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From Challenges to Assets: Collaborative Autoethnography on the Transcultural Journeys as Teacher Educators

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ABSTRACT

Our study explores the transcultural journeys of three doctoral students from South Korea and China, examining how our diverse experiences as teacher educators in the United States have shaped our teaching practices. Utilizing collaborative autoethnography grounded in transcultural and poststructural theoretical frameworks, we highlight the challenges, growth, and identity (re)formation encountered within the teacher education context. Our findings emphasize the importance of an asset-based mindset in teacher education, advocating for dynamic and inclusive approaches that leverage the rich, multifaceted identities of both teachers and students to foster more equitable educational environments.

Keywords: Collaborative autoethnography, Inclusive pedagogy, Teacher education, Transcultural identity

In today's globalized world, the concepts of identity, culture, and language are becoming increasingly complex and intertwined. This complexity is particularly evident in teacher education, where educators must navigate and integrate multiple cultural and linguistic backgrounds. In this study, we, three transcultural doctoral students from South Korea and China, explored our transformative journeys as transcultural teacher educators, focusing on how our diverse

experiences have shaped and informed our teaching practices. We share commonalities of teaching in various K-12 settings in our home countries and are currently enrolled in the same doctoral training in education. Although we have taught different courses based on our areas of expertise, we are all bi-/multi-lingual and use English and our native languages, Korean and Chinese.

Our journey is framed around the concept of transculturalism, which provides a lens to understand the multifaceted identities and experiences we bring into our teaching environments (Casinader & Clemans, 2018; Howe & Xu, 2013). By employing the transcultural approach, we intended to challenge the traditional, monolithic views of teacher education, advocating instead for a dynamic and inclusive perspective that acknowledges and values the cultural and linguistic diversity inherent in contemporary classrooms. By examining our own experiences, we aimed to contribute to the broader discourse on the importance of diversity in education. Our narratives highlight the necessity for teacher preparation programs to move beyond rigid, monocultural frameworks, embracing a more fluid and integrated approach to identity and pedagogy (Montgomery, 2014; Wulf, 2010) instead. Through our stories, we hope to illuminate the transformative potential of transcultural experiences in shaping more empathetic and effective teaching practices.

In this study, we collectively (re)visited our personal and professional journeys utilizing the Collaborative Ethnography (CAE) methodology (Chang et al., 2016) to offer insights into the challenges and learning moments we have encountered as transcultural educators. This research is driven by an overarching question: "How do our transcultural experiences and identities interact with our teaching?" To explore this further, three research questions guided our inquiries:

1. What struggles/challenges have we encountered while working in the higher education teacher education (TE) context?
2. How have our transcultural experiences and identities informed and shaped our TE practices?
3. How have TE experiences as transcultural teacher educators reshaped our identities?

These research questions are not merely focused on our individual experiences. Still, they are designed to derive broader insights that can contribute to understanding the complex interplay between transcultural identities and teaching practices in higher education contexts. Our primary aim was to illuminate the unique challenges we face and explore the ways in which our transcultural identities contribute to and enrich our teaching practices. By sharing our CAE, we hoped to provide nuanced insights for other educators from diverse social-cultural and linguistic backgrounds and contribute to developing more inclusive and justice-oriented teacher education programs.

LITERATURE REVIEW & THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

According to the Open Doors data (2023), international student mobility has shown significant growth post-pandemic, particularly in the U.S. For the 2022-2023 academic year, international student enrollment increased across all levels

of education, with graduate student numbers reaching an all-time high. Traditionally, the term "international student" has been defined by national citizenship (Gardiner et al, 2013), reinforcing a dichotomy between domestic and international students. This definition tends to homogenize diverse populations, ignoring the rich variety of backgrounds and experiences within this group. However, we recognize the complexities of international students, particularly in light of increasing global interconnectedness and the presence of diverse communities and identities (Bennett et al., 2023). It is crucial to acknowledge the diversity of identities and lived experiences among international students. In this study, we reject the traditional definition of international students, as it fails to capture the fluid and dynamic nature of our identities and experiences. Instead, we align our identities and experiences with our respective home cultures and past cultural experiences, moving beyond the simplistic boundaries of national citizenship. In light of this, our CAE is grounded in the essence of shared experiences in becoming teacher educators in the U.S. context, and our collective inquiry was informed by the notion of transculturalism and poststructural approaches to understanding identity. This perspective aligns more closely with a transcultural approach rather than an international one, as we focus on narrating ongoing changes and transformations, rather than fixed identities or statuses (Brinkmann & Friesen, 2018).

