



Reflexivity and cross-cultural education: a Foucauldian framework for becoming an ethical teacher-researcher

Wen Xu¹ · Garth Stahl²

Received: 11 March 2021 / Revised: 8 October 2021 / Accepted: 8 October 2021 / Published online: 19 October 2021
© Education Research Institute, Seoul National University, Seoul, Korea 2021

Abstract

The global forces shaping international education requires us to explore how transnational pre-service teachers navigate new and unfamiliar education contexts. Within studies of transnational pre-service teacher education, the voice of the Chinese diaspora remains largely on the periphery. This article aims to redress this paucity by applying Foucault's fourfold ethical framework to demonstrate how one Chinese teacher's reflexivity can contribute to the construction of an 'ethical self' in Australia. Data were drawn from a teacher-researcher's journal entries and analytic memos documenting self-reflective practices in the course of both teaching and research. The article seeks to adumbrate the ways in which reflexivity—as an ongoing and dynamic process—can work as an intercultural space for developing professionalism and enhancing quality in practitioner research. This work is important if we are to re-imagine teacher education as part of a wider social justice agenda through respecting the experiences and voices of 'others.' Integral to the analysis is promoting the two-way flow of cultural knowledge, particularly those from the Asian diaspora whose voices are often denied in relation to the global dynamics of knowledge production.

Keywords Reflexivity · Ethics · Foucault · Teacher as researcher · Practitioner inquiry · Classroom practice

Introduction

In Australia, over 90% of teachers of Chinese are native Chinese speakers and received tertiary education in Chinese institutions (Orton, 2016). Teaching in Australian schools, it could be argued these educators are in a process of transition—shifting from beliefs align with principles of the Confucian educational legacy to new pedagogical identities and practices that fit into Australian educational schema (Moloney & Xu, 2015). During this process, teachers may engage in negotiations (and renegotiations) as they encounter tensions and conflicts which influence their pedagogical decisions and practices (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). Imagining

teacher education as part of a wider social justice agenda, it is important to explore how they live out the cultural disjunctures and challenges of new and unfamiliar educational contexts (Chow, 2019).

Within studies of transnational pre-service teacher education the voices of the Chinese diaspora remains largely on the periphery (Kohli & Pizarro, 2016; Singh & Han, 2010a). With this in mind, we aim to explore the reflective practices of one Chinese teacher-researcher (the lead author) who worked at the intersection of inquiry (research) and practice (teaching) (Mockler, 2014) with the aim of improving her pedagogic practices through recursive cycles of theoretically-informed design, enactment and reflexivity (Lingard & Renshaw, 2010). What is foundational to the inquiry was the teacher-researcher's commitment to develop her professional skills and to construct an 'ethical self' in a foreign cultural context that differed substantially from the country of origin.

By foregrounding ethics—as a dynamic way of *knowing* and *being* within educational practice—this single case study seeks to provides insight which may inform how teachers from different cultural contexts are trained and the role reflective practice plays in (Singh & Han, 2010b; Singh et al., 2007). Furthermore, this work seeks to foreground the

✉ Wen Xu
xuwen0826@gmail.com

Garth Stahl
garth.stahl@gmail.com

¹ Faculty of Education, East China Normal University, Shanghai, China

² School of Education, The University of Queensland, Office 510, Social Sciences Building 24, Campbell Road, St. Lucia, QLD 4072, Australia

experiences and *voices* of ‘others’ as integral to promoting the two-way flow of knowledge (Lomer, 2017), particularly those from the Asian diaspora whose voices are often denied in relation to the global dynamics of knowledge production (Singh & Han, 2009; Stein, 2019; Tikly, 2004).

This article progresses in six sections to explore the teacher-researcher’s reflexivity. It begins with a brief overview of reflexivity in education and Foucault’s work on ethics, before discussing the methods adopted in detail. Then we supply excerpts from journal entries and analytic memos whereby the teacher-researcher’s reflexivity was exercised towards education for an ethics of engagement (Christie, 2005). The discussion section works to problematise the reflexive process around these artifacts and what this may mean for developing professionalism and enhancing quality in practitioner research. Finally, the article concludes with delineating how ‘reflexivity on ethics’—as a disposition—should be fostered in initial and continuing teacher education given the important implications for cross-cultural education.

Reflexivity and reflective practice in education

Interrogating the role of reflexivity and reflective practice in the field of education continues to be an important topic of teacher education and professional development (Dewey, 1933; Feucht et al., 2017; Phelan & Kinsella, 2013; Powell et al., 2016; Zembylas, 2014). A specific line of inquiry has centred on how reflexivity and reflective practice may inform a range of teacher identity transitions (Ball, 2016; Ball & Olmedo, 2013). Reflexivity refers to a mental capability to control feelings, evaluate performance, initiate and develop plans, which enables teacher-researchers to explore ethical entanglements before, during, and after the inquiry (Donati & Archer, 2015; Kleinsasser, 2000). Insights are generated through the interplay of theory/research knowledge and practice, which informs future ethical decision-making and quality just education (Bentley-Williams & Morgan, 2013; Clayton, 2013). Hence, reflexivity is consistently considered as a key characteristic of ethical practice in practitioner inquiry as it is integral to the development of transferable knowledge about teaching and researching (Powell et al., 2016). Based upon this understanding of reflexivity, reflective practice can be understood as teacher-researcher’s reflexive capability, a form of critical thinking and a way of contemplating the theory/practice nexus with informs pedagogical practice (Watts, 2019).

