004). Rather, children or novices are "active contributors to the meaning and outcome" (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1986, p. 165) of an interaction in a given social group in which "subjectivities, stances, and positions are negotiated and achieved, not given" (Kulick & Schieffelin, 2004, p. 350). Duff (2008, p. 110) further suggested that the nature of LS is "dynamic, bi-or multidirectional, political, and highly contingent." Therefore, language socialization does not necessarily lead to novices' complete internalization of the pragmatics and cultural values of a certain social group; rather, other possibilities might emerge, including the fact that novices might resist, transgress the norms, or develop a hybridized/syncretic or multiple codes/practices, subject positions and culture (Kim & Duff, 2012; Brutt-Griffler & Kim, 2017; Okuda & Anderson, 2017).

As L2 learning may be described as "situated learning" (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Ochs, 1993; Wenger, 1998) in which individuals are under an "intrinsically social process of socialization into specific communities" (p. 286), many scholars have utilized "second language socialization" as the more accurate approach to understand the L2 learning process (e.g., Duff, 1995, 2015; Morita 2000, 2004; He, 2003; Kim & Duff, 2012; Kobayashi *et al*., 2017; Okuda & Anderson, 2017). Different from L1 socialization, L2 socialization specifically refers to learners "who have already acquired or are still in the process of acquiring a primary language and cultural knowledge and practices associated with that language" (Duff, 2011, p. 8) and who are attempting or expected to "internalize the norms, preferences, and expectations associated with additional language(s) and culture(s)" (p.8).

Second language socialization into workplace

For ITAs, their second language socialization process is comprised of two dimensions, second language and cultural practice that relate to workplace discourse and the workplace culture itself (Li,

2000; Roberts, 2010; Duff, 2015; Zappa-Hollman & Duff, 2015). Two ethnographic and longitudinal studies are identified in examining second language speaker novices' development of their communicative competence and identify transformation in the workplace where they acquired L2 pragmatics and cultural practices associated with workplace context. Vickers' (2007) study investigated the interaction in the lab with regard to naturalistic second language socialization of a group of non-native speaking novice engineer students. Through interaction processes with native speakers experts in the labs, the non-native speaker novices were successfully socialized into the community of electrical and computer engineering. In the end, one novice student, Ramelan, not only obtained full control of the interaction routine but also transformed his identity from being a peripheral member to a core expert member in the team along this process. Li's (2000) study, discusses how one Chinese immigrant woman, Ming, came to internalize target language and cultural norms and develop communicative competence in ESL in her workplace, suggesting that in the L2 socialization process, non-native speaking novices can form not only professional identities and self-identified as experts in workplace discourse in their L2, but they can also retain their identities regarding L1 language and cultural practices.

Both Li's (2000) and Vickers' (2007) studies have identified tensions and difficulties for second language speakers in the process of L2 socialization into the workplace, similar to what has been found regarding second language speakers in the classroom. (e.g., Flowerdew & Miller,1995; Canagaraiah, 1999; Iino, 2006). They also demonstrated how informal socialization within which novices learned the interactional norms through informal guidance or their own observation could help them to socialize into the workplace operated in their second language and culture. Through the process, L2 speakers' identity could be transformed from a peripheral member to a core expert member (Vickers, 2007; Anderson, 2017), or multiple identities could co-exist in the same time while they acquired the new language and cultural practices through retaining their original ethnic identity (Li, 2000; Kim & Duff, 2012, 2015).

In sum, even though ITA research has fostered understanding regarding their language issues, pedagogical styles, and the teacher role they play, there remains a need to investigate ITAs' professional identity, which is thought to have an enormous impact on teachers' roles and the pedagogies they adopt. It is important to investigate two things happening at the same time—socialization into the workplace culture and socialization into the L2 language and culture associated with the workplace. Adopting language socialization perspective with the ethnographic methodology is necessary to understand ITA's "double socialization" process (Li, 2000; Roberts, 2010; Okuda & Anderson, 2017)—how novice ITAs acquire L2 pragmatics and cultural practices associated with workplace context and how they demonstrate the identity transformation along the double socialization process.