Transculturalism

Transculturalism emphasizes the interconnectedness and fluidity of cultural identities, moving beyond the fixed boundaries of national or cultural categories (Wulf, 2010). This theoretical lens allowed us to explore the continuous cultural exchange, adaptation, and integration processes that characterize our experiences. By applying transcultural theory, we examined how our diverse backgrounds intersect and influence our professional identities and teaching practices. Our CAE highlighted the importance of transcultural experiences in shaping our pedagogical approaches and understanding of identity. For example, the dynamic nature of our experiences, linked to translingual practices, underscored how we navigated and integrated multiple linguistic and cultural resources, enhancing our teaching methodologies and fostering inclusive educational environments (Lee & Canagarajah, 2019).

Additionally, transculturalism offers a more inclusive framework for understanding cultural interactions than traditional multicultural or intercultural approaches. We view transculturalism as the merging of two processes that occur simultaneously, where each culture informs and is informed by the other (Ortiz, 2020). This perspective enabled us to capture the complexities and ongoing transformations in our identities and teaching practices. By embracing this framework, we acknowledged the continuous and evolving nature of our cultural and professional identities, emphasizing the value of prior knowledge and cultural experiences in our teaching. This approach allowed us to move beyond static cultural categories, fostering a dynamic and integrative understanding of identity in teacher education (Dagnino, 2012).

Dagnino (2012) suggested several core tenets of transculturalism that characterize this approach: a non-essentialized and inclusive view of culture, rejecting cultures as pure and fixed entities, and acknowledging overlapping and dynamic cultural borders. These tenets aligned with our experiences as transcultural educators, where we continuously navigated and integrated our diverse cultural backgrounds to enhance our teaching practices. This perspective helped us address the limitations of multiculturalism, which often relies on an oppositional model of social relationships, reinforcing postcolonial binaries such as West versus non-West. In contrast, transculturalism promoted openness, allowing us to construct complex identities based on cultural interactions, which is particularly relevant in our increasingly globalized world.

Understanding our identities as transcultural educators requires considering how power dynamics and societal norms influence self-perceptions. Here, we focus specifically on power dynamics within the teacher education system in which we are situated. Often, transnational teacher educators view themselves from a deficit-based perspective, perceiving their differences as limitations rather than strengths. This outlook can be seen as a product of dominant power-knowledge structures that define what is considered "normal" or "ideal" in educational contexts (Foucault, 1977, 1981). These structures often privilege certain cultural and linguistic backgrounds, marginalizing those who do not fit these norms. For example, students whose first language is not English identified English barriers and limited their interactions with others (Rodriguez et al., 2024, p. 283). Yilmaz (2024) similarly found that students experienced challenges due to their accents and believed that they would gain more power with native-like pronunciation. Recognizing this, our study highlighted the importance of deconstructing these power-laden narratives to appreciate the unique contributions that transcultural educators bring to their teaching environments.

Poststructural Understanding of (Cultural) Identity in Education

In this study, our conceptualization of identity aligns with a poststructuralist perspective, emphasizing identity as a dynamic process of "becoming" rather than a fixed entity. This contrasts (neo-)Ericksonian views that, while acknowledging social context, often prioritize the individual's role in identity formation as a process of adapting to different life situations. Similarly, our approach also differs from Vygotskian approaches which, despite highlighting the importance of sociocultural processes, do not fully address the influence of power relations and political context that are central to a poststructuralist understanding of identity (Zembylas, 2003). In this light, we draw from various scholarship on culture in education to better understand our (trans)cultural identities.