In this article, we align with McCabe and Holmes (2009) and consider reflexivity as both a concept of qualitative validity and a tool used during the teaching and research process to achieve the goal of professional development. We

intend to explore how Foucault’s (1988) ‘technologies of the self’ can be used to mobilise a continual practice and contribute to the formation of a disposition. In a Foucauldian sense, therefore, we draw on the data to explore the practice of reflexivity in order to understand how one Chinese teacher-researcher working in Australia was better able to see, understand and analyse her inquiry and practice, her students and herself.

Foucault’s notion of ethics

Michel Foucault’s theoretical work has been applied to educational studies where scholars have sought to explore understandings of emotions (Niesche & Haase, 2012), pedagogy (Gore, 1995a, 1995b; Hope, 2013; Pitsoe & Letseka, 2013; Zhao, 2019) and educational leadership (Niesche & Keddie, 2011, 2016). His conceptualisation of ‘technologies of power’ and ‘technologies of the self’ (Foucault, 1980b) provides valuable insights into theorising reflexivity in practitioner inquiry, and this section examines the fourfold ethical framework developed in Foucault’s later works (Foucault, 1990) regarding ‘care for the self’. Work by Niesche and Haase (2012) have used the four-part framework as a scaffold to actively connect emotions to a teacher’s ethical position.

For Foucault, ethics refers to the individuals’ continual work on behaviours with respect to themselves and to institutions where he consistently links the notion of ethics to the exercise of power (Foucault, 1981) and to the governance of others:

I say that governmentality implies the relationship of self to self, which means exactly that, in the idea of governmentality, I am aiming at the totality of practices, by which one can constitute, define, organise, instrumentalise the strategies which individuals in their liberty can have in regard to each other. It is free individuals who try to control, to determine, to delimit the liberty of others and, in order to do that, they dispose of certain instruments to govern others. (Foucault, 1984, pp. 130–131)

Informed by reflexivity, therefore, ethics is considered a form that freedom takes (Foucault, 2000) where it is important to understand ethics as a thinking tool within governmentality which ‘refers to the control one may exercise over oneself, and others, over someone’s body, soul and behaviour’ (Foucault, 2007, p. 122). As such, Christie (2005) perceives ethics, as a disposition, directs thought and conduct, entails considerations of how to be and behave in relation to self, and to others. The individual, as the site of power (Ball, 2016), constitutes him/herself through an incessant, active process of self-governmentality, in relation to notions

of human good and harm (Niesche & Haase, 2012). It is believed this form of self-discipline can challenge 'regimes of truth' if it engages with reflexivity (Zembylas, 2014). Of note, care for the self morally precedes practice of governing others, and a good ruler must be able to exercise power correctly on himself in order to govern others (Foucault, 2000).

We consider Foucault's (1990) fourfold genealogy of ethics as a key framework to examine the teacher-researcher's reflexivity. The following briefly describes the four aspects of ethical work put forward by Foucault:

Ethical substance is 'the way in which the individual has to constitute this or that part of himself as the prime material of his moral conduct' (Foucault, 1990, p. 26). In this article, we use this notion to refer to the teacher-researcher's reflexivity that is relevant for ethical judgement in order to achieve professionalism in the foreign cultural context (Donati & Archer, 2015). While Foucault (1984) states that practice of the self is not invented by individuals, but shaped by culture, society and social group, reflexivity, as a 'personal emergent property' of individuals (Archer, 2007) and formed by the *aphrodisia*, that is, 'intersection of bodies, pleasures and desires' (Niesche & Haase, 2012, p. 279), can be drawn upon to facilitate the teacher-researcher's ethical judgement in relation to wider contexts.

Mode of subjection is 'the way in which the individual establishes his relation to the rule and recognises himself as obliged to put it into practice' (Foucault, 1990, p. 27). In this instance, the teacher-researcher can, for example, develop pedagogical approaches which comply with policy documents from educational authorities (see for example, New South Wales Quality Teaching Model). Furthermore, they can connect knowledge, experience and skills to what is deemed as expertise (e.g. fully peer-reviewed research journals).

Forms of elaboration is the 'ethical work that one performs on oneself, not only in order to bring one's conduct into compliance with a given rule, but to attempt to transform oneself into the ethical subject of one's behaviour' (Foucault, 1990, p. 27). In this article, we consider *forms of elaboration* in relation to the specific writing of reflective journal entries and analytic memos which constitute a central part of 'self-forming activities' contributing to how one becomes a moral subject. *Hypomnemata*, or the act of writing to document ideas and experiences for personal or professional purposes is deemed by Foucault (1991) as a way of self-training and guiding future potential courses of action (Lilja, 2018).

