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A Multiple-Case Study of Chinese Student Teachers' Micropolitical Literacy in Teaching Practicum Conflicts in Chinese Contexts

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A MULTIPLE-CASE STUDY OF CHINESE STUDENT TEACHERS'

MICROPOLITICAL LITERACY IN TEACHING PRACTICUM CONFLICTS IN CHINESE

CONTEXTS

by

Huiyin Li

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November 20th, 2019

A Dissertation Presented to the Faculty of the Doctor of Education Leadership Department in

partial fulfillment for the degree of Doctor of Education

GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

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"A MULTIPLE-CASE STUDY OF CHINESE STUDENT TEACHERS'
MICROPOLITICAL LITERACY IN TEACHING PRACTICUM CONFLICTS IN
CHINESE CONTEXTS", a Doctoral research project prepared by Huiyin Li in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Education degree in
Educational Leadership.

This dissertation has been approved and accepted by:

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine the micropolitical literacy of four former Chinese English Foreign Language (EFL) student teachers in handling conflicts during their practicum in Chinese urban practicum schools. Each participant graduated from an EFL teacher education program after their completion of practicum and worked as a school English teacher. The researcher sought to investigate the participants' conflict experiences and how they made sense of and responded to the micropolitics of their practicum. This study utilized in-depth personal interviews to explore former student teachers' practicum conflict experiences. Four major themes were identified in the analysis process of the study: a) All STs acquiesced in and demonstrated deference to the power differential between them and their mentors; (b) STs reported more negative emotions in conflicts with mentors than with their students; (c) Most STs felt the impact of the struggle between exam-oriented education and quality-oriented education; and (d) STs acknowledged their potential to influence their mentors, indicating practicum could be bilateral. Implications from the study suggest the importance of micropolitical literacy in student teachers' smooth and successful navigation in practicum, highlight the need for teacher educators to assume a liberating view of their roles in practicum, and call for universities to incorporate micropolitics of school into curriculum.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"Help!" An English student teacher sent me this message one morning in our practicum group WeChat (a popular multi-functional social media platform in China). Another student teacher in the group followed it up with the same "Help!" In approximately two weeks their teaching practicum would be over. Being a supervisor for the first time, I treated their request seriously. My cohort leader informed me these two student teachers refused the task imposed upon them by a Chinese teacher in the practicum school but were concerned about the consequence of their refusal. The task itself wasn't hard at all but was the last straw due to student teachers' mounting dissatisfaction with their mentor throughout their practicum. Considering the university-school partnership and for the interest of my student teachers, I intervened cautiously.

Though the conflict got resolved with my intervention, it produced unexpected outcomes. After implementing the one-child policy for more than three decades, China issued its two-child policy in 2016. Many incumbent teachers took the plunge to try to have their second child, which resulted in a temporary shortage of teachers in many schools. Schools welcomed student teachers more than ever as they were expected to relieve the workload and pressure resulting from both pregnant teachers and teachers on maternity leave. There was no exception in the school where my student teachers conducted their practicum. What transpired was that the number of student teachers who opted to do practicum in this school in the following year dropped from six in the previous year to two. This sharp drop alerted the school liaison and she kept searching for

an explanation. Apparently, the conflicts the student teachers had encountered one year earlier caused some negative impact.

Teaching practicums play a vital role in training teachers. Practicum refers to the professional practice of teacher education, during which the teacher candidate works in a classroom as a teacher. It is highly regarded by both student teachers and teacher educators. To former student teachers, practicum is a "significant milestone"(Graham, 2006, p.1118) in their life experience, the most valuable part of teacher education (Wilson, 2006), as well as an important means for personal development and growth (Yan & He, 2010). To teacher educators, practicum is the capstone experience in teacher education (Burns, Jacobs, & Yendol-hoppey, 2016), the best way to train teachers (Bullock, 2011) and the most valued part of teacher preparation (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005; Cross & Dunn, 2016; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Feiman-Nemser & Buchman, 1983). Many countries regard the practicum as an integral component in preparing prospective teachers (Canh, 2014; Grudnoff, 2011; Mtika, 2011; Seban, 2015) and an indicator of the quality of teacher education (Cross & Dunn, 2016; Sudzina & Knowles, 1992). Due to its importance to teacher education, the practicum has garnered growing attention worldwide (Cohen, Hoz, & Kaplan, 2013). This attention has led to calls for reform in America and other nations to ensure high-quality practicum experiences (Burns, Jacobs, & Yendol-hoppey, 2016).

The Chinese government is no exception to these calls for reform. Dedicated to produce a high-quality teacher team, the Ministry of Education (MoE) has issued a series of directives and policies to improve the quality of practicums, which specified the goal of practicums in teacher education, offered guidance in the standardization of its

operation (MoE, 2016), required that practicums be lengthened to at least one semester

in compulsory education (Ministry of Education, 2017), and proposed conducting

teaching practicums in high-quality schools (MoE, 2018). It is expected that these

initiatives can contribute to student teachers' success and development and nation-wide

teacher quality (Ministry of Education, 2017; 2018).

One basis for reform and a means to improve the quality of a practicum is to

examine and have a good understanding of the conflicts student teachers have

encountered in practicums. Though conflict is perceived and defined differently by

people, according to Cuban (2001), it is "a situation in which a gap is found between

what is and what ought to be"(p. 4), causing struggles within an individual's mind or

between and among people (Boulter, Bergen, Miller, & Wells, 2001). It is a common

phenomenon in human interactions (Azim, 2017) and represents incompatibility,

disagreement, or a difference between people (Rahim, 2001). Examining and resolving

conflicts thus offers an effective and diagnostic approach to improving practicums.

Conflicts, tensions, and dilemma are the common themes in the research of the

teaching practicum. Smagorinsky, Cook, Moore, Jackson, & Fry (2004) and John (2001)

analyzed the tensions between student teachers and their mentors. Correa, Martínez-

Arbelaiz, & Gutierrez (2014) studied how student teachers dealt with the dilemmas and

conflicts they faced in their daily interactions with students, teaching colleagues, and the

practicum supervisor. Arguing that practicum was a struggling period for student

teachers, and susceptible to tensions, Pillen, Beijaard, and Brok (2013) derived a list of

13 types of conflicts from a substantial amount of literature, among which the top three

were: 1) treating students with care or strictness; 2) how to get balanced between a

private life and work; 3) different teaching methods with the mentor. Cohen et al. (2013) found 18 percent of their reviewed studies discussed the work relations in the practicum and identified seven sources of tension.

