"I'm Like a Growing Sapling": a Narrative Inquiry into a Multi-subject Teacher's Construction of Multiple Identities

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Abstract: *The practice of teaching multiple subjects is common in China and worldwide, especially in rural areas. However, these multi-subject teachers' identities have been underexplored. Adopting the approach of narrative inquiry, this study explores how a multi-subject teacher constructed and reconstructed her multiple identities in the first year of her teaching career. Findings of the study show that the multi-subject teacher, Ying, from a rural primary school in China, constantly tried to defend and develop her triple identities as a Chinese teacher, a head teacher and a Social Studies teacher. In the trajectory of her multiple-identity construction, individual factors such as the teacher's past experience about teaching multiple subjects and personal belief about being a teacher as well as the contextual factor of colleagues are found to be contributing to Ying's multiple-identity construction. In addition, subject matter is found to be most influential in her sense of multiple-identity. The study concludes with suggestions for relevant Professional Development program as well as appeals for more attention on multi-subject teachers.*

Keywords: *teacher identity; multi-subject teaching; out-of-field teaching; multiple identities; subject matter*

1. INTRODUCTION

Teacher shortage in rural areas is a tricky problem globally, against which "out-of-field" teaching has perforce become a commonplace practice (Hobbs, 2013; Sharplin, 2014), which denotes assigning teachers to teach some extra subjects that they are not professionally qualified to do so (Ingersoll, 2001). In the light of various problems brought up by this issue, Chinese Ministry of Education launched "The Government-funded Directional Training Program for Rural Teachers", one of whose aims is to train groups of rural primary school teachers who are comprehensively qualified for multi-subject teaching [Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China (MOE), 2017]. This means that there have emerged and will continue to generate a large number of primary school teachers who teach more than one subject but avoid being "out-of-field".

Teacher identity, given the importance of the construct in teachers' professional lives, is now recognized as a central component in teacher education initiatives (Thomas & Beauchamp, 2007; Yazan, 2017). Generally accepted as situated and multidimensional, teacher identity is also characterised by its "multiplicity", or "multiple-identity"(Akkerman& Meijer 2011). Among contentions around what make up teacher's multiple-identity, subject matter emerges as an important but neglected factor (Helms, 1998; Talbert, 1995). Teaching subject affects identity in that subjects may tend to have particular beliefs, values and teaching cultures of their own (Barty, 2004; Varghese et al., 2005; Grootenboer, 2006). Identity of teachers who are required to teach within and across particular subjects has been shown to vary according to the subject being taught (Martinez, 1994), and these subject-based "teachings" are grounded in the teachers' subject-based identities -i.e., what they know, think, value and do.

It is thus assumed that teachers who teach more than one subject might encounter more than one single identity. However, research on "out-of-field" teachers indicate that they may lead to an identity expansion, but sometimes also encounter disruption or even destruction in their identity construction, feeling like an outsider (Porsch 2016), losing faith in their abilities and might eventually leaving teaching (Hobbs &Törner,2019). Reasons might lie in the fact that "out-of-field" teachers are usually to a large degree defined and determined by subject matter or teacher's cognitive knowledge(e.g., Pedagogical Content Knowledge(PCK)) (Helms, 1998;Hobbs, 2013); whereas it is also argued that

teacher's affective-motivational domains(e.g., beliefs, motivations, self-regulation), which usually can compensate for out-of-field teachers' shortcomings in cognitive dimension, should also be taken into consideration (Bosse&Törner, 2015a, 2015b; Kenny, Hobbs &Whannell, 2020). In addition, research also point out that the notion of "discontinuity" of identity (referring to an ongoing process of construction) is rather more prominent when it comes to "out-of-field" teaching or other occasions contributing to teacher's multiple identities. These teachers, frequently crossing from one context to the other, cannot be treated as static in terms of their identities (Hobbs, 2012; Bosse&Törner,2015a), which might be always "shifting" and "unstable" (Beijaard et al. 2004; Rodgers and Scott 2008). It is thus of essentiality to understand "what" is shifting and what determines the direction of shifting (Akkerman& Meijer, 2011). Put another way, identities of out-of-field teachers are believed as central and essential in understanding and promoting out-of-field teachers' development, but meanwhile as multiple, somewhat elusive, and continually changing (Beauchamp &Thomas 2019; Kenny, Hobbs &Whannell, 2020). Regardless of these arguments, research to date on "out-of-field" teaching mainly focus on its impact on teaching quality and student learning, not always reflecting how the practice of teaching extra "out-of-field" subjects contribute to their multiple identities.