Telos is 'an action that is not only moral in itself, in its singularity; it is also moral in its circumstantial integration and by virtue of the place it occupies in a pattern of conduct' (Foucault, 1990, pp. 27–28). With this in mind, in Foucault's writings *telos* refers to the accomplishments (or the endeavouring to accomplish) of a certain mode of being that

contains the features of an individual's notion of the ethical subject (Niesche & Haase, 2012). To be more specific, it is the achievement of a mastery over oneself (Foucault, 2000; O'Farrell, 2005). In this article, we use the notion of *telos* to refer to the teacher-researcher's moral stance and her reflexive practices of becoming an ethical teacher-researcher in the international practicum.

Drawing on Foucault's fourfold ethical framework, this article is a foray into drawing on abstract social theory to unpack the ethical tensions experienced as micro practices upon the self on the ground (see Ball, 2016; Bazzul, 2017). Directly related to the agenda of this article, there are no examples which draw on Foucauldian ethics to explore a teacher-researcher's reflexivity in a cross-cultural context. As such, keeping in mind a commitment to social justice, this article explores ways of understanding how reflexivity works iteratively and recursively, serving to discipline the teacher-researcher in both practice and inquiry.

Methods

The data of this article was collected as part of a larger practitioner inquiry on pedagogical influence on primary students' Chinese language learning in Australia (Xu & Knijnik, 2021; Xu & Stahl, 2021; Xu, 2021a, 2021b). The teacher-researcher (the lead author) was embarking on her doctoral study in order to become a 'good' teacher and researcher as she understood it (Xu, 2021a). We adopt a constructivist paradigm where truth and meaning are constructed and interpreted by individuals (Crotty, 1998) and the focus is on the complexity of views instead of narrowing them into a few categories (Creswell, 2009). As such, our epistemic stance is interpretivism as it 'looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world' (Crotty, 1998, p. 67). Reflective journal entries ($n=18$), students' focus groups ($n=4$), and classroom teacher's semi-structured interview ($n=2$) were implemented in an effort to 'give voice to the insider's perspective' (Howe, 2004, p. 54), while interpretively understanding how this perspective existed in relation to the social milieu and experiences of the larger project. Therefore, the research presented is best described as a case study, where we 'investigate a contemporary phenomenon (the case) in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident' (Yin, 2018, p. 15). Arguably, a case study approach has the capacity to unfold some dimensions of the theory/practice nexus with (Watts, 2019) in relation to the subject's 'care for the self' realised through reflexivity and writing. This paper involved the use of reflective journal entries ($n=18$) written after observing the teacher-researcher's own lessons ($n=18$) (Term 1 and Term 2, 2018), as well

as analytic memos ($n=4$) with the students' focus groups ($n=4$) (Term 1, mid-term, Term 1, end of term, Term 2, mid-term, Term 2, end of term, 2018).

Flick (2014) points out that in interpretive inquiry, researchers are not disinterested bystanders and their voices are supposed to be included in knowledge construction. Therefore, the teacher-researcher's reflexivity while undertaking data collection and analysis—was recorded as analytical memos (Saldana, 2016) and became a part of the data, which Drake (2010) recognises as an effort toward 'self-triangulation'. A benefit of drawing on both teaching and research reflection is that it strengthens the argument that reflexivity can serve as a space—within practitioner inquiry—to objectify oneself as an ethical subject at the intersection of inquiry and practice. It also illustrates some of the ways research ethics and classroom ethics can overlap and shape each other.

Based upon Foucault's (1990) four-part ethical framework, conceptualisation of 'ethical substance', 'mode of subjection', 'forms of elaboration' and 'telos' were applied as codes to deductively analyse the two data sources—the reflective journal entries and analytic memos of the students' focus groups. The analysis broadly followed the steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). To reinforce reliability, data have been analysed by two researchers who are familiar with the theoretical framework through e-mail correspondences to minimise biases (Flick, 2014; Morais & Neves, 2010), before reaching consensus on the reliability of the analytical process (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

A teacher-researcher's reflective journey

This section draws on Foucauldian theory to explore the teacher-researcher's reflective journey. The teacher-researcher came from Asian middle-class educational context and the focus is on her adaptation to an Australian low socioeconomic status (SES) primary school. Her familiarity with classification, framing and pedagogic discourse around Basil Bernstein, who passionately supports the rights of disadvantaged students (Bernstein, 2000), structured her thinking, pedagogic approach and consequently research practice in a range of ways. In placing her voice as central the analysis foregrounds the two-way flow of cultural knowledge; therefore the article seeks to make a contribution to knowledge about the development of 'ethic' within the teaching profession.

Developing an ethical pedagogical disposition

As a teacher-researcher, the lead author received all her compulsory education in the Chinese school system and worked as an English as a Second Language teacher prior

to her arrival in Australia in 2017. Her teaching and learning beliefs were entrenched in a teacher-directed approach, aligning with principles of traditional Chinese education and, as a result, she found herself uneasy with the constructivist philosophy underpinning the Australian educational system.