The current study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How did Fay (the focal ITA) understand and accomplish her professional identities along with her learning to do "bring the TA" into an American classroom?
2. How did Fay's professional identity shape her engagement, motivation and teaching practice in her TA discussion sessions?

Method

Setting

The study was conducted in TA discussion sessions and the related meetings at a public university in Southern California in 2011 by a focal ITA named Fay (pseudonym). The TA discussion session was a weekly meeting for students in the "International Relations" lecture class, a compulsory for students majoring in political science. The lecture class was taught by a professor and five TAs, graduate students in political science department who were selected to lead the TA discussion section separately. Two out of the five TAs were international students from Asia. Every TA had to attend one two-hour long TA workshop at the beginning of the semester, but only ITAs had to undergo ITA evaluation which required international graduate students who were interested in applying for a teaching assistant position to deliver a presentation of topics on their major and answer related questions initiated by three faculty members from the ESL program of the university. Graduate students who did not pass the ITA evaluation had to take a quarter-long ITA training class which included training in English pronunciation, presentation skills, and classroom management.

Participant

Fay was a 24-year-old international graduate student from Taiwan. She received her BA degree from a Taiwanese university and she was a second-year master and doctoral student in the political science department at a public university in Southern California. She was in her second year in the U.S. and it was her first time to serve as a TA. Fay's mother tongue was Mandarin Chinese, and she started to learn English at the age of eight at a private English institute in Taiwan called Sesame Street. At the age of 12, she began to receive formal English education in junior high school. She attended a TA workshop designed for all graduate students serving as TAs and received one quarter of ITA training from the ESL program before serving as the ITA for the class "International Relations" one year later. Out of the fourteen undergraduate students who were assigned in her TA discussion, eight were male and six were female.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

This study employed a qualitative and ethnographic case study approach to gain an in-depth and holistic understanding of Fay's experiences and perspectives of her TA-ship (Stake, 1995; Merriam, 1998). I followed a deductive approach to bring the "theoretical constructs" (Brenner, 2006) of two areas, including professional identity and language socialization from the literature. Also, I combined these theoretical constructs with how informants address these constructs in the observation as well as interviews to frame the research questions. In keeping with tradition in qualitative (ethnographic) research, "complete and complex illustrations" (Wolcott, 1994, p. 364) or thick descriptions were the aim for data analysis, while data analysis also attempted to identify some general trends and significant patterns among them with the focus of how Fay understood and constructed her professional identity along with her learning of how to carry out TA duties in an American classroom.

Data were collected concerning how Fay's professional identity was formed along with her TA-ship: in her interaction with her students in the TA discussion sessions and her interaction with the other TAs. To allow data to be triangulated, multiple collection methods were used (Marshall & Rossman, 1995) as follows.

First, Fay's weekly TA discussion sessions, nine samples of the TA discussion, were audio-recorded and transcribed. Second, four formal interviews were conducted with Fay (see Appendix), which

provided Fay's immediate reaction to her TA discussion sections. The interviews with Fay were conducted through a combined interview approach utilizing elements of the Interview Guide and the Standardized Open-Ended Interview (Patton, 2002).

Results

Borrowing the definition of professional identity as defined by Volkmann and Anderson (1998), that is, a relationship between teacher's self-image and the teacher role he or she had to play, I further defined Fay's professional identity as follows: how Fay viewed herself and positioned herself as a TA in relation to her students and the TA job she had to fulfill, how she conceptualized her professional identity, and how her professional identity and teaching practices changed throughout the quarter. Fay's development of professional identity as an ITA in an American classroom could be divided into three phases—her *Sesame Street model* (stage 1), her *parent-like model* (stage 2) and her *students' achievement-oriented model* (stage 3).

I.   First Phase: Sesame Street Model

The Sesame-Street-model stage spanned the TA discussion session from week one to week three. In the first three weeks, Fay adopted the Sesame Street model, which she borrowed from her childhood English-learning experience in Taiwan. Sesame Street English School is a popular private English-language school in Taiwan that bases its teaching material on the American children's TV show *Sesame Street*. Sesame Street English School is known for implementing meaning-centered activities and tasks for real purposes with firm base on Constructivism-based (Glasersfeld, 1991; Jonassen, 1991; Steffe & Gale, 1995) learning model.