Concerning the problems brought by teaching out of field, international PD programs that intend to train "out-of-field" teachers to be more "in-field" have also been reported, for example in Ireland (see, Faulkner et al., 2016; Goos et al., 2020), Germany (Bosse&Törner, 2015), and UK (Crisan& Rodd, 2014).Importantly, the aforementioned China's "The Government-funded Directional Training Program for Rural Teachers" is considered as resembling such PD programs since it aims at training teachers to teach multiple subjects to avoid the problems brought by teaching "out-of-field". However, data derived from relevant studies suggest that PD programs as such were effective in improving subject knowledge of the teachers, but their teacher identity in relation to the subjects they teach is rarely explored. In spite of this, research is showing that attending explicitly to these teachers' identities is of great importance, emphasizing that identity formation is an indispensable consideration (Bosse&Törner, 2015a, 2015b; Kenny, Hobbs &Whannell 2020).

In a nutshell, one of the major realistic contributors to teacher's multiple identities - the common practice of multi-subject teaching or teaching "out-of-field" has been comparatively under examined in literature. Also, PD and the relevant research are suggested to be more mindful of the multi-subject teachers' identities. Therefore, this study, informed by above research, looks especially into the identity (re)construction of a multi-subject teacher, Ying, who have just stepped into her multi-subject teaching career after her 4-year training under the program China initiated and have experienced both "out-of-field" teaching and "multi-subject" teaching during her early career. Importantly, it worth noting again that when using the term "multi-subject teaching" in this article, it signifies the practice of teaching more than one subject which teachers have been professionally trained to do so, which should be distinguished from "out-of-field" teaching. Through a method of narrative inquiry, this study hopes to shed some lights on how we can better understand multi-subject teacher's identities and how PD program can better support them. Hence, the study attempts to address the following two questions:

(1) What are the teacher's multiple identities when teaching multiple subjects?

(2) How does the teacher construct these identities?

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Narrative Inquiry as Research Methodology

Narrative inquiry has been advocated as an useful tool for representing and understanding human identities(Golombek* &Johnson, 2004). In the field of teacher education, narrative inquiry as both a research approach and a research product (Barkhuizen et al. 2013) has shed light on the complex and dynamic process of teachers' identity formation(e.g., Liu &Xu, 2011;Yuan & Lee, 2016). Therefore, informed by a narrative perspective, the present study employs the three dimensions of the narrative inquiry space proposed by Clandinin&Connelly(2000) to investigate the narrative construction of the participant teacher-Ying's multiple identities in relation to different courses. Data are gathered through three rounds of semi-structured interviews. Firstly on the dimension of "time", the interview focuses on the participant's past experience, present engagement and future plans as a primary school teacher teaching multiple courses, which resonates with the "discontinuity" attributes of identity

(Gee, 2000). The focus of the second round of interview is on how Ying's identities emerged and shifted as regards her "inward" (i.e. his perceptions, beliefs, values and emotions) and "outward" (i.e. her social interactions) engagement in teaching multiple subjects, corresponding with the second dimension of "person and social" (Clandinin &Connelly, 2000). Lastly, institutional and social–cultural environment is taken into account to shed some light on the third dimension of "context" in her identity as a multi-subject teacher in a rural primary school.

2.2. Context and Participant

"The Government-funded Directional Training Program for Rural Teachers"has been implemented since 2006, one of whose targets is to train a group of qualified "generalist teachers" who can teach multiple subjects in primary school so as to address the problem of "scarcity of teaching resource" in rural China (MOE, 2017). Under the program, participants are divided by two opposite directions, i.e., the direction of art and of science. Teachers who choose the direction of art will be trained to teach art subjects like Chinese, Music, Fine Arts and Social Studies, and the ones who choose the direction of science will be trained to teach Science courses such as Mathematics, Science, Computer, and PE. Student teachers who participate in the program enjoy the "tuition-free" policy and at the same time accomplish their four-year undergraduate studies, but they must accept their final work assignment to rural areas of China after graduation.

The participant of the present study, Ying, is one of the author's classmates of high school. After taking the College Entrance Examination, she was enrolled in a normal university. It was in the university that she participated in the program and graduated with a certification from it. During her last year of study, she had her 18-week teaching practicum in a primary school in her hometown, ErDu Primary School (pseudonym). Then after her graduation from university, she was employed by another primary school nearby, Moshi Primary School (pseudonym), where she now works as a teacher who teaches both Chinese and Social Studies for two classes of second-grade primary students.