In the first year of her PhD, she was placed in two high schools in the Greater Western Sydney region to observe and assist the teachers teaching Chinese. During this experience, she witnessed a pedagogy featuring rote learning and students' disaffection and resistance (Xu, 2021a). Thereafter she was placed in a primary school, for 2 days a week teaching in 2018 where she was required to teach. Informed by her previous observational experiences at the secondary schools and reflections on literature reading, her early thinking and configuration of learning activities were sought to address empowering students. She found herself increasingly drawn to reflecting on the relationships between staff and students she witnessed:

It seems that in Australia, the pedagogical relationship between the teacher and students is less hierarchical and students are encouraged to take control of learning. Students love group activities and autonomous learning, of which they can spend hours on searching information online, discussion with peers and working collaboratively with less emphasis on teachers. This is their way of learning and it works here. (Journal entry, 2018/02/07)

The observing experiences contributed to the development within herself concerning a belief that power could be regulated with minimum domination, so she entered her teaching with an understanding that a good teacher in Australia would foster a balance of power within the classroom where students and the teacher work collaborated productively. This presents a stark contrast to her previous teaching beliefs around autonomous learning in a Chinese contexts where 'searching information online, discussion with peers and working collaboratively with less emphasis on teachers', is generally considered as a waste of classroom time from the traditional view of Chinese (Huang, 2005).

At the very beginning, the teacher-researcher was challenged as the lessons she delivered did not meet her expectations which resulted in intensive reflections regarding how to adapt her pedagogic practices to better align with her 'telos' as a teacher:

Last week I taught 12 colours and students learnt them quickly, so I taught 18 kinds of food in today's lesson. However, too many words made them feel confused and lose interest. Therefore, I have to balance the amount of knowledge to teach in each lesson. It coincides with Bernstein's claim that weaker framing

suits students from disadvantaged backgrounds. (Journal entry, 2018/04/11).

Through the challenges she encountered, the teacher-researcher centred her reflective practice on framing—'how' to teach, particularly the pacing of the subject being taught (Bernstein, 2000)—in an effort to move closer to telos as a certain mode of being. This shift from 'technologies of domination' to 'technologies of the self' involved the work of destabilising accustomed ways of teaching and modifying her relation to the present professional context (Ball, 2016). Resistance manifested when she had to confront her values and skills and reflect upon how they could align with everyday practice (Zembylas, 2003).

During this time, the teacher-researcher's reflexivity was a fostered through reflective journal writing where ethical substance was considered as she strove to achieve professionalism in the foreign cultural context (Donati & Archer, 2015). Part of her journey to professionalism was how she engaged with educational theory (e.g. '*weaker framing suits students from disadvantaged backgrounds*') allowing her to recognise herself 'as obliged to put into practice' (Foucault, 1990, p. 27) what she has learned. It is notable that her reflective practice was centred on herself and the development of her pedagogies in a foreign context which suggests continual ethical work (Foucault, 1980a; Gore, 1995a). Her words like '*I have to balance the amount of knowledge*' suggest engagement with modes of subjection formed as an essential part of practice of the self and pedagogic practices in relation to students. Reflexivity evidences through reflective writings served as a vehicle for bringing awareness of power relations that might arise in the teaching process (Phelan & Kinsella, 2013). In the follow-up lessons, she prepared both basic and spare learning materials so as to productively exercise power in a way that encouraged students to recognise and develop their own ethical selves.

Developing an ethical research disposition

Qualitative studies are limited by the sensitivity and integrity of the researcher (Hellowell, 2006), and this indicates that caution is required when undertaking practitioner inquiry (Sultana, 2007). Though the insider's role afforded the privilege of gaining empathy, trust and rapport in the school setting, it has the potential to impede the research process in terms of bias. According to Mercer (2007), people may temper or distort the truth within the context of insider research. Methodologists, therefore, often recommend writing analytic memos that document reflections on data analysis processes (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Saldana, 2016), since 'good research is not about good methods as much as it is about good thinking' (Stake, 1995, p. 19).

In this practitioner inquiry case study, the researcher disposition contributed to the teacher-researcher's reflexivity, where the aim in documenting her reflections was to be thoughtful and impartial. The analytic memos were kept for critical reflexivity and to ensure validity as the teacher-researcher developed over time:

I do not think students felt 'a bit enjoyable' or OK with the grammar learning, though they said they did. When listening to audio-recordings of focus groups, I found their choices of words and tones were less passionate compared to describing other learning activities. Recalling the grammar lesson and retrieving the day's journal entry, students seemed not very much engaged. I feel this is their euphemistic rhetoric of not offending me, as a teacher. (Analytic memo, 2018/05/30)

The teacher-researcher encountered more than once that student participants used neutral, unsentimental words to describe specific learning activities. As the ethical imperative was to attend to the micro dimension of research practice in order to foster improved pedagogical practice, this involved being sensitive to how participants' voices are interpreted and represented (Phelan & Kinsella, 2013). In reflecting on the participant's tone, the attempt was to contextualise students' discourse, using her sensibility and insider knowledge to judge if students were pleasing adults and holding views.