The concept of culture in education has been examined through various frameworks, with scholars employing terms such as culturally appropriate (Au & Jordan, 1981), culturally congruent (Mohatt & Erickson, 1981), and culturally compatible (Jordan, 1985). Ladson-Billings (1995) introduced a transformative approach termed culturally relevant pedagogy to challenge the cultural deficit perspective and "to accept and affirm their cultural identity (p. 469)." This

framework not only emphasized the importance of acknowledging diverse cultural identities but also encouraged teachers to deepen their understanding of both their own and others' cultures (p. 483). Later, Ladson-Billings (2014) advocated for a more dynamic view of culture by noting that "culture is always changing (p. 75)." This perspective requires educators to consider identities within a broader global context, which are hybrid, fluid, transformative, and complex. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, Ladson-Billings (2021) highlighted how the pandemic helped educators realize the importance of valuing students' cultural success, reiterating that culturally relevant teaching amplifies all students' voices and opens up opportunities for each student. Similarly, Paris (2012) introduced culturally sustaining pedagogy as an extension of culturally relevant teaching. This approach aims to foster and sustain linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism among students and teachers while offering access to challenge dominant cultural norms (p. 93). Culturally sustaining pedagogy emphasizes the need for education to honor and maintain the diverse cultural practices of students in an increasingly multicultural and globalized world.

Though scholars recognize the importance of honoring students' cultural differences, challenges in the field of teacher education have been raised. Andrews (2021) argued that the culture of schooling in the U.S. failed to effectively prepare teachers to educate all children, which is linked to the inability to "decenter whiteness and decolonize teacher education and integrate the knowledge systems and traditions/customs of communities and peoples who are not white (p. 417)." Therefore, Andrews (2021) proposed preparing teachers to be culturally multidimensional in their practice for enacting a professional identity that is culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining.

Drawing on scholarship about the cultural dimensions of identity in education, we also incorporated the concept of performativity (Butler, 1999), which posits that identities are continuously shaped through actions and interactions within educational settings. As transcultural educators, we may not initially "perform" in ways that align with established expectations, leading to feelings of precariousness (Butler, 2004). However, this performative aspect also means that our identities are not fixed but are open to ongoing negotiation and redefinition. By engaging with our diverse cultural and linguistic resources, we developed new ways of performing our professional roles, authentic to our backgrounds and responsive to the needs of our students. This process of continual performance and adaptation underscored the fluidity of our identities and the potential for transformation inherent in our transcultural experiences.

In sum, the theoretical framework of transculturalism and poststructural approaches provided a foundation for examining our identities' dynamic and multifaceted nature as transcultural teacher educators. This framework informed our analysis and emphasized the significance of embracing cultural diversity and fluidity in educational contexts, ultimately enriching our teaching practices and professional identities.

METHODOLOGY

We employed CAE as the primary research methodology. CAE is a qualitative research method that is simultaneously collaborative, autobiographical, and ethnographic (Chang et al., 2016). This approach allows researchers to collectively explore their personal experiences in relation to their sociocultural contexts, thereby providing a deeper understanding of the phenomena under investigation. In our case, CAE was instrumental in examining the transformative journeys of transcultural teacher educators, highlighting how our diverse backgrounds intersect and inform our professional identities and teaching practices.

CAE is distinct from traditional autobiography, which focuses solely on personal stories. Instead, autoethnographers use their personal narratives as windows to the world, interpreting how their selves are connected to their sociocultural contexts and how these contexts give meaning to their experiences and perspectives (Chang et al., 2016). This method transcends a mere narration of personal history, focusing instead on the interplay between the individual and the culture. The collaborative aspect of CAE involves multiple researchers sharing and analyzing their personal experiences, thus enriching the data through diverse perspectives.

The data collection process in our study was meticulously structured to ensure a comprehensive exploration of our experiences as transcultural teacher educators. This process was divided into four main phases: preliminary data collection, subsequent data collection, data analysis and interpretation, and report writing. In the preliminary data collection phase, each of us engaged in self-writing and reflection to document our personal experiences related to our transcultural journey. This was followed by group sharing and probing sessions, where we discussed our individual reflections in detail. This phase set the foundation for a deeper understanding of our shared and unique experiences. The subsequent data collection phase was built on the initial reflections. We continued to document our evolving experiences through individual self-writing and reflection. These reflections were again shared within the group, enabling preliminary meaning-making and the identification of emerging themes. This iterative process of writing and sharing ensured that our data collection was dynamic and reflective of our ongoing transformations.

Afterward, during the data analysis and interpretation phase, each one of us reviewed and coded our data independently, focusing on significant themes and patterns. This individual coding was then followed by group meaning-making sessions, where we compared our codes and constructed a unified set of themes. This collaborative approach to data analysis allowed for a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of our collective experiences. The integration of multiple perspectives enriched our analysis and helped us to identify commonalities and divergences in our experiences. The final phase, report writing, involved individual meaning-making and outlining, where each researcher contributed their insights and interpretations. This was followed by group writing sessions, where we integrated our individual contributions into a cohesive narrative. The

collaborative writing process ensured that the report reflected our collective understanding of the data and highlighted the dynamic and interconnected nature of our transcultural experiences.