According to Zhu, Waxman, Rivera, & Burlbaw (2018), the practicum is "full of competing interests with different stakeholders" (p. 163). Serving as the interface between the university and the school, practicums provide student teachers border-crossing experiences that involve people with divergent experiences, roles, goals, expectations, understandings, and beliefs of teaching and learning. But what complicates matters is that most struggles and conflicts student teachers have experienced are invisible to mentors, supervisors, and teacher educators (Flores, 2004). Regardless of how conflicts make them feel—anger, helplessness, awareness of their own shortcomings—many student teachers did not turn to their mentors or supervisors for help but "put up with the situation" (Pillen, Beijaard, & Brok, 2013, p. 253). This finding aligns with Maynard and Furlong (2001), Rajuan, Beijaard, & Verloop (2010), and Leshem (2012), that unresolved conflicts result in student teachers missing valuable learning opportunities.

While conflicts are not uncommon in practicums, a good relationship is usually considered valuable to student teachers' learning and growth (Allen, Perl, Goodson, & Sprouse, 2017). A collegial relationship is viewed as facilitating learning to teach and reflecting over teaching and learning (Nelson & Friedlander, 2001). Supervisors can assist in solving practical problems and emotional conflicts, encourage and support student teachers' creativity (Correa, Martínez-Arbelaiz, & Gutierrez, 2014). Mentors often offer practical skills in teaching and managing students, answer the needs of student

teachers (Martin, Snow, & Torrez, 2011), and influence student teachers' attitudes and beliefs (Cochran-Smith, 1991). Caruso (2000) regards the relationships between the student teacher and the mentor as the core of the practicum. Therefore, the study of practicum conflicts is of vital significance.

Despite the status the practicum enjoys and the common occurrence of conflicts in the practicum, conflicts have been inadequately addressed in China. Culture plays a vital role in deciding people's perceptions of conflict and conflict handling (Hofstede, 1980). On one hand, Chinese culture focuses on maintaining cohesion and harmony (Hall, 1971). Conflicts are regarded as "a detractor from harmony" (Chen, 2002) as they are ascribed with dishonorable qualities such as tension, confrontation, destruction, disagreement, or dispute; therefore, they should be avoided, discouraged, and downplayed.

On the other hand, Chinese culture is a high-context culture (Hall, 1971) with meanings embedded in the context rather than direct speech (Hyland & Lo, 2006). In this culture, social hierarchy and submission to hierarchy are not supposed to be challenged. Traditional Chinese culture positions teachers high in the social hierarchy and treats teachers as being on the same level as those key cultural components including heaven, earth, the emperor, and parents (tian, di, jun, qin, shi) (Fwu & Wang, 2002; Gao, 2008). Therefore, mentors' and supervisors' authority are not expected to be challenged by student teachers. Moreover, teachers in China are expected to be "morally and ethically impeccable" (Gao, 2011, p. 486).

In such a context, student teachers find it hard to voice their challenges in order to tackle conflicts. Conflicts have been identified in the Chinese practicum by a small

number of studies (Wu & Chen, 2011; Yuan & Lee, 2016; Zhu, 2017; Zhu et al., 2018), outlining student teachers' struggles. Mentors and supervisors are not only the moral models but enjoy more power, whereas student teachers are positioned much lower in the same social hierarchy. Moreover, student teachers have to be evaluated by their mentors, supervisors, and even administrators. In confronting conflicts, student teachers find it risky to speak out. To evade negative evaluation, they resort to avoiding conflicts, adjusting themselves, and putting up with conflicts (Wu & Chen, 2011; Yuan & Lee, 2016), making a practicum "an experience to be endured rather than learned from" (Bullock, 2011, p. 135). In addition, student teachers only stay at the practicum school for a short period. To the school community, student teachers are "outsiders" or peripheral members at most, not afforded with trust and loyalty accorded to the "insiders" in the Chinese culture (Gao, 1996); this exacerbates the vulnerabilities of student teachers in their practicums and makes it even harder for them to tackle conflicts.

According to Blasé (1991), the strategies student teachers employ to protect their welfare and to further their interest are called *micropolitics*. Strategies vary on the continuum from being reactive to proactive, encompassing acquiescence, conformity, ingratiation, diplomacy, passive-aggressiveness and confrontation (Blasé, 1988). If a student teacher is competent in navigating through the practicum based on his/her interpretation of the practicum realities and deliberation of corresponding strategies of handling conflict, he/she is said to have a high micropolitical literacy. Although micropolitical literacy in the practicum is under-researched (Ehrich & Millwater, 2011), a growing body of literature has addressed how micropolitical literacy in various educational settings contributes to a deeper understanding of teacher teaching and

learning (Conway, Rawlings, & Hibbard, 2018; Curry, Jaxon, Russell, Callahan, & Bicais, 2008; Gomes, Jones, Batista, & Mesquita, 2018; Tan, 2015). Blasé (1991) thinks that student teachers' micropolitical literacy reflects their positive capacity to be committed to the profession and contributes to the development of teacher identity. Student teachers' micropolitical literacy in a practicum deserves investigation.

Statement of Problem

The practicum is designed to serve the teaching and learning of student teachers. But various unresolved conflicts in the teaching practicum compromise its achievement, despite its potential for growth and learning. In addition, Chinese culture that stresses harmony and prescribes a hierarchical relationship between mentors/supervisors and student teachers can further hinder its fulfilment, as conflicts seem less evident or invisible to teacher educators with greater power (Bang & Goodyear, 2014). These factors lead to inadequate discussion of Chinese student teachers' conflict experiences in their practicum periods. Problems cannot get addressed without being recognized. To reform and to improve practicums, a detailed study of student teachers' conflictual experiences is necessary. Micropolitics is about the use of power to influence and to protect (Blasé,1991). Despite its contribution to teacher learning and development, this approach has been under-utilized in studying practicums.

Purpose of Research

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine Chinese student teachers' micropolitical literacy in practicum conflicts by describing graduate Chinese English Foreign Language (EFL) student teachers' conflict experiences in urban practicum schools. Specifically, I conducted personal interviews with former EFL student

teachers. Their practicum conflict experiences were coded to explore the causes of conflicts and coping strategies from a micropolitical perspective.

By describing in depth how former student teachers experienced and coped with conflicts in their practicums in a teacher education program in one Chinese university, this study investigated student teachers' micropolitical literacy and awareness of micropolitical realities of the educational settings in both the university and the school, while pointing out issues that could be addressed by schools and teacher education programs. Findings offered insight as to how to help student teachers navigate the practicum more confidently and competently. By investigating student teachers' practicum conflicts and their conflict-coping strategies, this research draws attention and contributes to the study of Chinese student teachers' micropolitical literacy.

Research Questions

To gain an understanding of the micropolitical literacy of Chinese EFL student teachers in practicum, the following research questions were explored:

Research question #1

What do former Chinese student teachers' stories about their practicum experiences reveal about conflicts and conflict resolution within a practicum?