Furthermore, technologies of the self and deep engagement in self-reflection served as a catalyst that drew the teacher-researcher's telos to the surface of her consciousness (Lilja, 2018). In a moral sense, her telos of striving to become a good—or ethical—researcher incorporated the notion of integrity, rigour in order to better develop professional judgements aligned with the Australian context. In surveying the data, the teacher-researcher actively constructed an ethical self by extensive memo writing while concurrently referring to educational and methodology research. Literature was used to confirm as well as compare examined evidence in reporting the results, so as to 'enhance sensitivity to subtle nuances in data' (Tuckett, 2005, p. 79) and 'offer anew in terms of the theory's development or refutation' (Marks & Yardley, 2004, p. 5). Therefore, her 'ethical self' was tied in with a perception that qualitative researchers need to overcome undue influence of personal bias through using literature as an empirical counterweight (Ellis-Caird, 2017; Greene, 2014).

A collaborative dialogue between ethical pedagogical and research dispositions

There were many times during this practitioner inquiry that the identities of teacher and researcher, the role of insider and outsider, knowledge consumer and producer, were

blurred (Lingard & Renshaw, 2010). In exploring the ethical dimension of becoming a teacher in a foreign environment, attention to ‘the dialectic’ of practitioner inquiry (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Mockler, 2014), and the following excerpts provide some insight into a dialogue on ethics between inquiry and practice:

It could be seen Dominic and Zeek were very excited about talking what they wanted to learn next term. ‘Zeek and I can do it’ indicates Dominic believes in his and his peer’s with Zeek who responded ‘Do this, do this!’ It seems that they were eager to be heard and really looked forward to what will happen next term. In fostering a reciprocal learning environment, I will have to incorporate what they want (making Chinese knot) into following lessons. (Analytic memo, 2018/04/12)

As part of each focus group, the teacher-researcher would ask students what they like and what they do not like based on the delivered lessons. She would also seek comments from student participants on what they want to learn in the upcoming lessons, as a strategy of fulfilling her telos of ‘privileging student voice’. This ‘ethical’ practice signaled the teacher-researcher’s disruption from her Chinese understandings of teaching and learning, which are more textbook-based, examination-oriented practices (Hu, 2002, 2004). It appears that she was adapting to a more Australian way of teaching, as she reflected that a student-focused pedagogy was more aligned with the context, where incorporating what students want to learn can ‘*foster a reciprocal learning environment*’.

Adopting a more democratic teaching style was further extended as she responded to students’ voice and encouraged students to share their voices in the learning space:

One week before the lesson, I told Dominic and Zeek that I was going to deliver the Chinese knot making lesson next week and tentatively asked if they were still interested in making it happen. They took the offer and got some materials from me so they can practise at home first. What they did today really surprised me—they stood in front of the whole class and demonstrated what they have learned from YouTube and their cultural (Philippine) way of making knots. I stepped back and became a listener and learner, intervening at times if clarification needed. Their voices as capable learners and their reflections on engaging in this craft were eloquently articulated and heard by everyone in the classroom. (Journal entry, 2018/06/29)

Not only does the practice of canvassing students’ opinions on what they want to learn indicate a shift in practice, the journal entry evidences her continuous efforts to reflect in order to conduct ethical work around culturally appropriate pedagogy. Her journey as a teacher involved *forms of*

elaboration as the ‘ethical work that one performs on oneself’ to ‘attempt to transform oneself into the ethical subject of one’s behaviour’ (Foucault, 1990, p. 27).

The teacher-researcher’s adherence to the ideas presented in policy documents and research literatures informed her sense of ethics, as she refrained herself from abusing the position of authority that was more authoritarian and aligned with the Chinese contexts, which suggests her technologies of the self and a possible self-transformation (Foucault, 1990; Lilja, 2018). Here, within this case study, research ethics and classroom ethics became aligned and complement each other, as the former infuses the latter, becoming an ‘everyday ethics’ that guides the enactment of pedagogy (Mockler, 2014). Furthermore, in considering the wider data collection, the privileging of student voice in the focus groups contributed to providing further opportunities in the classroom space. This ethical work helped to ensure that the teacher-researcher’s exercise of power over the students was a productive and moral exercise in the way it empowered students to care for their own learning and ethical selves (Niesche & Haase, 2012).

Discussion

Practitioner research is a study of the development of ethical practice, wherein research and pedagogic practice are scrutinised specifically in regards to how they shape each other through professional development and learning (Mockler, 2014). Reflexivity, and reflective practice, is integral to how teachers develop responses to ethical dilemmas as it sensitises one to what is culturally appropriate and foreground the richness of practice and inquiry (Phelan & Kinsella, 2013).

Through using a Foucauldian ethical framework, the article has nuanced some of the ways the Chinese teacher-researcher straddling the fields of research and classroom practice in an effort to construct an ethical self. Noticeably, her reflective process was entangled with power relations to legitimise or delegitimise certain teaching and researching practices (Zembylas, 2014) as well as the educational research she was reading. The ethical work of classroom pedagogic enactment is not simply conforming to abstract codes of behaviours enshrined in a rule, a law, or a value, rather it is a history of ethics and *askésis* where training and self-discipline are deployed as a way to act upon, examine, reflect and transform oneself (Foucault, 1990). Over time, self-knowledge and truth-telling were produced which, in turn, enabled the teacher-researcher to become more critical. Through a process of struggle around ‘care for the self’ (Ball, 2016), it could be argued her ethical position (and efforts made around upholding the ethical position) contributed to the dynamic and evolving set of power relations (Niesche & Haase, 2012).