While CAE offers significant advantages in exploring personal and collective experiences, it also presents certain challenges and limitations. One of the primary challenges is the potential for bias, as researchers may consciously or unconsciously present their experiences in a particular light. Rather than attempting to erase them, we addressed them through multiple rounds of reflection and group discussions, carefully documenting the process to acknowledge and mitigate their influence, allowing for data triangulation and validating our findings through diverse perspectives. These group reflections and discussions were crucial as they allowed us to externalize our experiences and re-examine them collectively, functioning as "critical friends" to one another (Costa & Kallick, 1993). This "critical friend" approach facilitated questioning assumptions, rethinking interpretations, and deepening our reflexivity. Member checking was also integral to this process, as we consistently revisited and revised interpretations to make sure they accurately represented the shared meanings and narratives of our lived experiences. By engaging in collaborative dialogue, we avoided overgeneralization and the dominance of one perspective. This iterative process not only improved the trustworthiness of our findings but also reinforced the collaborative ethos of CAE, emphasizing shared ownership and accountability throughout the research.

In sum, the rationale for choosing CAE as our methodology was rooted in its ability to capture the complexities and nuances of our experiences as transcultural educators. Traditional research methods often fall short in exploring the deeply personal and contextual nature of such experiences. CAE, with its emphasis on collaborative reflection and analysis, provided a platform for us to delve into the intricacies of our identities and pedagogical practices. This methodological decision also aligned with our theoretical framework, which underscores the fluid and dynamic nature of cultural identities and the importance of understanding these identities in relation to broader sociocultural contexts. By employing CAE, we captured a robust and nuanced understanding of our experiences as transcultural teacher educators.

NARRATING OURSELVES

The title of this section, "Narrating Ourselves," is inspired by the seminal work of Ochs and Capps (1996), who explore the intricate process of self-narration and its role in shaping identity. They argued that personal narratives are fundamental to the construction and understanding of one's identity, emphasizing the dynamic and evolving nature of these narratives. While this section serves as the positionality in other qualitative studies (Holmes, 2020), it was also an instrumental part of our transcultural exploration. Through the process of narrating our own lived experiences, we were able to critically examine and reflect on how our diverse cultural backgrounds and personal journeys have shaped our identities and practices as transcultural teacher educators. This reflective practice

not only deepened our understanding of ourselves but also highlighted the fluid and interconnected nature of our identities within the broader sociocultural contexts of our teaching environments.

As three authors —one male from Korea and two females from China—we bring diverse yet interconnected experiences shaped by our teacher education in highly centralized systems. These systems emphasized efficient teaching practices rather than fostering critical pedagogical reflection. Our ages range from late 20s to mid-30s, and each of us transitioned to the United States for doctoral studies, navigating distinct cultural and educational contexts. Reflecting on our preparation, we recognize that our prior training inadequately addressed the autonomy, flexibility, and cultural responsiveness required in U.S. settings. In retrospect, more explicit preparation for addressing sensitive topics, fostering inclusive classroom dialogue, and adapting to diverse student needs would have been invaluable. This reflection highlights the need for teacher education programs to incorporate transcultural competencies and critical perspectives, a point we explore further in our conclusion. The following stories detail each of our backgrounds.

Seunghoon's Story

Before starting a Ph.D. degree in the U.S., I taught at a public elementary school in Seoul, South Korea, for six years. South Korea has a unique elementary teacher education system, where the vast majority of elementary pre-service teachers attend one of the National University of Education system, and take the teacher employment exam to work at a public elementary school. I attended one of those institutions, earned a bachelor's degree in elementary education, passed the exam, and started my career as an elementary teacher. For the first few years (and still, to some extent), I had considered myself a successful product of the Korean teacher education system, before realizing that such a government-driven system can unwittingly marginalize students who do not share the monolithic preconception about student identity. Therefore, I studied more for a master's degree in elementary social studies education and came to the U.S. to find out how educators can (re)shape their practices toward a more inclusive and anti-oppressive.