Research question #2

How does a micropolitical lens offer insight into the realities/experiences of student teaching in a Chinese context?

Definition of Terms

Practicum refers to the experience student teachers undergo as a teacher in a school classroom with school students. It means the same as other terms used in

international literature of teacher education, such as field experience, student teaching, clinical teaching, student internship, and teaching practice (Moody, 2009; White, & Forgasz, 2016). To avoid conceptual confusion, I use the term *practicum* in this study.

Student teachers (STs) are the fourth-year college students in a teacher education program in this study who are now doing their practicum at a school. Other terms which have been used in literature are pre-service students, teacher candidates, student interns, novices, and students of teaching. Again, this study used *student teachers* to differentiate them from undergraduate students at other stages in a teacher education program.

Mentors refer to the school-based teachers assigned to student teachers. They provide chances for STs to sit in their classrooms to observe their teaching, to use their classrooms and students to practice teaching, and to conduct managerial work or class activities with their students. They also need to offer feedback and suggestions to assist student teachers' success in practicum.

Subject mentors refer to the school-based mentors assigned to student teachers to assist their teaching in a specific subject in practicum. For example, if a student teacher majored in English, the practicum school will assign an English teacher to be the subject mentor. Their major responsibility is to deepen student teachers' understanding of the subject and help them to master pedagogical skills to deliver subject knowledge effectively.

A *Banzhuren*, or class teacher, is a teacher in charge of both the psychological and physical wellbeing and academic achievement of one class. It is a job and title accorded to a teacher who is in full charge of one class. She/he may teach a subject in this class or not teach any subject at all. The duties are extensive, including class-disciplining and

management, activity-organizing, taking care of students' physical, moral, intellectual, and mental development, as well as communicating with students' parents and holding parent-teacher conferences. *Banzhuren* is a prerequisite for all teachers for professional promotion.

Supervisors come from a university and are assigned to STs in a practicum. In supervision, they are expected to provide feedback based on STs' school performance and mediate between the university and the school. A number of terms have been used in literature, such as coordinator, mentor, and professors which means the same as the supervisor in this study.

Practicum placements or schools accept student teachers and assign mentors to them so that student teachers can fulfil a practicum. They usually form a partnership with universities or colleges of education or teachers.

Students are the pupils that student teachers teach within their practicum placement.

EFL stands for English as a foreign language, a term used to refer to the use of English by speakers whose native language is other than English. It shares the same meaning as teaching English for speakers of other languages (TESOL) and English as a second language (ESL).

CLT refers to communicative language teaching. It is a progressive language teaching method usually pitted against traditional language teaching methods. Due to its stress on providing learners with opportunities to use their English for communicative purposes (Mak, 2011), it is also regarded as a student-centered teaching method.

Conflict is a term hard to define despite being commonplace in human life. In this study, conflict refers to the situation of discomfort, disagreement, emotional frustrations,

relationship tensions, and internal and interaction struggles caused by different ideas and actions.

Limitations

This study was limited by a number of factors, three of which were prominent. The first limitation of this study was that it was context-bound due to several reasons. First, the study was conducted in Guangdong, the first province open to the world since China's Reform and Opening policy in 1978, a national policy to boost China's economic development. Due to its economic development and frequent exchanges with the world, especially with Hongkong, Guangdong Province embraces an open and internationally-oriented educational vision, comparatively speaking, which is much different from the other areas in China. Both the international exchanges and comparatively advanced educational orientation impact all the major stakeholders in the practicum. Second, this study focused on a small number of participants in a given context. All my interviewees were from only one university, which further limits the generalizability of the findings of the study to other contexts, although generalizability is not a major concern in qualitative studies (Gay, Mills, Airasian, 2012). Third, most of the partnered schools under study were urban foreign languages schools or experimental schools. Compared with other K-12 schools, these schools across China are specialized in one or more than one foreign language teaching and enjoy more international exchange opportunities; students usually come from medium-income families. Therefore, conflicts may be somewhat different from the conflicts STs would encounter in town or rural schools. This limitation sets a boundary on what and how far its findings can resonate with or be related to other contexts.

The second limitation was related to the fact that all the interviewees were graduates. Some participants were new graduates, but some graduated a couple of years ago. Although they could remember what happened in the conflicts, details may escape them.

The third limitation was social desirability bias. Wilson & Joye (2017) define social desirability response bias as " participants choose responses that make them appear more favorable" (p. 459), which was hard to avoid in this study. Especially if the interviewee tried to defend him/herself, they would provide what they thought was appropriate to build up a positive image of themselves instead of offering what they really thought had happened.

Delimitations

This study focused on former EFL STs' conflict experiences in their practicum periods enrolled in a four-year teacher education program in one university in Guangdong. It excluded STs who had completed their practicum but had not yet graduated from the university. It also excluded teacher education graduates in other subjects. Only EFL graduates who encountered major practicum conflicts in foreign languages schools in Guangdong province were included in the study. Interviews and other materials provided by participants were used for data collection. All interviews were conducted in China and in Chinese.

Bracketing

As a child born in a traditional Chinese family, I held a very limited understanding of conflict. Since I was taught to respect and never to challenge authority, I perceived conflicts as something negative which should be avoided and minimized as much as

possible. This perception often made me feel inferior about myself or doubt myself when I had conflicts with others. Experiences in adulthood challenged my long-held beliefs toward authority and conflict from time to time, and I came to learn 1) I was not at fault in all conflicts, and 2) I should not remain silent all the time.

I chose student teachers' micropolitical literacy in practicum conflicts as my dissertation topic because of my personal experience as a practicum supervisor. When I became a supervisor in 2016, I did not expect any conflicts in my supervision. When I was a student teacher, I took my mentor's words seriously and felt obligated to do whatever I was told to do. When my student teachers refused to cooperate with the practicum school teachers, I was acutely aware that today's student teachers were much different from my time. Their refusal was a manifestation of rebellion against the "mistreatments" they had encountered in their practicum, such as too much non-teaching work and disrespect for student teachers. Still, I was shocked at student teachers' direct confrontation and felt uneasy because inappropriate handling would result in a breakdown in the partnership between our university and the school.

During my investigation and negotiation, I was told by mentors that they did not realize their demands on student teachers would generate conflicts. They had student teachers before, treated them in the same way, and hadn't encountered objections or rebellions, which intrigued me into thinking. With more millennials entering the teaching profession, what should teacher educators do in order to smooth out the practicum? This became the motive for my dissertation writing. I sincerely hope this study can draw teacher educators' attention by representing student teachers' experiences. I also hope this study can lay a solid groundwork for future similar studies.