2.3. Data Collection and Analysis

Informed by the three dimensions of the narrative inquiry space as elaborated above (Clandinin &Connelly, 2000), the study draws on semi-structured interviews and follow-up casual conversations to collect storied experiences from Ying in relation to her multi-subject teaching. First, a total of three semi-structured interviews (with different focuses) were conducted, ranging from 60 to 90 min each. To space more time for Ying to recall her experiences and to avoid tiredness, the three rounds of interview were respectively conducted in three continuous days. Interviews were conducted through phone call and were recorded and transcribed for further analysis. The interviews were conducted in Chinese as Ying felt at ease when speak in her native language. The first interview aimed to tap Ying's educational background and her previous and present learning and teaching experiences as well as her future projections and their influence on her self-perceptions as a multi-subject primary school teacher. The focus of the second interview was placed on how Ying took on an identity as a multi-subject teacher in her current job and the possible identity conflicts she might experience in the workplace. In the last interview, Ying was invited to reflect on her whole journey of learning to teach and teaching multiple subjects over the past five years and discuss the change (if any) of her professional identities and the possible personal and institutional factors underlying the change. In addition to interviews, a casual face-to-face conversation in café was involved. For one thing, in such a casual atmosphere Ying was again elicited to share some impressive events happened during her teaching time, which might totally differ from what was shared in interviews. For another, it was a good opportunity for the author to address her confusions and interests arisen from the previous interviews.

Once all the interviews and the casual conversations were transcribed and lightly edited for grammar and clarity of expression, the revised transcripts were sent to Ying for member checking. Following a further revision based on her comments, a rigorous in-depth analysis was undertaken, which consists of three main stages. Firstly, the author carefully reviewed and coded the interview transcripts with particular attention paid to the various identities Ying took up in her multi-subject teaching practice. Consequently, triple identities of her were figured out, including "Chinese teacher", "Social Studies teacher", and "Head teacher". Following the identification of the multiple identities, the author re-

examined them in depth by reviewing the original data and composing different mini-stories following the three dimensions of narrative inquiry(Clandinin &Connelly, 2000) with a focus on "time" (i.e. her past experiences, current situation and future projections), "personal and social" (i.e. her values and emotions as well as her interpersonal relationships) and "context" (i.e. the institutional and socio-cultural settings). Through continuously constructing and reconstructing the mini-stories in line with Ying's different identities, the storyline of her narratives gradually developed, through which the mini-stories were knitted by three themes, including "It was unexpectedly enjoyable", "I felt overwhelmed" and "I shall keep it a balance". The constructed narratives were also shared with Ying to invite her further comments, which thus validated the data analysis results of the narrative inquiry.

3. RESEARCH FINDINGS

3.1. "It was Unexpectedly Enjoyable!"

Prior to her formal job, Ying finished an 18-week practicum at a local primary school. During her practicum, she was assigned to teach Chinese and Mathematics. She felt that it was a huge challenge to teaching Math because she chose the direction of Art in college, in which Chinese was her major. At the beginning, she felt a lot of stress because she barely remembered any knowledge about Mathematics, let alone teaching Mathematics:

> Teaching Math is tough and unimaginably challenging. You know, I got no training in how to teach math and I can't even remember anything except for "one plus one equals to two"! How could a Chinese teacher teach Math! (Interview 1)

Ying sounded resistant to talking about her Mathematic teaching experience. She ended up by saying:

> ...you know, stress never faded away. I spent large quantity of time getting used to it but I, uh, finally failed it, sort of failing, I think. Don't remind me of that experience again. That's horrible. (Interview 1)

One month later Ying applied to school for resigning from her job of Mathematics teaching, but she was rejected, being told that the school was actually faced with an acute shortage of Mathematics teacher. Fortunately, after the practicum, Ying was admitted to her present local primary school. She taught a main subject -- Chinese, and was also charge of a minor subject -- Social Studies. Compared with her painstaking practicum, she felt much relaxed, at least in the first few months. She said:

> Teaching Chinese is a piece of cake for me. I'm in Chinese major, after all! I've also taken relevant courses and got appropriate training on Social Studies during my college. Also, the curriculum requirement for Social Studies is not that demanding. It was totally different from my experience in practicum. I enjoyed a lot at the very beginning, I mean, the first two months. (Interview 2)

Ying's statement that the Social Studies is not demanding refers to the fact that taking test is not compulsory for students to complete the study of this subject. Thus, both teachers and students could treat this minor subject without exam pressure.