The research disposition, structured by the teacher-researcher's experience, in turn, kept her reading informative literatures on teaching while writing analytic memos in an effort to make scientific, objective induction and deduction to the natural happenings. The insider experiential knowledge the teacher-researcher has of the students led to more 'subjective' and contextualised judgements regarding the students' answers (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2007). In this sense, a domination of self over self perhaps elevated the rigour and quality of practitioner inquiry in terms of developing less superficial forms of insight (Lingard & Renshaw, 2010).

In considering how one Chinese teacher's reflexivity can contribute to the construction of an 'ethical self' in a forging context, moral conducts such as 'empowering students' and 'giving voice to young people' permeated into both research and classroom practice, what Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) describe as a reciprocal and symbiotic relationship. In this practitioner inquiry, ethics of practice in the classroom and in the research process impacted upon each other, constituting 'cross-field effects' (Rawolle, 2005; Rawolle & Lingard, 2013) and a 'connecting web' (Lingard & Renshaw, 2010), directing towards educational transformation and social justice. As such, reflexivity and ethics of self-care emphasised genuine and authentic concerns with regards to the wider agenda of educational and social justice, moving beyond the local context and improving professional practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009).

Conclusion

This article detailed a case study of the ethical work that a cross-cultural teacher-researcher engaged in. We have taken the notion of reflexivity as an ethical substance that she used to constitute part of her behaviour that is relevant for moral conduct (Foucault, 1990). Educational theory functioned as a regime, or a mode of subjection, which facilitated the development of 'technologies of the self' (Foucault, 1988) where she engaged in forms of elaboration. The writings of journal entries and analytic memos functioned as a space where the teacher-researcher could explore the 'aesthetics of existence' (Ball & Olmedo, 2013) and struggled to develop appropriate 'conducts' (Allan, 2013), that is, attending to power relations, exercising sound culturally-responsive judgements. Her Chinese educational experience, as a structural force, enables her to engage in a continuous process of negotiations, renegotiations, tensions and conflicts that reflect the diversity of personal and sociocultural experiences that she participates in (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011).

The case presented here is neither a panacea for continual educational and ethical issues, nor an exceptional example for citing. Rather, the critical endeavour presents a

personal approach that can allow transnational educational researchers and teacher-researchers to govern themselves in reflective ways within the intercultural space. Such reflection requires a well thought out and deliberate ethical base, which is incessantly redefined through reflective practices. The theoretical tool provided in this article can help teachers with Chinese background examine ethics in both teaching and research practices, as a necessary step towards better schools and a social justice agenda in the democratic Australian society.

The research also has important implications for teacher education internationally. Given the global forces of the internationalisation of education and the consequent local challenges for training transnational pre-service teachers to navigate new and unfamiliar education contexts, we need to be conscious of the work on the self around resolving the possible tension in the cross-cultural teaching environments. Beyond focusing solely on teachers' skills and knowledge development, we offer an alternative approach to understanding transnational teachers' professional development and how they may labour towards the telos they wish to achieve. This article sheds light on how reflexivity and Foucault's ethical dimension are integral to how international practicum are structured.

Funding This work was supported by the Peak Discipline Construction Project of Education at East China Normal University.

Declarations

Conflict of interest N/A.

Ethical approval Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee at Western Sydney University, Australia.

Consent to participate Verbal and signed consent to participate were sought from teacher and student participants, parents/caregivers.

References

- Akkerman, S. F., & Meijer, P. C. (2011). A dialogical approach to conceptualizing teacher identity. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 27(2), 308–319.
- Allan, J. (2013). Foucault and his acolytes: Discourse, power and ethics. In M. Murphy (Ed.), *Social theory and education research* (pp. 33–46). Routledge.
- Archer, M. S. (2007). *Making our way through the world: Human reflexivity and social mobility*. Cambridge University Press.
- Ball, S. J. (2016). Subjectivity as a site of struggle: Refusing neoliberalism? *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 37(8), 1129–1146.
- Ball, S. J., & Olmedo, A. (2013). Care of the self, resistance and subjectivity under neoliberal governmentalities. *Critical Studies in Education*, 54(1), 85–96.