1. Training versus believing: Agency and self-appropriation

The following example (Example 1) from the interview data shows how Fay recalled choosing her outfit for the first day of teaching. The example reveals that how Fay selectively appropriated what she considered important training information and disregarded the instruction provided by TA training.

Example 1 (A= Author , F=Fay)
1. **A:** I remember that in the first day of your teaching, you discussed with me about
    what you were going to wear. Could you tell me your whole mental process?
3. **F:** Hm. Many people told me that I shall wear suit, because every, two workshops
4. both said, if you dress better, you'll have more confidence. That is a good method
5. and that's true, because everyone is close in age; this is the quickest way to build
6. your authority. On one hand, it can build the authority and on the other, it can
7. build confidence. Basically, all people told me to wear formally.
8. **A:** Does "all people" include other TA?
9. **F:** Yes, other friends also said the same thing, dressing well is not anything bad
10. But it seems that I did not wear very formal in the first day, right?
11. **A:** Right, you wore a tank.
12. **F:** = @ Yeah. Because I wanna be their friend @@.
Note: @@ means "laughs"

Example 1 from the interview data showed that the two workshops both advised newcomer TAs to dress formally in order to "build the authority [sic]" (line 6) and "build confidence" (line 7). The explicit mentioning of clothing in these workshops indicates that the two workshops did offer information about the social and personal aspects of "doing being the teacher" (Axelson & Madden,

1994). The idea that a good TA should dress formally and well was also shared by Fay's friends and other TAs. Nevertheless, Fay's desire to "be [her students'] friend" (line 12), as manifested in her wearing a tank top on the first day of teaching, shows that she did not to follow the workshops' advice, which she did not consider to be useful or essential.

In the interview, she further explained her childhood experience in Sesame Street English School was the source of her idea of being students' friends in her own TA discussion, because it corresponded to her idealization of what classroom learning should be like. Instead of adopting grammar translation and rote learning (as most formal English education in Taiwan does), Sesame Street English advocates a happy-learning, stress-free, friendly environment in which students learn English through engaging in real-world activities such as playing games instead of memorizing texts and taking exams. Fay took the fun part of the Sesame Street English approach as the basis for her self-identity and teaching practice. She thought learning could be fostered in a friendly and happy environment without the teacher being a frightening authority.

As Duff and Uchida (1997) suggested, novice teachers' self-image, which is heavily influenced and shaped by their own learning experiences, is critical in the formation of their early teaching practice (e.g., Kagan, 1992). Fay's Sesame Street model, according to which she identified herself as her students' friend, penetrated her classroom practices. The atmosphere of an egalitarian "friend-friend" encounter rather than a hierarchical "TA-student" relationship also infused an air of casualness and informality into her classroom teaching practices.

Example 2 from classroom interaction data illustrates how Fay yielded control and authority to her students and how it resulted in the derailment of the original "on-task" academic discussion to an "off-task" casual chatting—Fay's second-time self-introduction prompted by the students. The conversation happened after everyone including Fay had finished introducing themselves when Fay attempted to proceed to an on-task academic discussion.

Example 2 (Fiona, Jimmy, Aaron, Dick, Bella are students' pseudonym)
1.   **Fay**: Well, since we,
2.   since, like, we still have some time:
3.   Is it okay we do some discussion? About the class?
5 . {students are chatting}
6   **Fiona**: Sure
7   **Jimmy**: Su[re]
8   **Fiona**: [Why] [not]
9   **Aaron**:   [How about-]
10   not a[bout the class]
11   **Dick**:   [so how does] the state [inaudible] {talk to the student next to him}
12   **Fay**:   [@ @ Nah % xxxx talk about it]
13   @ what do you wanna talk about@
14   **Aaron**: how about international relations:
15   or:
16   **Bella**: =Oh my ^god
17   **Fay**: = @@@@ you wanna talk about your paper
18   **Bella**: oh [no @@@]
19   **Aaron**:   [no:]
20   don't even wanna think [about it]
21   **Fay:**   [I can] give you some time next, you know,
22   section %

23   (5.0) {Fay is writing on the blackboard}
24   **Aaron**: Why don't you-
25   =why don't you tell us about yourself?