As my area of expertise was social studies education, I started teaching social studies methods courses and have taught at elementary, middle, and secondary levels. The vast majority of my students were white female students who were born and raised in the U.S. Although I had experience in teaching and researching social studies in South Korea, I found that my expertise was not as useful in the U.S. context due to significant differences in history and culture. The Korean narratives and historical events that I was familiar with often did not resonate with my American students. Communication with students was another major challenge, not only because of the language barrier but also due to cultural differences. I also often struggled to understand the nuances of U.S. undergraduate life and the cultural significance of historical narratives for my students. Despite these challenges, I continuously sought ways to integrate my

background and perspectives into my teaching, aiming to provide a more inclusive and diverse educational experience for my students.

Chen's Story

I have dreamed of working as an English teacher since I was a primary school student. Driven by this interest, I majored in English education as an undergraduate and earned a master's degree in English Language and Literature in China. After graduation, I taught English and worked as a homeroom teacher at a middle school in the capital city of China for four years.

Throughout my career in the field of education, I incorporated literature into the curriculum from grades 7 to 9, and I found that students often found themselves interested in children's literature. From these experiences, I realized the power and significance of children's literature in education, which in turn inspired me to pursue a Ph.D. to explore how literature empowers students to share their funds of knowledge.

Now, I am teaching pre-service teachers in a course titled "Teaching Children's Literature," which aims to motivate and help them engage in textual analysis and acquaint them with different theories and practices of teaching children's literature in PreK-4 classrooms. This new journey is filled with excitement and challenges. One of the significant challenges I faced was addressing controversial topics that were unfamiliar due to my different cultural background. During my education and teaching in China, I had little experience discussing sensitive issues, which influenced my confidence in expressing insights about such topics in my class.

Another challenge was recognizing my transcultural identity and being aware of my different cultural backgrounds. I initially felt reluctant to introduce different cultural perspectives to native English speakers because I was uncomfortable presenting Chinese culture in a predominantly English-speaking context. Despite these challenges, my teaching journey has evolved into a rich immersion in multicultural contexts for both me and my undergraduate students.

Yue's Story

During my undergraduate studies in China, I was trained to become an early childhood teacher in a teacher education program. I started my career as a preschool teacher, working with children between 2-4 years old. After seeing the unsatisfactory working conditions and struggles of teachers on the front lines, I was motivated to pursue doctoral studies to find potential solutions through academic research.

I came to the U.S. to pursue higher education seven years ago. Interestingly, it wasn't until I immersed myself in the culture here that I became aware of my identity as an Asian woman. After entering my doctoral program, I needed to work as a graduate student instructor, teaching undergraduate students who are preparing to become early childhood and elementary school teachers. This experience made me realize that I am a non-native speaker of English. There were

many moments when people could identify my nationality based on my appearance and accent. When I started teaching in the U.S. higher education system, my primary concern was my English proficiency. I worried about how students perceived me as a foreign instructor with a different language accent and a non-authority figure.

In addition to the language barrier, as a young Asian female instructor, I experienced tensions and challenges when teaching a group of undergraduate students predominantly from the local white community. My course focuses on the early childhood field, with a specific emphasis on anti-bias issues. Teaching was challenging for me as I had to address topics like white supremacy/privilege and cultural dominance in front of a group of young white students, some of whom may not have ventured beyond their local community. I needed to find connections between these educational philosophies/teaching strategies and local practices, which was not my advantage since I grew up in a different socio-cultural background. All these challenges collectively imposed invisible stress on me, compelling me to invest much more time in class planning and preparation than my American peers.

FINDINGS

The overarching question guiding our inquiry was: How do our transcultural experiences and identities interact with our teaching? This section presents the collective insights and meaning-making that emerged from our study's "report writing" phase. Through a collaborative process of reflection and analysis, we organized our findings around three research questions. These questions allowed us to explore the multifaceted ways in which our transcultural identities intersect with and influence our roles as teacher educators.

The following sections offer a synthesis of our collective experiences, highlighting the significant themes and patterns that emerged from our narratives. While the phases of this process can be understood as subsequent, they were not always necessarily linear or bound by strict time order. Instead, the iterative nature of collaborative reflection allowed for fluid movement between phases, emphasizing the dynamic interplay of our experiences and insights.