- Bazzul, J. (2017). The 'subject of ethics' and educational research OR Ethics or politics? Yes please! *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 49(10), 995–1005.
- Bentley-Williams, R., & Morgan, J. (2013). Inclusive education: Pre-service teachers' reflexive learning on diversity and their challenging role. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 41(2), 173–185.
- Bernstein, B. (2000). *Pedagogy, symbolic control and identity: Theory, research, critique* (Revised). Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 11(4), 589–597.
- Chow, C. J. (2019). Asian American teachers in US classrooms: Identity performances and pedagogical practices. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, 29(1), 21–41.
- Christie, P. (2005). Education for an ethical imagination. *Social Alternatives*, 24(4), 39–44.
- Clayton, K. A. (2013). Looking beneath the surface: A critical reflection on ethical issues and reflexivity in a practitioner inquiry. *Reflective Practice*, 14(4), 506–518.
- Cochran-Smith, M., & Lytle, S. L. (2009). *Inquiry as stance: Practitioner research for the next generation*. Teachers College Press.
- Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (3rd ed.). SAGE.
- Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. SAGE.
- Dewey, J. (1933). *How we think: A restatement of the relation of reflective thinking to the educative process*. Prometheus Books.
- Donati, P., & Archer, M. S. (2015). *The relational subject*. Cambridge University Press.
- Drake, P. (2010). Grasping at methodological understanding: A cautionary tale from insider research. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 33(1), 85–99.
- Ellis-Caird, H. (2017). Let me in! A comment on insider research. *European Journal of Psychotherapy & Counselling*, 19(1), 87–96.
- Feucht, F. C., Brownlee, J. L., & Schraw, G. (2017). Moving beyond reflection: Reflexivity and epistemic cognition in teaching and teacher education. *Educational Psychologist*, 52(4), 234–241.
- Flick, U. (2014). *An introduction to qualitative research*. SAGE.
- Foucault, M. (1984) *The ethic of care for the self as a practice of freedom: An interview with michel foucault on January 20, 1984/Interviewer: R. Fernet-Betancourt, H. Becker, & A. Gomze-Muller*.
- Foucault, M. (1980a). 7 Power and strategies. In C. Gordon (Ed.), *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings 1972–1977* (pp. 134–146). Pantheon Books.
- Foucault, M. (1980b). *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings, 1972–1977*. Pantheon.
- Foucault, M. (1981). The hermeneutics of the subject. *Lectures at the Collège de France, 1982*. Macmillan.
- Foucault, M. (1988). *Technologies of the self: A seminar with Michel Foucault*. University of Massachusetts Press.
- Foucault, M. (1990). *The use of pleasure: The history of sexuality* (1st ed., Vol. 2). Vintage Books.
- Foucault, M. (1991). *The Foucault Reader: An introduction to Foucault's thought*. Penguin Books Ltd.
- Foucault, M. (2000). *Ethics: Subjectivity and truth: The essential works of Foucault 1954–1984*. Penguin Book Ltd.
- Foucault, M. (2007). *Security, territory, population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–78*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Gore, J. M. (1995a). Foucault's poststructuralism and observational education research: A study of power relations. In R. Smith & P. Wexler (Eds.), *After Postmodernism: Education, politics and identity* (pp. 70–80). The Falmer Press.
- Gore, J. M. (1995b). On the continuity of power relations in pedagogy. *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 5(2), 165–188.
- Greene, M. (2014). On the inside looking in: Methodological insights and challenges in conducting qualitative insider research. *The Qualitative Report*, 19(29), 1–13.
- Groundwater-Smith, S., & Mockler, N. (2007). Ethics in practitioner research: An issue of quality. *Research Papers in Education*, 22(2), 199–211.
- Hellawell, D. (2006). Inside–out: Analysis of the insider–outsider concept as a heuristic device to develop reflexivity in students doing qualitative research. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 11(4), 483–494.
- Hope, A. (2013). Foucault, panopticism and school surveillance research. In M. Murphy (Ed.), *Social theory and education research* (pp. 47–63). Routledge.
- Howe, K. R. (2004). A critique of experimentalism. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 10(1), 42–61.
- Hu, G. (2002). Recent important developments in secondary English-language teaching in the People's Republic of China. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 15(1), 30–49.
- Hu, G. (2004). Pedagogical practices in Chinese EFL classrooms. *Asian Englishes*, 7(1), 42–59.
- Huang, R. (2005). Chinese international students' perceptions of the problem-based learning experience. *Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism Education*, 4(2), 36–43.
- Kleinsasser, A. M. (2000). Researchers, reflexivity, and good data: Writing to unlearn. *Theory into Practice*, 39(3), 155–162.
- Kohli, R., & Pizarro, M. (2016). Fighting to educate our own: Teachers of color, relational accountability, and the struggle for racial justice. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 49(1), 72–84.
- Lilja, M. (2018). The politics of time and temporality in Foucault's theorisation of resistance: Ruptures, time-lags and decelerations. *Journal of Political Power*, 11(3), 419–432. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2158379X.2018.1523319>
- Lingard, B., & Renshaw, P. (2010). Teaching as a research-informed and research-informing profession. In A. Campbell & S. Groundwater-Smith (Eds.), *Connecting inquiry and professional learning in education* (pp. 26–39). Routledge.
- Lomer, S. (2017). *Recruiting international students in higher education: Representations and rationales in British policy*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Marks, D. F., & Yardley, L. (2004). *Research methods for clinical and health psychology*. SAGE.
- McCabe, J. L., & Holmes, D. (2009). Reflexivity, critical qualitative research and emancipation: A Foucauldian perspective. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 65(7), 1518–1526.
- Mercer, J. (2007). The challenges of insider research in educational institutions: Wielding a double-edged sword and resolving delicate dilemmas. *Oxford Review of Education*, 33(1), 1–17.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis* (2nd ed.). SAGE.
- Mockler, N. (2014). When 'research ethics' become 'everyday ethics': The intersection of inquiry and practice in practitioner research. *Educational Action Research*, 22(2), 146–158.
- Moloney, R., & Xu, H. L. (2015). Transitioning beliefs in teachers of Chinese as a Foreign Language: An Australian case study. *Cogent Education*, 2(1), 1–15.
- Morais, A., & Neves, I. P. (2010). Basil Bernstein as an inspiration for educational research: Specific methodological approaches. In P. Singh, A. R. Sadovnik, & S. F. Semel (Eds.), *Toolkits, translation devices and conceptual accounts: Essays on Basil Bernstein's sociology of knowledge* (pp. 11–32). Peter Lang Publishing.
- Niesche, R., & Haase, M. (2012). Emotions and ethics: A Foucauldian framework for becoming an ethical educator. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 44(3), 276–288.