Significance of Study

This study is significant in at least three aspects. First, it contributes to the study of micropolitics. Despite achievements micropolitics has made in education, understanding supervision and mentoring from a micropolitical point of view fails to draw sufficient attention from educational researchers (Kelchtermans & Vanassche, 2017), which is similarly scantily addressed in a Chinese teaching practicum. This study adds itself to the body of micropolitical studies by not only examining student teachers' practicum conflicts from a micropolitical lens, but also in a Chinese context. Its findings in a Chinese context will complement and enrich the research of micropolitics in teacher education.

This study is significant in studying practicum practices from an understudied perspective. While much research examines practicum or student teaching from the orientations introduced by Calderhead & Shorrock (1997), including cognitive, technical, experiential, emotional, and social aspects, the political aspect is often ignored. This study looks at the practicum from this ignored orientation, specifically, the interplay between the political realities in practicum and student teachers. By situating student teachers in a real-life context and describing how they navigate their learning and teaching within, this study reveals the complexities and intricacies of the practicum from a micropolitical perspective.

Last but not least, Chinese student teachers often find it hard to voice their perceived conflicts due to power differentials. This study works as an outlet to make a student teacher's voice heard. By doing so, this study contributes to Chinese teacher educators' understanding of student teachers' difficulties and problems in the practicum.

It is also hoped that teacher educators in practicum policy-making and practicum reforming can be better informed, and that the educative value of the practicum can be optimized thereafter. It will be of significance if this study can make teacher educators aware of micropolitics in their professional development and learn to developing their own micropolitical literacy in the meantime.

Organization of Study

This dissertation has five parts in total. I began this introductory chapter with a vignette of my supervision experience to introduce the topic for my dissertation, before explaining the rationale of this study, the statement of problem, and the purpose of the research. In addition, my research questions are offered together with key terms, limitations, delimitations, as well as bracketing.

The second part is the literature review. This review includes three major themes: practicum, conflict, and micropolitics. In the practicum section, practicum is defined, and the Chinese practicum is detailed after an introduction to the context of Chinese educational reforms. In the conflict section, conflict is defined, followed by a review of types and causes of conflicts in both non-Chinese practicum contexts and the Chinese practicum. Finally, micropolitics and micropolitical literacy are introduced as the theoretical framework for this study.

The third part is methodology. In this part, case study is introduced and the rationale for case study in this research is presented. In addition, the setting, participants, research design, data collection and analysis, and research ethics are all addressed in this section.

The fourth part is findings. In this section, four participants shared their practicum experiences with conflicts revealed in episodes. Across these four cases, four themes emerged: (a) All STs acquiesced in and demonstrated deference to the power differential between them and their mentors; (b) STs reported more negative emotions in conflicts with mentors than with their students; (c) The struggle between exam-oriented education and quality-oriented education contributed to some of the conflicts STs experienced in practicum; and (d) STs acknowledged their potential to influence their mentors, indicating practicum could be bilateral.

The last part is the conclusion. In this section, my two research questions are answered. The significance based on the findings is discussed and recommendations for future research are suggested.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

As discussed in Chapter One, the study's purpose is to investigate STs'

micropolitical literacy by examining their practicum conflict experiences. Therefore, it is

important to explore what conflict experiences STs have encountered in the practicum

and to understand the causes and their handling of those conflicts. This chapter presents a

review of the literature related to my research focus: understanding of practicum,

understanding of conflicts, and micropolitics.

This review employed explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria to produce a

summary and synthesis of the research on teaching practicum, practicum problems or

conflicts, and micropolitics from academically peer-reviewed journals beginning in 2000

to the present. Take conflict for example. I didn't restrict the search to conflict only.

Rather, I expanded the key words to other terms related to conflicts. First, synonyms of

conflicts were used in searching, such as challenges, problems, frictions, clashes,

concerns, tensions, stress, and dilemma. So were the synonyms of the parties involved in

practicum conflicts, such as student teachers, pre-service teachers, student interns,

cooperating teachers, mentors, and supervisors, to name a few. Since this study addresses

Chinese EFL STs, other key terms used in searching were EFL, TESOL, and ESL.

Terms related to the interactions among the major stakeholders in practicum were

also taken into consideration: supervision, mentoring, coaching, and relationship.

Therefore, this review included a body of studies which examined practicum learning and

the interactions involved in practicum. The aim of this literature search was to identify

both empirical and theoretical studies about teaching practicum, practicum conflicts or

problems, and micropolitics. Some articles published before 2000 were included because they were frequently quoted by researchers, therefore too established and influential to be ignored. If found by searching in George Fox e-library, they were directly chosen as relevant references. Books, book chapters, documents, and conference papers that appeared during or before 2000 were all included in this study. In addition, important relevant Chinese literature was also reviewed for reference. The search engines employed were Science Direct, EBSCO, ERIC databases, google scholar, and CNKI, a Chinese academic database.

Understanding Practicum

Practicum is a renewed focus in educational research (Alamri, 2018; Anderson & Freebody, 2012; Lawson, Çakmak, Gündüz, & Busher, 2015). Some studies focus on how teacher educators provide mentoring and help to develop STs' professional skills and knowledge; some focus on how STs' teaching experiences influence their teacher identity development; others focus on the structures, paradigms, and practices of initial teacher education. More recently, relationships, evaluation, emotions, conflicts, tensions, and distress have assumed importance in research on practicum and have gradually garnered attention (Caires, Almeida, & Vieira, 2012).

The concept of practicum. Practicum in this study refers to the professional practice of teacher education where STs learn to teach (Le Cornu & Ewing, 2008). Different terms have been used throughout a host of literature to describe the same practical experience, such as field experience, student teaching, clinical teaching, student internship, and teaching practice (Moody, 2009; Whit & Forgasz, 2016; Yazan, 2015b).

Each term varies from the other in roles, goals, and level of responsibility (Gebhard, 2009; Whit & Forgasz, 2016).

Practicum is a school-based practice jointly supervised by school and university (Gebhard, 2009) committed to develop STs' professional competence. Expected to combine theoretical and practical elements, practicum includes "instruction and practice" in both "general school method [and] … methods of teaching" (Board of Education, 1916, p. 5), involving "supervised teaching experience with systematic observation, and gaining familiarity with a particular teaching context" (Gebhard, 2009, p. 250). For students who want to become teachers, it is a mandatory experience where STs integrate their understandings of being a teacher and teaching learned from coursework with those acquired in the real classroom practices (Britzman, 2003). Though the duration and organizations vary from country to country (Ambrosetti & Dekkers, 2010), the goals of the practicum share some common themes across contexts and fall into the following summarized objectives across a host of international literature: a) promoting student teachers' professional abilities; b) getting to know school environment; c) promoting student teachers' personal growth; and d) impacting the school (Cohen et al., 2013).