Experiencing Struggles and Challenges as Transcultural Teacher Educators

All three of us experienced significant cultural and systemic discrepancies between the educational systems of our home countries and the United States. These discrepancies often posed challenges in adapting our teaching methodologies and content. For instance, one example from our narratives reflects on the difficulty of integrating social studies education with other subjects, such as using children's books for read-aloud activities. This particular challenge was compounded by a lack of experience and confidence in conducting read-aloud sessions in English, which is more common in American classrooms but not in Korean classrooms where national textbooks were the primary texts. The need to adapt to these different educational expectations often led to a sense of inadequacy

and a struggle to bring the desired authenticity into the classroom. Seunghoon reflected, "Sometimes the discrepancies between Korean and American educational systems made it worse. For example, when I was talking about the marginalization of social studies education and how to 'sneak in' social studies education by integrating it with other subject areas, like how to do read-aloud using children's books more purposefully, I was very unconfident because social studies education has been one of the major subjects in the elementary schooling system, and I also did not have much experience doing read-aloud in English." This lack of confidence was exacerbated when discussing politically sensitive issues, or "difficult knowledge" (Pitt & Britzman, 2003). As Seunghoon noted, "The degree of sensitivity that I could feel was very different compared to my students - predominantly white-female-American students - and I thought I was not able to bring the kind of authenticity that I wanted to have in the class."

Another recurring theme in our discussions was the difficulty of addressing sensitive and controversial topics with students from diverse cultural backgrounds. For instance, our experiences with discussions around banned books revealed our discomfort and lack of preparedness to handle controversial topics. Chen shared, "While students shared their interpretations on Harry Potter and Prisoner of Azkaban and The Giver, we had a discussion about banned books. Even though I was aware that both books are banned or challenged in some schools or districts because of the concern of violence or political concerns, students expressed that they would not use the whole Harry Potter series book due to J.K. Rowling's transgender comment controversy." This challenge was compounded by previous restrictions in our home country, where discussing such topics was not allowed. The struggle to navigate these unfamiliar teaching contexts revealed the difficulties in adapting to different educational settings. As Chen reflected, "I realized that I was unconfident with talking about controversial topics, such as banned books, based on the lack of teaching experiences in those topics."

Internal conflicts and identity struggles were also prominent in our findings. The transition to teaching in the U.S. often brought about feelings of uncertainty and self-doubt, affecting our roles as teacher educators. For instance, Yue described the experience of an inner conflict during the first year of teaching, characterized by a strong sense of inadequacy and the pressure to navigate a new identity in an unfamiliar environment. "During my first year of teaching, I experienced an inner conflict characterized by a strong sense of uncertainty and unconfidence. This sense weakened my role as a teacher educator and led to feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt. Reflecting on those stress and negative impacts on my mental and emotional well-being, I realize that they originally stemmed from navigating my new identity in an environment that I was not very familiar with." This realization underscored the dynamic nature of identity and the ongoing process of adaptation to different cultural contexts, highlighting the need to bridge gaps between educational practices, theories, and pedagogies in contextualized settings. As Yue shared, "The shifted mindset made me realize that identities are not static but dynamic, adapting to the changing context."

Our collective experiences underscore our significant challenges in adapting to the higher education TE context. These challenges were rooted in cultural and

systemic discrepancies, navigating sensitive topics, and internal conflicts related to our evolving identities. Through our use of CAE, we were able to externalize these experiences and critically examine them together, functioning as critical friends. This process of collaborative reflection allowed us to understand the complexities of our struggles and identify strategies to navigate and address these challenges in our teaching practices. By sharing these collective insights, we aim to contribute to the broader discourse on the importance of diversity and adaptability in teacher education.

Embracing Transculturality into the Practice

Despite struggles and challenges we experienced in the beginning, our transcultural experiences as teacher educators have taught us to shift from a deficit-based perspective toward an asset-based mindset, recognizing the unique strengths and perspectives that our diverse backgrounds bring to our teaching practices. This transformation has been instrumental in redefining our professional identities and enhancing our effectiveness as educators.

Through our discussion, we realized that our transcultural experiences provided us with a broader understanding of the complexities in the educational field. Having grown up and taught in a different country and pursued higher education in the United States, we gained insights into the diverse approaches to education and the importance of localized contexts. This comparative and international perspective encouraged students to think critically about educational practices and reflect on their own contexts. It also highlighted the need for anti-bias education and curriculum adaptation to cater to diverse student backgrounds based on our own experiences living in bi-/trans-cultural spaces. Yue shared, "The insights generated from my previous work as a pre-service and in-service early childhood educator bring a comparative and international perspective, which guides students to think outside the box, encouraging them to reflect on how and why certain educational practices are as they are."