- Niesche, R., & Keddie, A. (2011). Foregrounding issues of equity and diversity in educational leadership. *School Leadership & Management*, 31(1), 65–77.
- Niesche, R., & Keddie, A. (2016). *Leadership, ethics and schooling for social justice*. Routledge.
- O'Farrell, C. (2005). *Michel Foucault*. Sage.
- Orton, J. (2016). Issues in Chinese language teaching in Australian school. *Chinese Education & Society*, 49(6), 369–375.
- Phelan, S. K., & Kinsella, E. A. (2013). Picture this...safety, dignity, and voice—Ethical research with children: Practical considerations for the reflexive researcher. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 19(2), 81–90.
- Pitsoe, V., & Letseka, M. (2013). Foucault's discourse and power: Implications for instructionist classroom management. *Open Journal of Philosophy*, 3(1), 23–28.
- Powell, M. A., Graham, A., & Truscott, J. (2016). Ethical research involving children: Facilitating reflexive engagement. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 16(2), 197–208.
- Rawolle, S. (2005). Cross-field effects and temporary social fields: A case study of the mediatization of recent Australian knowledge economy policies. *Journal of Education Policy*, 20(6), 705–724.
- Rawolle, S., & Lingard, B. (2013). Bourdieu and educational research: Thinking tools, relational thinking, beyond epistemological innocence. *Social theory and education research: Understanding Foucault, Habermas, Bourdieu and Derrida* (pp. 117–137). Routledge.
- Saldana, J. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (3rd ed.). SAGE.
- Singh, M., & Han, J. (2009). Engaging Chinese ideas through Australian education research: Using chéngyǔ to connect intellectual projects across 'peripheral' nations. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 30(4), 397–411.
- Singh, M., & Han, J. (2010a). Peer review, Bourdieu and honour: Connecting Chinese and Australian intellectual projects. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 31(2), 185–198.
- Singh, M., & Han, J. (2010b). Teacher education for World English speaking pre-service teachers: Making transnational knowledge exchange for mutual learning. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 26(6), 1300–1308. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2010.03.004>
- Singh, M., Rizvi, F., & Shrestha, M. (2007). Student mobility and the spatial production of cosmopolitan identities. In K. N. Gulson & C. Symes (Eds.), *Spatial theories of education: Policy and geography matters* (pp. 205–224). Routledge.
- Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. SAGE.
- Stein, S. (2019). Critical internationalization studies at an impasse: Making space for complexity, uncertainty, and complicity in a time of global challenges. *Studies in Higher Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2019.1704722>
- Sultana, F. (2007). Reflexivity, positionality and participatory ethics: Negotiating fieldwork dilemmas in international research. *An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies*, 6(3), 374–385.
- Tikly, L. (2004). Education and the new imperialism. *Comparative Education*, 40(2), 173–198. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0305006042000231347>
- Tuckett, A. G. (2005). Applying thematic analysis theory to practice: A researcher's experience. *Contemporary Nurse*, 19(1–2), 75–87.
- Watts, L. (2019). Reflective practice, reflexivity, and critical reflection in social work education in Australia. *Australian Social Work*, 72(1), 8–20.
- Xu, W. (2021a). Dominic's story: The 'pedagogy of discomfort' and learner identity in flux. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15348458.2021.1988604>
- Xu, W. (2021b). Fostering affective engagement in Chinese language learning: A Bernsteinian account. *Language and Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09500782.2021.1936543>
- Xu, W., & Knijnik, J. (2021). Critical Chinese as an additional language education in Australia: A journey to voices, courage and hope. *British Educational Research Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3747>
- Xu, W., & Stahl, G. (2021). Teaching Chinese with Chinese characteristics: 'difficult' knowledge, discomfoting pedagogies and student engagement. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2021.1881995>
- Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (6th ed.). SAGE.
- Zembylas, M. (2003). Interrogating "teacher identity": Emotion, resistance, and self-formation. *Educational Theory*, 53(1), 107–127.
- Zembylas, M. (2014). The place of emotion in teacher reflection: Elias, Foucault and 'critical emotional reflexivity.' *Power and Education*, 6(2), 210–222.
- Zhao, W. (2019). 'Observation' as China's civic education pedagogy and governance: an historical perspective and a dialogue with Michel Foucault. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 40(6), 789–802.

Publisher's Note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.