Rather than dominating the class and proceeding to the planned classroom practice, Fay's unassertive posture in her talk signaled a high level of openness to the alternative options. In the beginning, even though she explicitly stated her intention to proceed to the classroom discussion, her "permission request" directed toward the students ("is it okay we do some discussion?" line 3) apparently made her agenda seem uncertain and mutable to the students. The permission question itself projected a weak authoritative profile. Fay's unassertive demeanor in leading classroom discussion was further weakened when she purposely neglected the "permissions" she received from two students ("sure" and "why not?" in lines 6-8). Rather than directly proceeding to the discussion after receiving the two elicited permissions, she responded positively to Aaron's proposal of derailing the class ("how about not about the class?" lines 9-10) with an opinion-seeking question ("what you wanna talk about? [sic]" line 13). Her laugh (line 13) further indicated a jocular stance toward Aaron's proposal, suggesting that an off-task option would not result in scolding or punishment. Later, from lines 17 to 22, Fay's lack of seriousness toward the on-task option ("paper" uttered through her laugh in line 17: "@@@ you wanna talk about your paper?") and her later exclusion of the "on-task" option from the current agenda ("I can give you some time next, you know, section [sic]" lines 21-22) cemented the off-task nature of the interaction. Finally, through Fay's gradual move away from the on-task discourse, Aaron initiated an off-task proposal, a prompting of the second self-introduction from Fay (line 25: "Why don't you tell us about yourself?"). At the end, Fay acknowledged the students' request and started another five-minute self-introduction, a much lengthier self-introduction with more personal details like her family background and her relationship status compared to the one-minute short and formal one she delivered during the same week.

After Fay framed her first TA discussion section as a friend-friend encounter, she continued to utilize her Sesame Street model, using the students-as-friends identity as her approach to interact with her students for the following weeks. The following excerpt, Example 3 shows that she also initiated a good deal of small talk with the students, because she wanted to ascribe a relaxing and entertaining element into her TA discussion sessions. At the same time, she brought dessert and pies she made to her TA discussion sessions every week to share with her students.

Example 3
1. **Fay**: And Laura, hi, I wanna to know how tall are you.
2. **Laura**: How tall am I? 5 11@
3. **Fay**: Wow, okay, cool
4. **Students**: @@@@@
5. **Fay**: Ryan-hey- I remember you're the guy who want to get girls in beaches, right?
6. **Ryan**: (1.2) Right @

The excerpt shows that Fay's attendance-taking addressed not only students' names and majors but also the students' social and personal lives—for example, their height and their leisure practices. In addition, the colloquial and casual usages such as "hey" (line 5) and "cool" (line 3) also signaled a close, friendly, and harmonious Sesame Street-like atmosphere that Fay strived to develop in her TA discussion session. Her small talk drawing on students' leisure and height, her outfits (tank top, sweatpants, and a pair of sneakers), and her treating her students to pies are all "acts of identity" (Le Page & Tabouret-Keller, 1985) that indexed her identity as the students' friend. As argued by Block (2007), indexing of identity is both multimodal (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001) and multisensory. Fay's identity as the "students' friend" is expressed through a combination of different modes and sensory

realizations—hairstyle (pony-tailed), clothing (tank top and sweatpants), verbal genres (small talk and a self-introduction with many personal details), and nonverbal actions (lots of laugher and treating students to food).

This shows that Fay did not follow what the workshops and other TAs suggested regarding a young TA's "presentation of self" (Katz, 2000). In her first TA discussion, she dressed informally and prioritized students' off-task requests over her on-task plan. She disregarded the lesson from the authoritative source including other TAs and the TA workshop but stuck to the "Sesame Street model," demonstrating her deep-rooted personal beliefs and cultural assumptions (Kagan, 1992; Johnson, 1994), which were more deeply ingrained than the single quarter of TA training and workshops that she had at the university (Duff & Uchida, 1997).