In terms of helping pre-service teachers getting prepared to teach, we were able to extend the transcultural and transformative experience to our students by engaging them in multicultural contexts. We frequently used diverse cultural materials to foster inclusive discussions. For instance, Chen used the book Lon Po Po, an adaptation of "Little Red Riding Hood" in her literacy method class, to discuss cultural representations and stereotypes. Students were drawn into the cultural contexts beyond the book by introducing Chinese characters and explaining their meanings. This not only revealed stereotypical depictions but also spurred meaningful conversations on multiculturalism. Such experiences underscored the importance of leveraging our diverse cultural backgrounds to enrich the learning environment. As we noted, "Some students may not have a chance to be exposed to multiple cultures, so we, as educators with multiple cultural backgrounds, can reflect our cultures in the class to help students have a conversation about multiculturalism."

We all initially felt a sense of unpreparedness and inadequacy due to the highly context-bounded nature of certain subjects. For instance, Seunghoon

recalled that teaching social studies in the U.S. context was challenging as it involved integrating complex political and cultural themes that were unfamiliar to us. However, we soon realized that our unique perspectives could turn these perceived deficits into valuable assets. One example of this is the discussion on the promotion of democracy in classrooms. Sharing experiences from different cultural contexts, such as how democratic strategies were applied superficially and how they could be improved, captivated students' interest and facilitated deeper understanding. This transnational transferability of knowledge helped build our confidence as teacher educators. As Seunghoon reflected, "Even though the context I taught and their future context will be very different, there have been many occasions where my knowledge could be transferred transnationally, and I started gaining confidence as a teacher educator."

Through these collective experiences, we recognized that our transcultural backgrounds are not deficits but assets that enrich our teaching practices and enhance our students' learning experiences. By embracing an asset-based mindset, we were able to transform our perceived weaknesses into strengths, fostering a more inclusive and dynamic educational environment. This shift not only empowered us as educators but also encouraged our students to appreciate the value of diverse perspectives in their learning journeys.

Transforming From Deficit-based to Asset-based Mindset

Our experiences as transcultural teacher educators have fundamentally reshaped our identities, moving us from a deficit-based perspective to an asset-based mindset. This transformation has been instrumental in guiding our thoughts and practices regarding the role of the teacher educator through active engagement, mutual interactions, and critical reflections.

Teaching across different cultural settings redefines our identities, pushing us toward critical engagement and reflective practice. Initially, navigating these challenges, conflicts, and complexities led to feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt. However, these experiences also prompted deep reflection on the ethical aspects of our teaching, pushing us to develop approaches that meet the diverse needs of students and foster inclusive and supportive learning environments. One example of this transformation is the realization that the diversity and richness of the classroom embrace not only the backgrounds of the students but also our own. As Yue reflected, "The conflict and confusion I experienced during my first year of teaching came from the lack of recognition of my strengths and awareness of my agency as a teacher educator." Through accumulating more teaching experience, a sense of cultural sensitivity developed, leading to a more flexible and open-minded approach to teacher education.

Moreover, our experiences have shown that teaching is not merely about content delivery but about building bridges between diverse cultural contexts. For instance, engaging with students in discussions about stories like "Humpty Dumpty" highlighted the power of interaction over authority in teaching. As Chen wrote, we argue that "the power in teaching never exists in the authority but in the interaction with students." This realization helped in building bridges of identities

in teaching, where the unconfidence in discussing unfamiliar topics and the engagement with multilingualism reshaped who we are and who we will be. This process led to the understanding that as teachers, we must make room for what both students and educators bring to the classroom, enriching the teaching and learning process.

The concept of performativity, as discussed by Butler (1999), provides another layer to understanding our evolving identities. Identity is not static but performed differently across contexts. Seunghoon shared during the last discussion session, "I do not view identity as a fixed notion. It is not like I have multiple identities such as a Korean, international student, or father, but rather it performs in relation to the specificities of given contexts." Initially, the unfamiliarity with the U.S. educational system and cultural differences created a sense of precariousness. However, over time, becoming more accustomed to the context allowed for better performance as a teacher educator. This evolution highlighted the unique vulnerabilities transcultural educators face, emphasizing the need for authentic experiences that foster a sense of belonging.