Teaching practicums usually involve three phases (Shahid & Hussain, 2011). The initial phase is orientation which introduces STs to their mentors, who in turn should familiarize STs with the school and the class scenario, inform them of curriculum, and help them gain the access to teaching materials and other facilities. The second phase is the participatory stage where STs observe teaching, interact with students, and begin to assume teachers' roles within the scaffolding of supervisors and mentors. It is during the third phase that STs begin to enjoy more freedom and independence in teaching and class

management. It is also at this stage that their performance is evaluated, and the practicum comes to completion.

The value of the practicum has been generally agreed upon and well-documented in teacher education. Numerous studies laud the practicum as an integral component in preparing prospective teachers (Alamri, 2018; Cohen et al., 2013; C. Gray, Wright, & Pascoe, 2017; Grudnoff, 2011; Gürsoy, 2013). Both teacher educators and student teachers speak highly of practicum experiences (Gürsoy, 2013; Shahid & Hussain, 2011). Student teachers have claimed that their practicum is the milestone experience and the most powerful aspect in teacher education due to the chance to gain real teaching experiences and insight into teaching and being a teacher (Allen & Wright, 2016; Armutcu & Yaman, 2010; Burns et al., 2016; Graham, 2006; Waugh et al., 2003). Teacher educators view it as the best way to train teachers (Bullock, 2011) because it offers STs a chance to observe and work in natural settings (Richards & Crookes, 1988); helps them to get socialized into a school context (Faez &Valeo, 2012; Farrell, 2008; Graves, 2009); to acquire skills in pedagogy, instruction, and curriculum-design (Richards & Crookes, 1988); and to become prepared to enter the teaching profession (Calderhead, 1988). Throughout the international teacher education literature, the practicum is a highly valued component and deemed as pivotal in learning to teach (Hobson, 2002; Patrick, 2013).

Practicum in China. There are different types of formal initial teacher education programs in China (Guo, 2005). The most important one is the four-year teacher education programs provided by colleges or universities (Guo, 2005). This study discusses and reviews only the practicum of four-year college teacher education

programs. Contextualizing teaching practicums in the backdrop of national reforms supplies a macro-lens to a better understanding of STs' conflict experiences in the practicum.

Context of Chinese practicum. Chinese education has undergone some major reforms in the past two decades. In this section, an introduction of reforms in education, in EFL teaching, and in teacher education is presented.

To empower itself globally, China has engaged in a series of far-reaching reforms. Changes in education always come after political and social reforms, one of which is the Reform and Open policy. In 1978 Xiaoping Deng, then the vice president, initiated the most important reform in China: opening to the world and carrying out domestic reform (Deng, 1994). This reform transformed the Chinese economy and political system tremendously. Chinese economy was shifted from a planned one to a socialist market one and its political system from being more centralized to being more localized, more democratic, and diversified (Chen, Wei, & Jiang, 2017). Progress and changes in politics and economy called for transformation in education which led to challenges to the traditionally rigid and closed educational system (Guan & Meng, 2007).

Drastic reforms came to Chinese education with the New Curriculum Standard (NCS) in 2001 and its improved version in 2011. In China, curriculum is stipulated by educational authorities and approved by the state, and "curriculum administration is symbolic, concealing complex power relations and struggles over the distribution of knowledge between dominant forces" (Law, 2014, p. 334). To counter the global challenges in the 21st century, the MoE initiated the NCS in 2001 (MoE, 2001) and mandated that NCS be applied across China in 2011 to all subjects in compulsory

education (MoE, 2011), attempting to cultivate creativity, innovation, and social responsibility among its younger generation (Liu & Dunne, 2009). Yan and He (2012) viewed the NCS as "one of the most ambitious, radical, far-reaching, wide-reaching and complex" reforms in the world (p. 2), for it touched upon the cornerstone of the Chinese educational system (Chen et al., 2017). From then on, exam-oriented education versus quality-oriented education constituted a reality and dilemma in Chinese education.

No definition is given to exam-oriented or quality-oriented education (Chou & Spangler, 2016), but it is self-evident to Chinese people what these terms mean. Exam-oriented education (yingshi jiaoyu) depicts the situation of Chinese education before the promulgation of NCS with rote memorization of factual knowledge, focus on "text-learning, didactic teaching and pen-and-paper assessment" (Chou & Spangler, 2016, p. 38). Its purpose is to achieve a high academic score as the requisite to further advancement, which embodies China's long-standing selective examination system.

In contrast, NCS is best encapsulated by the term "quality-oriented education" (suzhi jiaoyu) (Chou & Spangler, 2016). To crystalize NCS, it was expected to change the passive student learning to a constructivist, collaborative, and inquiring one, to alter the discipline-centered curriculum structure to a more integrated one, and to transform "assessment standards on screening students (learning for assessment) to those promoting the sustainable development of students and teachers (assessment for learning and teaching)" (Chen et al., 2017, p. 527; Law, 2014).

But several extra-curricular factors impede the realization of these paradigm shifts (Law, 2014). One is the limited access to higher education, given the huge population in China. In 2011, the admission percentage to higher education was only 26.9% (MoE,

2012). Second, the Chinese peoples' traditional idea of wishing their only child (due to China's one-child policy) to enjoy a better future (Law, 2014) exacerbated the competition to be admitted to higher education. The high-stakes exam system is still the major medium to screen students to enjoy better resources and "the main criteria for teachers' accountability" (Chen et al., 2017, p. 527). The third factor is the symbiotic web of interest among different education stakeholders (Law, 2014). While student academic performance impacts the assessment of teacher performance, teacher performance assessments impact schools. This assessment system is used as the criterion to decide the distribution of financial funding by the local government. Teachers become the lynchpin of this interest circle. Stakeholders such as parents, schools, and local governments impose great pressure on teachers for producing high test scores. High-stakes examinations remain a major assessment tool and examination-oriented education is still the prevailing mode in Chinese education.

English is one of the core subjects to be impacted by NCS. As a compulsory and vital course of study in Chinese education, the status of English teaching and learning is inseparable from Chinese Reform and Open policy. Considering English as the most important language in international exchange, the Chinese government mandated that English be taught from Grade three in elementary schools to university so that talents needed in Chinese economic development and China's global competitiveness enhancement can be produced (Lan Jin, 2011; Shen, 2018). Since then, a good command of English has become a passport to personal, social, and national advancement and development (Li, 2016) and English proficiency tests are required unanimously as "a gateway to socio-economic upward mobility and better educational

opportunities"(Zheng, 2015, p. 43). English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching acquired prominence immediately and EFL teacher education becomes a pivotal component of teacher education. Zheng (2015) affirms that "EFL has been accorded enormous importance from social and educational perspectives" (p. 43).