This further suggests that novices are not merely passive recipients of values, beliefs, or pragmatic skills. Rather, they are "active contributors to the meaning and outcome" (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1986, p. 165) of an interaction in a given social group. Instead of following and adapting to the norms by being "authoritative TA" by dressing formally suggested by the "expert," TA workshop and other experienced TAs, the novice, Fay, drew on her own personal beliefs and appropriated the norms in her own way- a sesame-street model of TA.

2. Surface level of Sesame Street English School – Fun without learning

The previous excerpts all showed that Fay embraced the Sesame Street model of teaching and learning; nevertheless, her teaching practice seemed to stop at the surface level of constructivism-based teaching (Glasersfeld, 1991; Jonassen, 1991; Steffe & Gale, 1995) practiced by the Sesame Street English School, as she only acknowledged students' answers without giving any substantial feedback. Example 4 shows how Fay elicited students' opinions regarding the theories they have learned without substantial feedback or further questions to initiate deeper learning.

Example 4
1.   **Anna**: Hmm. Actually, I kinda agree with liberalism. I think liberalism is a really
2.   good state of mind; it's quite opstem—optimistic, sorry.
3.   **Fay**: Uh-hm
4.   **Anna**: But I think that in the view of international relations,
5.   **Fay**: Uh-hm
6.   **Anna**: The state behaves with more the realism kinda view
7.   **Fay**: Oh. Okay. I see. What about you? (facing the next student)

Example 4 shows a series of "uptake" Fay used to respond to her student. The student, Anna, showed her alignment with the theory ("Actually, I kinda agree with liberalism. I think liberalism is a really good stage of mind; it's quite…optimistic" line 1). Fay acknowledged the answer with the constant confirmation ("Uh-hm" in lines 3 and 5; "Okay. I see" in line 7); yet, she did not ask any questions to prompt students' further elaboration, nor did she initiate any further discussion among students.

According to Steffe and Gale (1995), constructivism-based learning refers to a type of learning in which knowledge is constructed by learners. In order to achieve this type of learning, learners have to be provided the opportunity to construct by being presented with goals and minimal information. Fay's constructivism-based discussion used this approach. She gave minimal information about the content. She did not express her own opinion; neither did she ask students to follow any particular principles. Rather, she asked the students to interpret and evaluate the theories by themselves. Nevertheless, the discussion was far from a real constructivism-based discussion because it lacked development of the

learning. Even though Fay acknowledged students' answers, she did not help students to proceed to further conceptualization of the theories because she always moved on to the next student immediately after the students had shared their opinions.

Accordingly, her adoption of the constructivism-based discussion was carried out merely at a surface level, as she only addressed the fun and happy part of the Sesame Street English approach and assumed that this type of environment could automatically lead to better learning. Nevertheless, while children in Sesame Street English learn the target language by playing games because games offer children a medium for meaningful learning and language is employed to solve tasks in real life, which further help children to construct their own knowledge (Ronimus, Kujala, Tolvanen, & Lyytinen, 2014), Fay adopted only the playing and entertainment elements into her own Sesame Street model but ignored the learning element, as what she did was creating a casual and informal classroom atmosphere and reserving her own viewpoints and substantial feedback to her students. In sum, Fay's adaptation was an over-simplification of constructivism-based teaching practiced by her own adaptation of Sesame Street English School.

II.   Second Phase: Parent-like TA Model

In the second phase (from week four to week six), when the deadline for the paper assignment was approaching, Fay gradually encountered evidence that contradicted her Sesame Street model of teaching. Example 5 showed that Fay stopped being open to students' suggestions as she used to do in the first phase. Rather, she viewed the counter-options raised by students as challenges to her authority.

Example 5 (F=Fay)
1. **F**: I have a student who has been argued with me about choosing the right source.
2. He could not accept the fact that why we allowed students to use *Frontline* but
3. not other news such as CNN or BBC. The thing he could not understand is that
4. even though Professor Harlig said variety is a good thing, but she'd rather
5. stick to the same standard because it's difficult to filter the good from the bad
6. The students said why can't I use BBC and CNN since they're news like
7. Frontline? He argued endlessly with me and he did not give any chance to respond!
8. I think this is such a trivial and less important thing… but you've
9. already challenged my authority and my ability to respond. What if there is
10. </VOX> something trickier in the future? </VOX>