Through these collective experiences, we recognized that our transcultural backgrounds are not deficits but assets that enrich our teaching practices and enhance our students' learning experiences. Embracing an asset-based mindset has allowed us to transform perceived weaknesses into strengths, fostering a more inclusive and dynamic educational environment. This shift not only empowered us as educators but also encouraged our students to appreciate the value of diverse perspectives in their learning journeys.

CONCLUSIONS

Our journeys as transcultural teacher educators have been marked by numerous challenges and transformative experiences that have reshaped our identities and professional practices. By utilizing CAE and grounding our study in the theoretical frameworks of transculturalism and poststructuralism, we could critically examine and articulate the dynamic interplay between our transcultural identities and our roles as educators in a diverse, globalized context.

Throughout our inquiry, we identified several key themes that encapsulate our collective experiences. Firstly, the cultural and systemic discrepancies between our home countries and the United States presented significant hurdles. Adapting our teaching methodologies to fit a new educational context often led to feelings of inadequacy and unpreparedness. However, we recognized through reflection and collaborative discussion that these perceived deficits could be transformed into valuable assets. By sharing our unique cultural perspectives and experiences, we enriched our teaching practices and engaged students' learning in meaningful and cross-cultural ways.

Secondly, our experiences highlighted the importance of engaging with sensitive and controversial topics in the classroom. Initially, the lack of experience in discussing such topics in our home countries led to feelings of discomfort and hesitation. However, as we became more familiar with the diverse cultural backgrounds of our students and the sociopolitical context of the United States,

we developed greater confidence in addressing these issues. This growth underscored the significance of fostering open, inclusive discussions that acknowledge and respect diverse perspectives, creating a space for meaningful dialogue and mutual understanding.

Lastly, navigating our transcultural identities involved confronting internal conflicts and self-doubt. The transition to teaching in the U.S. often brought about feelings of uncertainty, particularly in relation to language proficiency and cultural differences. As McAllester (2024) argued in her transposed identity negotiation framework, crisis self-verification can be challenging, but also provides international students with an opportunity to deepen their connection to their national identity (p. 228). Through this identity negotiation process, we recognized the strengths of our diverse cultural backgrounds and reaffirmed our national identities, embracing them as integral to our teaching practice. This ongoing reflection and engagement with the concept of performativity enabled us to reconceptualize our identities as fluid and adaptable. By embracing the notion that identity is continuously constructed through our interactions and actions, we were able to redefine our roles as educators and strengthen our sense of agency.

Our collective inquiry provides nuanced insights into the complexities of transcultural teacher education. By highlighting the challenges and opportunities associated with transcultural identities, our CAE underscores teacher preparation programs' need to move beyond monolithic frameworks and embrace a more dynamic, inclusive approach. Specifically, the findings suggest that teacher education programs should integrate transcultural perspectives into their curricula, including content that addresses the complexities of cultural and linguistic diversity and the dynamic nature of identity. Educators should adopt teaching methods that recognize and leverage students' diverse cultural backgrounds, incorporating culturally relevant pedagogy and creating classroom environments that encourage open discussions about sensitive and controversial topics. Furthermore, educational institutions should provide support systems for transcultural educators, recognizing their unique challenges and fostering a supportive community through mentorship programs, peer support groups, and resources for professional growth.

Although this study is grounded in the lived experiences of a specific group of researchers and tied to specific cultural and institutional contexts, which may not fully capture the diversity of perspectives and experiences within the broader field, it provides valuable insights into how transcultural identities interact with teacher educators' practices and challenges. Future research could build upon this work by exploring these intensions and dynamics of navigating cultural gaps, negotiating identities, and adapting teaching practices within different educational systems. Translating these findings into actionable strategies could inform professional development programs and provide systematic support to address the unique challenges and leverage the strengths of transcultural teacher educator in the U.S. context.

In sum, this study advocates for the development of teacher education programs that not only acknowledge but also actively leverage the rich, multifaceted identities of both teachers and students. By implementing these

implications, the field of teacher education can better prepare educators to navigate and embrace the complexities of a globalized world, ultimately fostering a more equitable and just educational landscape.

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