Great efforts have been given to improve EFL teaching and learning. Over the recent four decades, EFL in China has undergone enormous changes. But "deaf and dumb English" is so rampant and commonplace among EFL learners that it has eclipsed the achievements EFL has achieved over these years. "Deaf and dumb English" is a term used to describe EFL learners who cannot "communicate properly in English after many years of learning" (Lam, 2005). It was ascribed to the persisting influence of the grammar-translation method used in the first three decades as the only valid teaching method (Zheng, 2015). According to Zhan (2008), this time-honored grammar-translation approach had such a strong staying power because it matched Chinese Confucian idea of education, which emphasized silent reading, memorization, and practice. Therefore, "rote memorizing, heavy grammar instruction and vocabulary explanation'' has always been the major focus of EFL teaching (Jin & Cortazzi, 2003, p. 136).

To remedy this negative consequence and to improve EFL teaching and learning quality, NCS in 2001 and 2011 created the National English Curriculum Standards. The new standards aimed at "activating and cultivating students' interest in learning, building up their confidence, cultivating good learning habits and effective learning strategies, developing autonomous learning and cooperative spirit, …developing overall language competence…" (MOE, 2001, p.1-2). Progressive approaches, such as communicative language teaching (CLT), task-based language teaching, and experiential teaching were

introduced to EFL teachers. After the implementation of the NCS over a decade ago, despite the underachievement of these new approaches in China (Wen & Xue, 2005), Chinese EFL teachers have become familiar with the new concepts advocated in the reform. But the desired paradigm shift undergirding the NCS has not been achieved yet.

NCS also triggered reforms in teacher education. Of all the subsequent documents dedicated to improving teacher education, two milestone documents were issued in 2011, which were *Opinions Regarding Promoting Teacher Education Curriculum Reform Vigorously* (MoE, 2011) and its attachment entitled *The National Curriculum Standards for Teacher Education* (NCSTE) (MoE, 2011b). Committed to optimizing teacher education curriculum and instruction quality, both documents mandated more education or pedagogy courses, proposed a longer practicum period, and suggested transforming teacher education contents and teaching approaches (MOE, 2011a). As the first national standards for teacher education programs in China, NCSTE detailed in teacher education curricular establishment, textbook development, and teacher licensing accreditation. Courses in education, such as child development and learning, education foundation, and professional ethics were proposed (Han, 2012) and the minimum credit hours for these courses increased to eight or ten (MOE, 2011a). It was expected that these two documents could deepen the educational reform and promote professionalization of teaching (Han, 2012).

Another innovation in teacher education was the National Teacher Certificate Exam (NTCE) in 2011. NTCE is a grand project in China considering the huge population involved. Teacher certificate exams used to be administered by the provincial Education Ministry and candidates were afforded with the certificate if they could pass

the Mandarin test. NTCE requires STs pass the computer- or paper-based exams on professional ethics, professional knowledge, basic subject knowledge and skills, and then participate in an interview. It is expected that this innovation will enhance the overall quality of teachers across China.

The structure of Chinese practicum. The four-year teacher education program usually includes two parts: university-based coursework and a school-based teaching practicum, aiming at developing qualified teachers for elementary, junior, and senior high schools. Practicum usually occurs in the final year and lasts from six to eight weeks (Campbell & Hu, 2010), except that in the six key normal universities under the direct administration of the MoE, a practicum can last as long as one semester (Campbell & Hu, 2010).

Regardless of locations and majors, the practicum comprises "tripartite responsibilities" theoretically (Yan & He, 2010): a) practicing classroom teaching, b) undertaking the work of Banzhuren (class teacher), and c) conducting educational research. As the purpose of these components is not made clear to both mentors and students (Campbell & Hu, 2010), more attention was paid to the first two, that is, observing classroom teaching, taking part in managing student activities, practicing their teaching skills, and assisting mentors' work (Fang & Zhu, 2008). Generally speaking, practicum teaching begins with observation first and supervised teaching next (Tong & Yang, 2018). In principle, to fulfil the teaching responsibility, a student teacher has to offer at least one public teaching session so that the mentor, the supervisor, and other school teachers can observe and assess the teaching. To accomplish his/her role as a Banzhuren, the student teacher has to organize or supervise the following activities in

his/her class: theme-based class meetings, extra-curriculum activities, such as sport activities or musical festivals, and supervising the morning read-aloud study block and night study (the latter two are autonomous study time in the physical classroom).

The practicum is jointly supervised by both the university and the school. As a common practice, the school assigns two mentors to each ST: one subject mentor teacher (in the EFL program for example, an English teacher) and one class mentor teacher. Both mentors are expected to help, guide, support, and evaluate the STs' performance. However, since mentors are usually not provided with regulations regarding their responsibilities nor specific assessment criteria to evaluate STs' performance during the practicum (Campbell & Hu, 2010), mentors enjoy the leverage to decide how and when to mentor. It is a common practice in practicum that STs need to observe the mentor's class, discuss with the mentor their teaching plan before teaching, and coordinate with the mentor in daily teaching and teaching-related affairs, such as grading homework and designing exercises and exam-papers.

What is noteworthy is mentoring is not an independent or official profession in Chinese educational environment. Instead it is a subsidiary title attached to teachers and a requisite for teacher promotion. Different from teachers both at schools and universities, mentors are not licensed. No courses or training in mentoring have been offered to school teachers in China.

In addition, the university appoints a faculty member to assist and supervise the practicum. That is, each ST is assigned to a university supervisor, who together with two mentor teachers from the school, are held accountable for "guiding, supporting, and evaluating the STs' teaching practice during the practicum" (Zhu et al., 2018). Ideally,

the professor who teaches Pedagogy should be appointed for this job. But as the number of Pedagogy professors is very limited, teachers in any subject area can volunteer for or are appointed to this job. The supervisor is expected to pay visits to the school, offer guidance and support to the ST, discuss with the mentor teacher how to further develop ST learning, and evaluate STs' teaching practice. Since no strict national guidelines exist regarding its implementation, penalties rarely occur even if the supervisor does not meet the requirements. Due to increasingly heavy pressure on on-campus teaching faculty to publish rather than teach, supervision of STs becomes unattractive and burdensome to university professors (Wang & Clarke, 2014).