She described an event that occurred during her office hours in which a student wanted to add additional news sources as references ("I have a student who have been argued with me about choosing the right source." in line 1). The student was described as arguing excessively with her ("he argued endless with me for this" [sic] in line 7). She also described him as lacking the ability to understand the academic world ("The thing he could not understand" [sic] in line 3) and the ability to communicate ("he did not give any chance to respond" [sic] in line 7). She described the professor of the class ("Professor Harlig" in line 4) as the only source of authorized knowledge. In addition, she projected herself as the one to defend this authority ("why we allowed students to use Frontline but not other news such as CNN or BBC" in line 2-3). Fay's use of the collective pronoun "we" (in line 1), which referred to the professor and herself, showed that she was allied with the professor. As a TA, she stood on the same side as the professor. Furthermore, Fay did not treat the student's disagreement about acceptable sources as an isolated event; rather, she viewed this as an indicator of the student's rebelliousness ("this is such a trivial thing, but you've already challenged my authority and my ability to respond" in line 11-12), which might extend further to more significant issues threatening her authority ("what if there is something bigger in the future?" line 11-12).

Comparing this interview data with the classroom data in the first phase, it is evident that Fay no longer prioritized students' agendas over hers; instead, she viewed students' counterproposals as posing challenges to her authority. In the first TA discussion session, she disregarded the professor's and TAs' suggestion about proceeding to academic discussion in the first week but followed students' suggestion to re-do her "self-introduction" at a more personal level. In contrast, in the second phase, she not only refused to consider the student's suggestion for another possible option but also further evaluated this behavior as evidence of future rebellion.

Example 6 further shows how Fay "formally announced" her retreatment from the "Sesame Street model" in which she viewed students as her friends. Instead, she employed the alternative model—the authoritative "parent-like TA" (Marlatt, 2002) in her TA session. According to Marlatt (2002), teachers in this model of teaching act like students' parents or custodians. They serve as the dominant force in the classroom and are responsible for supervising and nurturing students by implementing more class control through pedagogical design (Bullough & Knowles, 1991; Kagan, 1992).

Example 6 (F=Fay)
1. **F**: That's why I'm here, to remind you guys to start studying
2. Okay?
3. If you have any questions, come to my office hour.
4. And:
5. Some TAs have already remind me before like
6. <VOX>Students usually will figure out that
7. TAs are NOT your friends anymore</VOX>

In the class, she explicitly positioned herself as an authoritative parent-like TA who would push students to study hard by using explicit reminders ("I'm here to remind you guys to start studying" in line 1). She announced a new configuration of her relationship with the students based on the new framework as a more authoritative TA, the one that other experienced TAs had advised her to do ("some TAs have already remind me before" [sic] in line 6). By imitating the voice of another TA and formally announced that the friendship between TAs and their students would "terminate" when the midterm came ("students usually will figure out that TAs are not your friends anymore" in lines 6-7), although she was a new TA without prior experience, she ascribed more authority to her choice by creating a "league" of her and other TAs. Through the announcement, she drew a line between students and herself—they were no longer "friends" who were standing on the same side; instead, the students were a "group of students" and she and other TAs were serving as authoritative figures who were entitled to monitor students' learning.

III.   Third phase: Student achievement-oriented TA Model

Fay's concern about her relationship with her students lasted until the midterm. She was conflicted about the identity she should choose as a TA, torn between being her students' friend or their parent. This concern disappeared after the midterm exam, as she finally prioritized her own "profession" over students' "affection" toward her as a TA, as shown in Example 7.

Example 7 (A= the author, F=Fay)
1. **A:** In which aspect do you think you did the best for this week's class?
2. **F:** Hmmm, I won students' heart this week by baking pies for them. But I think
3. the most important thing is that they gradually show more respect to me and my

4. opinions as a TA . . . So although I do hope they like me, as time goes by, I
5. try not to care about their feelings toward me too much because profession is
6. the most important.