> When teaching Chinese, I regard myself as a teacher or an instructor, but when teaching social studies, I think I am a sister or a friend of my students.(Interview 2)

Ying said she did like her double-identity --- as both a Chinese teacher and a Social Studies teacher.

> I enjoyed this teaching arrangement of our school. There were benefits for me to teach the two lessons. First, I myself could learn more, such as "domestic waste disposal and sorting", from the extra subject; second, I was able to get along with senior students in advance, which could lay a foundation for my future teaching; and lastly, to be frank, I could obtain a higher wage! (Interview 2)

In conclusion, as a novice teacher at her first few months of teaching, Ying enjoyed her work very much. Compared with her experience during practicum, Ying was happy to accept her double-identity as both Chinese and Social Studies teacher.

3.2. "I Felt Overwhelmed!"

Such a relaxing state lasted for no more than two months. Two months later, Ying ushered in the first change in her career. The head teacher of the class where she taught Chinese was transferred for some

reason, and the school manager appointed her to fill the vacancy. Hence, in addition to the teaching tasks of Chinese and Social Studies, she needed to assume the job of a head teacher. When describing her work of being a head teacher, Ying said:

> I almost lost my direction. Just as one student in my class described, "affairs like eating, drinking, sleeping and study are all under her (Ying)'control." You don't know how tired I was at the beginning. I had to take charge of everything concerned about my students. (Interview 2)

According to Ying's description, since taking over the job of head teacher, she has taken a full responsibility for her students, including clothing, food, accommodation and transportation. Importantly, to ensure the safety of each student is one of her major concern. About students' learning performances, she must extend her concern from the subjects she teaches to every course that students are learning. In addition, she has to deal with more administrative affairs, such as submitting working notes to school every week and writing the Head Teacher Working Diary each day in case of casual inspection. What particularly annoy her is that each week there was an extra three-hour meeting that entails every head teacher's attendance. When talking about the meeting, Ying sounded angry:

> Head teachers have got endless work to finish! It's impersonal to force them to attend such a time-consuming, boring and tedious meeting. It is all wasting time. (Interview 2)

In order to handle the work of "being a head teacher", each day Ying needs to work overtime for at least three hours. According to her description, since she become a head teacher, most of the time for lesson preparation has been occupied and she always needs to squeeze some time for preparing her lessons. In this way, her time and energy spent on subject teaching pales in comparison to the one in her dealing with class affairs. Sometimes she even has to "palter with" her subject teaching:

> One time, a parent kept annoying me in my office because her child's grade went down. Before I managed to calm down the parents' emotions, I had to rush to take my next class. Consequently, I failed to control my emotion in the class. I just sat in the classroom, saying no words, watching students learn by themselves. (Interview 2)

Regarding the work of the head teacher, she also said:

> I didn't really know how to deal with the work of a head teacher. I got little experience. I didn't expect that it would be so complicated! Sometimes I even wondered if I were a teacher of "teaching" or a teacher of "managing". (Interview 3)

It can be seen that the job of the head teacher stirred Ying's doubts about her teacher identity. The ease and excitement of teaching the two courses at the first two months of her career seemed to have faded away.

3.3. "I Shall Keep Them in Balance!"

Shortly after Ying took over as a head teacher, a new colleague, a math teacher of her age, arrived at the school and was assigned to the same office as Ying. She was appointed to be a first-grade Math teacher, a Physical Education teacher as well as a head teacher. In addition, she has to deal with many administrative tasks in the school. But to Ying's surprise, the new-coming colleague not only managed to handle all the tasks in a well-organized manner, but also spared a lot of time to help Ying out of some affairs. For example, she often helped Ying to supervise the class, gave some advice in her Chinese teaching, helped to assess students' works and so on. When talking about this colleague, Ying seemed to be very pleased:

> Thanks to her for a lot of things! She did help me a lot and gave me some pertinent advice. Under her influence, I gradually felt that everything was not that difficult. After all, she had a lot more work than I did but in turn it was she that helped me out of heavy works. I started to find reasons in myself (Interview 2).

Affected by her new colleague, Ying became more and more familiar with her work as a head teacher. For her, the work that used to cost a whole morning could be finished in less than two hours; the experience for communicating with parents and leaders could be obtained more easily; kids in her class also seemed to be more "obedient". Additionally, some novel and interesting suggestions about teaching proposed by her new colleague rekindled her passion as a "teacher of teaching":

> I used to be highly passionate in preparing a well-designed and interesting Chinese class, but I

lost that passion since I received the work of a headteacher. It was also my new colleague that involved in my lesson preparation work and kept encouraging me, giving me ideas and suggestions, and gradually drawing me back to the role of teaching (Interview 2).