Practicum reforms. Practicum has become an increasingly important topic in teacher education in China. Since the announcement of the milestone document of *Opinions on Promoting Vigorously Student Teachers' Practicum and Support for Teaching* 2007 (*Opinions 2007*) (MoE, 2007), it has been updated from time to time. *Opinions 2007* recommended a minimum of half year of practicum for teacher education undergraduates, which, according to Yan and He (2015), changed the marginal position of the practicum. The six key Normal Universities under direct control of the MoE were the first group of universities designated to extend their practicum from six to eight weeks, to at least half a year as a pilot study. To attract high-caliber teacher candidates, the MoE waived qualified teacher candidates from tuition and subsidized them with a modest monthly stipend (Campbell & Hu, 2010). In 2016 the MoE (2016) issued *Regarding the opinions on strengthening student teachers' practicum* which specified the goal of teaching practicum and confirmed its determination to continue reforming practicum. In Oct. 2017, the MoE (2017) issued a notification entitled *Measures for*

Accreditation of Teacher Education in Higher Education Provisional Version which reiterated that the practicum should be lengthened from approximately six to eight weeks to at least one semester for compulsory education, applicable to all universities with teacher education programs across China.

Nevertheless, the Chinese teaching practicum is not without problems. The length of practicum in majority universities still ranges from six weeks to ten weeks (Han, 2012; Yan & He, 2015; Zhan, 2008), which has been widely acknowledged as insufficient for teacher training (Zhan, 2008). Although each university implements and manages the practicum more or less the same in China, few universities offer any curriculum to STs related to practicum, with just a few organizing seminars or workshops for STS (Wang & Clarke, 2014). Additionally, the lack of qualified supervision and of effective communication between universities and schools were also identified as problems by some researchers (Campbell & Hu, 2010). Zhu et al. (2018) revealed that the teaching practicum at the first semester of the last year of the teacher education program might be limiting for student teachers' professional development due to time conflicts with job-hunting. A couple of studies criticized that the teaching practicum was more of a formality than a valued opportunity for STs (Qiu, 2007; Wang, 2011; Wang & Yu, 2014; Zhu, 2009). Han (2012) stated that the current dominant practicum paradigm dismissed the reciprocal learning of both STs and teachers and limited teacher learning.

In brief, Chinese education has undergone several major reforms in the recent two decades. Among the profound consequences these reforms have exerted, the dilemma of quality-oriented education versus exam-oriented education is most influential. Despite the

efforts to improve the quality of the practicum, problems still exist which will exert influence on the current study.

Conflicts in Practicum

The practicum is the bridge to help student teachers transfer from university to school, from being a student to being a teacher, from coursework to classroom, and from working in a more simplistic environment to working in a more complex context. It involves people with divergent beliefs, practices, visions, and goals. Increasing interactions with people and different conceptions complicate the practicum process, bringing challenges and conflicts. Where there is interaction, there is conflict.

Definition of conflict. Despite its pervasiveness in our lives (Callanan, Benzing, & Perri, 2010), conflict defies easy efforts in its definition. In many cases conflict is often not defined or ambiguously defined. Concepts related to conflict are "tensions," "challenges," "stress," "concerns," "dilemma," and "struggles." Pillen, Brok, & Beijaard (2013) interpreted tensions as "a conflict between personal and professional desires" (p. 88). So did Pillen, Beijaard, and Brok (2013) who identified conflicts as tensions when the personal side and the professional side of becoming and being a teacher is found imbalanced or disconnected. In their qualitative study of mentor-mentee relationships, Hudson and Hudson (2018) stated that dilemmas arose from ''conflict between two different commitments, obligations or values''(Turner, 2016, p. 572) and used dilemmatic conflicts in their research about dilemmas. Challenge appears "when a discontinuity or dissonance occurs'' (Martin, 1996, p. 49) and when STs attempt to close the gap by moving from "unstable equilibrium" to "stable equilibrium" (Tang, 2003).

Fuentes and Bloom (2017) borrowed the conflict definition from Cuban who viewed conflict as "a situation between what is and what ought to be" (p. 688).

The conceptual confusion regarding the definition of conflict has perplexed researchers in a number of fields for a long time who deplored this state and made attempts to conceptualize the term of conflict. Fink (1968) recognized that there was "…a state of conceptual and terminological confusion, (which) impedes both comparisons between distinct classes of conflict phenomena and the process of theoretical integration" (p. 416). Schmidt and Kochan (1972) echoed this view by stating definitions of conflict had either been "ignored or stated in exceedingly vague terms" (p. 359).

In fact, a plethora of definitions has been offered by conflict scholars. For example, some early definitions, such as "a threat to cooperation"(Marek, 1966, p. 64), and "antagonistic struggles" (Coser, 1956, p. 135) are now judged to be value-laden and seen as unfit. Dahrendorf (1959) defined conflict as "contests, competitions, disputes, and tensions and clashes" (p. 135). Drawing on predecessors' definitions, Deutsch (1973) termed conflict as incompatible activities when one party's behavior interferes, obstructs, or renders the other's behavior less effective. Mack and Snyder (1957) paid attention to the communicative nature of conflict and defined conflict as "a particular kind of social interaction process between parties who have mutually exclusive or incompatible values" (p. 212). These definitions focus on two common elements: a) whether conflict is a state/outcome or a process; and b) the incompatibilities between or among involved parties' goals, motives, and actions. There is no consensus in the definition of conflict and it is usually decided by research approaches and methods.

Based on the early researchers' efforts in defining conflicts and describing the causes of conflicts, a number of conceptions were presented by more recent scholars. Simons (1972) conceptualized conflict as a struggle between two or more parties due to incompatibility in interests. Ting-Toomey (1985) defined conflict as a state of intense interpersonal and intrapersonal disharmony caused by incompatible beliefs, goals, desires, needs, and attitudes. Folger, Poole, and Stutman (2005) defined conflict as the interaction between interdependent parties who had perceived incompatibility and potential interferences resulting from this incompatibility. Both the early and recent scholars seem to agree on the incompatibility in conflict.

In light of these definitions, this study conceptualizes conflict from the perspective of student teachers and defines it as a struggle in individual experiences externally (between people) and internally (within an individual's mind) due to incompatibilities in beliefs, goals, expectations, needs, and attitudes student teachers perceive or feel in a practicum context. In many cases, relational or external conflicts are caused by the internal ones (O'Connor et al., 2002). Practicum conflicts involve a range of possibilities, can be overt and covert, may be a minor squabble or a major rupture, and can be temporary or prolonged.

Conflicts in non-Chinese practicum. A substantial body of international literature reveals various kinds of practicum conflicts STs have encountered. Some are with mentors, some are with supervisors, some with students, and some with their peers. Causes vary. This section is a detailed description of these conflicts and their causes.

Conflicts with mentors. One of the most lamented conflicts STs have encountered is with mentors. A wide array of studies has documented unpleasant experiences with

mentors due to mentors' strict control, which reveals the dissonances between universities and schools regarding pedagogies, educational goals, and philosophies. In these studies, STs intended to apply what they had learned about constructivist views of learning and student-centered teaching to their classroom practices. But what prevailed in schools and what was required by their mentors were the traditional views of learning and teacher-centered teaching. What complicated the matter was that mentors monitored STs closely and forbade them to experiment with constructivist practices in the classroom, causing grievances and conflicts. The case study conducted by Smagorinsky, Cook, Moore, Jackson, and Fry (2004) described how the ST's teaching philosophy varied from her mentor's. When the mentor required the ST to imitate her teacher-centered teaching as closely as possible, the ST was deeply concerned that she would become like her mentor, working with worksheets one after another.