Example 7 shows that even though Fay had continued to engage in informal affiliation with the students ("I do hope they like me," line 4) by preparing them homemade sweets ("I won the students' hearts this week by baking pies for them," line 2), she had also become aware that the personal and social dimensions of the relationship (Roberts, 2010) should stand behind the professional dimension. She tried to avoid staying obsessed with her students' affection for her ("I try not to care about their feelings toward me too much," lines 4-5); instead, she convinced herself to focus more on her professional status as a TA ("profession[alism] is the most important," lines 5-6). At the same time, she gained positive reinforcement from the students because she found that they valued her hard work and professionalism as well ("they gradually show more respect to me and my opinions as a TA" lines 3-4). She stated the new priority in doing her job: Her job as a TA was viewed as more important than gaining her students' affection.

Example 8 from the interview data further shows how Fay distinguished herself from other native speaker TAs and described her "profession" (i.e., job) as the ability to help students raise their grades.

Example 8 (A= the author, F=Fay)
1. **F:** Maybe because I teach them easier things, so that they listen to me
2. I don't know whether they will appreciate that, but I know at least
3. those are the things for the exams. Other TAs bring them discussion about the
4. news. In fact, that's a different direction—whether you want to broaden your
5. horizon or raise your grades.
6. **A:** what's yours?
7. **F:** Definitely raising their grades. What I teach is also easier to them. Rule of
8. thumb—teach what the teacher wants.

Example 8 shows that Fay attributed her value as a TA in helping students to gain good grades and differentiated her style and value from that of other American TAs. She distinguished her style, which focused on rote learning with the goal of raising students' grades, from other TAs' style, which focused on discussing news and critical thinking development. She attributed different values to each style ("whether you want to broaden your horizon or raise your grades," lines 4-5). Yet she contended that her own teaching method, aimed at preparing them for exams ("At least those are the things for the exams," lines 2-3) and raising their grades ("raising their grades," line 7) was as valuable as other TAs' methods. This further shows that Fay finally placed the emphasis on her job as a TA instead of her relationship with her students as the objective of her TA-ship. In the third phase, she finally obtained confidence and professionalism as a TA by discovering her strength and value in "raising students' grades."

Discussion

Throughout Fay's TA discussions over a twelve-week period, her professional identity evolved from being a students' "friend" to students' "parent," and finally she identified herself as a "professional TA" who could help students raise their grades. Her professional identity also influenced the way she interacted with her students and guided her teaching practice in the TA discussions.

As suggested by Mawhinney and Xu (1997) and Vickers (2007), through gradually learning the pragmatics or practices associated with the L2 workplace, the identity of second language-speaking

novices in the workplace as "peripheral novices" could be transformed into a professional identity as "competent experts" in the L2 community. Nevertheless, Fay's process of professional identity construction was not a linear progression from adopting a professional identity associated with the educational beliefs and practices of her L1 (Chinese) to that of her L2 (English), the pattern displayed in many of the previous studies (e.g., Mawhinney & Xu ,1997; Vickers, 2007). Her process was of a highly complex and vacillating trajectory, with multiple influences and tensions encountered all along the way (e.g., Tsui, 2007).

Moreover, the tensions and difficulties did not come directly from the differences in L1 and L2 language and culture as Flowerdew and Miller (1995) suggested. Also, it was not only about accepting or rejecting L2 language and culture as Canagaraiah (1999) argued. Rather, it came from the disparities and differences happening in Fay's ingrained beliefs and opposing incidents happened along the way. For example, she struggled between following the advice from the TA workshop of being an authoritative TA and sticking to her ideal of a "friend-like" TA from her Sesame Street model of learning. Students' behavior of negotiating for grades and sources also emerged later in the quarter which contradicted her beliefs from the this model.