When asked how she thinks of her teacher identities now, Ying said that she now has triple roles, namely a Chinese teacher, a head teacher, and a teacher of Social Studies. She also ranked the three identities and felt that the role as a Chinese teacher ranked first, a head teacher second, and the teacher of Social Studies third. When asked why, she said:

> Chinese is my own major. For the past four years I have been mainly preparing for being a Chinese teacher. I am endowed with a sense of belonging to it. Maybe I was born to be a Chinese teacher, I mean, that's my duty. So, absolutely, being as a Chinese teacher is my major role. As for the second one, being a head teacher, it's because in my view the most important responsibility of a teacher is not to improve students' grades, but to cultivate their character and good habits. Head teacher bears this responsibility most. That's why I regard "a head teacher" as my second role (Interview 3).

In the end, when asked how did and would she balance her triple identities, Ying describe it vividly:

> To borrow an illustration of a "sapling" found in my textbook of Social Studies, I'd say my role in school as a whole is like a "growing sapling". I believe my role as "a Chinese teacher" is the tree trunk, that the role as "a teacher of Social Studies" is the leaves, and that the role as "a head teacher" is the essential sunshine and underground nutrients for growing up. The "growing sapling" shelters students from wind and rain, and at the same time it must keep accumulating nutrients to become taller and lusher. I mean, I myself should also keep learning, practicing, accumulating experiences, and enhancing my capability. Only in this way can I keep myself in a good balance between "giving shade" and "absorbing nutrients" and thus better shelter the students and promote their growth. (Interview 3)

According to Ying's description, her present triple identities can be delineated as in figure 4.1 below.
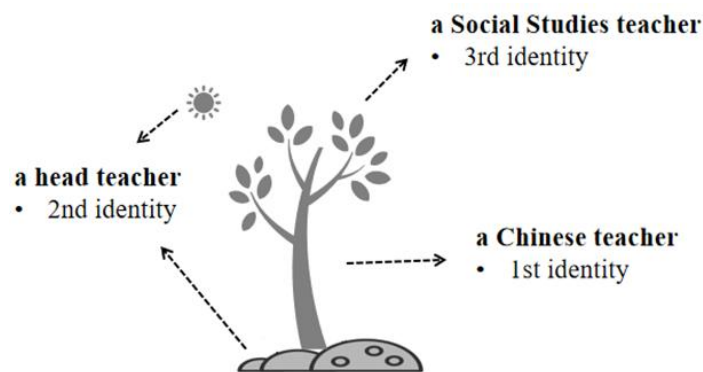

Figure4.1. *Ying's triple identities presented as a 'growing sapling'*

4. DISCUSSION

This narrative inquiry shows that Ying constructed triple identities in her early career of being as a teacher engaging in both teaching multiple courses and managing a class. To recap, Ying went through three major stages during her identity construction, from the early enjoyable double-identity stage of being a multi-subject teacher, through the overwhelming identity-crisis stage of being either a teacher of "teaching" or a teacher of "managing", to the final balanced stage of being a "growing sapling". The findings demonstrate the "discontinuity" of teachers' identities(Akkerman& Meijer, 2011). The different stories Ying experienced and constructed served as a narrative site through which her triple identities was shaped and reshaped in relation to her own perceptions and beliefs as well as the external institutional and socio- cultural contexts (Clandinin&Connelly, 2000).

According to Izadinia (2014), teachers are influenced by their personal biographies and past experiences, as well as their engagement in different forms of practice, as a result, they are constantly casting and recasting their identities, which in turn shape and guide how they think, believe and act in their professional work. In Ying's case, the unexpected ease and relax of her double identities as both Chinese teacher and Social Studies teacher attributes not only to her previous professional training in college but her "painstaking" experience during her prior practicum. During her practicum she

assumed two heavy courses and one of them was "out-of-field" for her (i.e., Mathematics). Thus, compared with the "double identities" she took during her practicum, the ones she assumed in her formal job were much enjoyable. In the similar vein, in the middle period of her career the overwhelming burden coming from her work as a head teacher also due in large part to her lacking experience of "being as a head teacher". Her identities as subject teachers are paled in comparison to her identity as a head teacher. Hence, she encountered an identity crisis of being either as a teacher of "teaching" or a teacher of "managing". However, it is Ying's new colleague who saved her from her identity crisis by helping to alleviate her burden and giving her many useful suggestions. As Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) argued, the school environment, the colleagues and school administrators can all be influential in shaping teachers' identities. Colleague, in this case, served as crucial factor in Ying's third-stage identity construction.

Additionally, teacher identity is also based on the core beliefs one has about teaching and being a teacher (Mayer, 1999). According to Ying, the reason why she ranked her identity as a head teacher instead of as a Social Studies teacher at the second place was her belief that the primary responsibility of teacher was not to improve students' academic performance but to cultivate their characters and good habits, and this belief had been held since she was determined to choose teaching as her future career. Head teacher, who was in charge of everything concerning students, bore this responsibility most (interview3). Therefore, the precedence of the identity of head teacher in Ying's mind demonstrates the basic effect of teachers' belief on teacher identity construction. Regardless of this, subject matter, highlighted as sometimes a defining and determining factor of teacher's identity (Helms, 1998; Hobbs, 2013), still plays a dominant role in Ying's rank about her identity -- a Chinese teacher as her first major identity. However, it is also suggested that teacher's strong sense of self from their subject matter may risk of locking themselves in their own area, thus losing the chances to stretch out their professional experiences or ways to understand themselves more (Helms, 1998). This constitutes a possible reason why Ying, who regarded herself as being "born to be a Chinese teacher" (interview 3), failed to accept her role as a Mathematics teacher during her 18-week practicum.

It is out of expectation that the multiple identities of this multi-subject teacher are affected not only by her relations to multiple subjects but her duty of being a head teacher, which might constitute a special socio-cultural phenomenon in the education context of China. However, concerning exclusively to multiple identities in relation to multi-subject teaching, it is noteworthy again that Ying actually experienced both a failed and a successful multiple-identity construction, respectively during her practicum of "out-of-field" teaching and her formal job of "in-field" teaching. This sharp contrast is resulted from the wide disparity of the personal resources, contextual factors, as well as supporting mechanism between the two cases of multi-subject teaching Ying encountered (Hobbs, 2013). Specifically, Ying's deficiency of knowledge about Mathematics and Mathematics teaching as a personal resource she brought into her "out-of-field' teaching prevents her from a multiple-identity building. Moreover, the urgent shortage of "Mathematics teacher" as a contextual factor in her practicum school pushed her teaching "out-of-field", and this is usually caused by "rurality (Hobbs, 2013, 286)", which also limits the support mechanisms available because it results in, for example, limited subject specialists to ask for help and lack of support from local professional development program (Hobbs, 2013).

5. CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS

Drawing on the approach of narrative inquiry, this study showcases how a multi-subject teacher tried to construct and reconstruct her multiple-identity as, in her words, "a growing sapling", which includes triple identities as a Chinese teacher, a head teacher and a Social Studies teacher. Individual factors such as the teacher's past experience and core belief as well as contextual factor like colleague are found to be major factors contributing to her multiple-identity construction; subject matter, however, is found to be most influential in her sense of multiple-identity.

However, when looking exclusively into the teacher's multiple identities with reference to her multi-subject teaching, it is found that an "out-of-field" multi-subject teaching leads to a failed multiple-identity construction whereas an "in-field" multi-subject teaching leads to a success. In fact, "out-of-field" teaching has been reported to be an international issue resulted mainly from the problem of teacher shortages and unequal teacher distribution (Hobbs &Törner, 2019). In the light of various troubles brought up by "out-of-field" teaching, a growing number of scholars are calling for an alternative solution to this problem, arguing that out-of-field teaching might not be an acceptable

long-term solution (Hobbs &Törner, 2019). Concerning this, the aforementioned program China launched sets a good example, which might serve as an optimum choice for countries still needing time to balance the distribution of education resources between urban and rural area. However, solely supporting policy cannot suffice to solve the problem. It also entails wide and deep research continuously probing into the practical experiences made by those teachers, getting insight into what they think, what they need, what problems and challenges they are facing, and, of course, into their relation to multi-subject teaching.

This study is not without limitations. Firstly, the interviews for narrative inquiry were conducted synchronically, through which the participant was asked to recall her past stories and feelings instead of being longitudinally followed and interviewed; secondly, the findings drawn from the narrative analysis of one multi-subject teacher in rural China cannot be generalized to other contexts. Future research can thus continue to explore how multi-subject teachers (re)construct their multiple identities through field observation. Besides, longitudinal research might be needed to examine multi-subject teachers' long-term identity development through research across different stages of their career.

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