This further indicates that Fay's language socialization process involved constant interpretation and reinterpretation of her experiences (Coldron & Smith, 1999; Beijaard *et al*., 2004; Flores & Day, 2006) which involved a negotiation process among multiple identities (Beijaard *et al*., 2004). She started her TA-ship by embracing an American version of teacher professional identity right from the beginning, one that she had gathered from her own early EFL experiences in the Sesame Street school as a child back in Taiwan. Early in her development as a TA, she resisted adopting authority in her TA discussion session, as the model of teaching embraced in Chinese language and culture would advocate (e.g., Watkins, 2000). Rather, she adopted a professional identity that she perceived from the Sesame Street model and positioned herself as the students' friend. Nevertheless, after the fourth week, she encountered contradictory evidence to her professional identity in this role. Therefore, the taken-for-granted points of reference (Block, 2007b, p. 864) Fay relied on were challenged. Her professional identity as the students' friend was also shaken because her assumption regarding American education did not work in the local context. The conflicts and tensions she encountered between her idealized image and the reality she encountered in the local context urged her to consider an alternative model. An informal meeting with Timothy helped Fay to construct a new professional identity—a parent-like TA. She quickly retreated from the students-as-friends model and assumed more authority as a parent-like TA as other TAs through formally announcing the "termination" of her and her students' "friendship." At the end, in the third phase, she abandoned her concern toward her relationship with her students and adopted an identity as a student achievement-oriented TA. This process is identical to Tsui's (2007) study. Tsui (2007) argued that it was not until the EFL teacher, Minfang, who resolved the conflict in his competence (in Communicative Language Teaching) and preferences (in a traditional teaching methodology) that he develop a professional identity as an expert and core member of the academic community and displayed a synthesized teaching practice in which he integrated a traditional teaching methodology into the CLT teaching.

Implications and Limitations of the Study

Three educational implications are identified from this study. First, in the process of learning to become a TA in an American classroom, instead of being passive recipients who merely follow what is instructed in the TA training, ITAs are active actors who utilize their agency to construct their own understanding and actions. In addition to informing them of the local practices of a TA-ship, it is equally important to understand ITAs' own conceptualization and agenda of being a TA in an American context. Moreover, programs to train ITAs' language proficiency and teaching skills should also be

balanced by the training on social and personal dimensions. Issues such as what it means to be a TA in an American classroom need to be further explored and discussed in the ITA training. Finally, peer TAs could have a big influence on ITAs' development of teacher role and professional identity. ITA training programs should also consider inviting experienced (I)TAs to share their experiences and working as mentors for newcomer TAs, as this type of personalized sharing was shown to be influential in Fay's teaching practice development and professional identity formation.

I would like to point out that there are limitations to this study. First, this is a case study of a particular ITA from Taiwan and a particular group of students from a particular university in California. This study, therefore, may not represent the ideas of ITAs who do not teach this group of students, who do not teach in this class, or who do not teach in this university. Future research may need to examine a more diverse group of ITAs. Also, this is only one TA discussion session in a number of TA discussion sessions across different universities. Therefore, beliefs, classroom dynamics, and TA-student interaction could be very different in each TA discussion section led by different TAs. Future research should also consider these issues of diversity and settings.

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Appendix

I.   First week interview questions:

1.   Can you tell me what program you are in?
         - What is your research field in the _____ program?
         - How does the _____ area compare to other fields in this program?
         - What other research is there?
2.   Can you tell me your educational background each year from middle school until the present?
3.   Can you briefly take me through a typical day as an international graduate student here?
4.   Could you share with me how you participate in the class?
         - Do you think English ability is interlocked with your academic performance? (If so, how?)
         - Which parts do you find challenging about leading a TA discussion?
         - Which aspect of acquiring English skills do you find the most challenging?
         - How long does it take for you to fully understand the professor's lecture?
         - What parts of the lecture are the most challenging to understand?
         - How long does it take for you to fully understand the undergraduate students' utterances during the discussion section?
         - What aspects of the undergraduates' talk do you find the most difficult to understand?
         - How long does it take for you to participate in the classroom discussion and actively initiate your own turns?
         - Any successful strategies?
         - Is there anything you find particularly challenging about this?

II.   *Bi-weekly interview questions:*

1.   Can you tell me step by step of how you prepared for the TA discussion session these two weeks?
2.   Which part did you find the most challenging in leading a TA discussion in these two weeks?
   - Can you give me an example?
   - Why and how so?
   - What did you learn from this experience?
   - How are you going to incorporate this into your teaching next time?
3.   Which part do you find you did the best in leading a TA discussion in these two weeks?
   - Can you give me an example?
   - Why and how so?
   - What did you learn from this experience?
   - How are you going to incorporate this into your teaching next time?

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