Jang's qualitative ethnographic study (2004) portrayed another ST who revealed her dissatisfaction with her mentor's teaching methods and activities after her completion of her teaching practicum, thinking they were too traditional and didactic and deprived students' right to love, enjoy, and explore science. Though she wanted to adopt an inquiry-focused method to motivate students' interest in science, her mentor's authoritarian mentoring dictated all her teaching activities and ideas, without allowing her to "jump over that" (p.72). Similar conflicts are verified in a number of other studies (Barnes, 2018; Cooper & He, 2012; Farrell, 2008; Gaudelli & Ousley, 2009; Nguyen & Parr, 2018; Smagorinsky et al., 2004; Valencia, Martin, Place, & Grossman, 2009; Walkington, 2005; Yuan & Lee, 2016). All these STs felt dissatisfied and unhappy but had to give in to their mentors.

Lack of control from mentors can also trigger relational conflicts between STs and mentors. Some studies explored how varying expectations of mentoring led to conflicts between mentors and STs. In Bradbury & Koballa's (2008) in-depth case study that investigated the mentor-ST relationships, one mentor assumed that his ST could learn how to teach by observing his lessons. Since this ST expected detailed guidance and direct feedback from the mentor, without acquiring advice from the mentor, the ST felt unprepared, unconfident, and reluctant to teach, which was viewed by the mentor that the ST was not committed to the profession of teaching, leading to more miscommunication. Though both thought discussion was needed, conversation never happened until in the end the ST refused to see the mentor more than the minimum hours required. Learning was severely hampered. The conflict caused by "show and tell" process—that is, performing to the standard after observing and listening—occurred in other studies (Sudzina, Giebelhaus, Coolican, Sudzina, & Coolican, 1997; Valencia et al., 2009).

Though communications between mentors and STs could settle some conflicts (Bradbury & Koballa, 2008; Fuentes & Bloom, 2017), not all mismatched personal beliefs regarding teaching or mentoring get dispelled easily with communication. Graham's case study (1997) of mentor-ST relationships offered two good examples. One mentor collaborated with the supervisor to encourage her ST to employ communicative approaches while the ST, deeply influenced by his previous school experience, insisted on a more structured teacher-centered classroom. Devastated by the perceived failure of his teaching approach and assumed lack of confidence of his mentor in him, he revealed anger, disappointment, and resistance toward his mentor in the final journal entry. Another mentor expected her ST to establish his own teaching style by exploring and

reflecting, as she thought no expertise existed and teaching was a dynamic, ongoing, and reflective process. But her ST insisted the mentor transmit her expertise to him to ensure his success and avoid failures. Despite the fact that communication occurred in both cases, unmet demands caused conflicts.

Mentor-ST conflicts can be related to ethical issues. In exploring how matched and mismatched conceptions of the mentor's role between mentors and STs impacted ST's learning, Rajuan et al. (2010) described how ethical issues led to mentor-ST conflicts. One ST described his mentor as a teacher who often humiliated students in front of the class, yelled at students, scared them into silence, only cared for the students with high academic scores, and never admitted she might be wrong before students—all of which challenged the ST's philosophy to reach every child with love and care. Even though he recognized his mentor as a representative of the school system who attempted to serve the academic goals of the school, the ST decided to discontinue his practicum the next year.

Likewise, Barnes (2018) explored in a two-year case study how different conceptions of care toward students between the ST and the mentor contributed to the ST's discontinuing of the practicum. Johnny, the ST in the study, was deeply concerned about student interests and lives and tried his best to attend to the individual needs of his students, which formed a sharp contrast with his mentor's values. The incongruence between them led to Johnny's decision to forgo his following practicum.

Some conflicts result from the incompatible personalities between STs and mentors (Hudson & Hudson, 2018). In Sudzina & Knowles' (1992) case study which explored the causes of the failure and withdrawal of STs in practicum, personal attributes were found to be one of the causes. Mentors were either intolerant of STs' incompetence or were too

flexible that STs found it hard to follow them. Or STs were too stubborn and determined that their interactions with others were abrasive and manipulative. In another case study of "failed" STs done by Sudzina, Giebelhaus, and Coolican (1997), a mentor seemed to resent the ST as well as the expectation upon the mentor. All the requests from the ST for the mentor's guidance and assistance were refuted and the ST's frustration was viewed by the mentor as incompetence. In another case, a ST resisted help from the mentor or despaired the mentor's efforts to improve the situation. Her mantra was "if I can't do it, well, I'll just have to accept that" (p. 29). In Hobson's (2002) interviews with 16 STs, four STs mentioned they couldn't get along with their mentors who were critical, unhelpful, and undermined their confidence. One even decided to withdraw due to the difficulties with the mentor.

Phelan et al. (2006) offered a very thought-provoking case where the conflict started with the inquisitiveness of the ST who questioned the nature, assessment, and the content of an art course and caused the mentor's doubt whether he should teach. Conflicts escalated until finally the student teacher was silenced and transferred to another placement. In Ferrier-Kerr's (2009) small-scale action research, a mentor recognized she and her ST experienced some relationship challenges because of their "strong-willed personalities," but she successfully "manipulated" the situation (p. 792). Hudson & Hudson (2018) employed grounded theory to study the mentor-ST conflicting relationships from the perspective of mentors. It was found STs' overconfidence and naivety to their responsibilities caused considerable frustration for mentors and the mediation of the third party was used as "the last resort" (p. 22).

Conflicts with supervisors. A limited number of studies have been conducted on

the conflicts with supervisors. These conflicts usually involve the different requirements of university supervisors upon STs from the requirements coming from school. Quite often, supervisors would insist on inquiry or progressive teaching methods, which run counter to the mentors' persistence on more traditional teaching methods. John (2001) conducted a case study of the conflictual supervisor-ST relationship in practicum. Constrained by the school culture, the ST's teaching which conformed to the school's requirement was challenged by the supervisor who insisted the ST be more critical and use more open-ended pedagogical methods. Without considering the ST's immediate environment and providing necessary scaffolding, the supervisor set the ST in an impasse, which annoyed and angered him a lot.

Ferguson and Brink (2004) comment that "student teaching may require student teachers to address the demands of two masters that often have very different expectations and philosophies" (p. 55). If both "masters" rationalize their viewpoints and try to accomplish their desired aims, they will unwittingly set their ST in a dilemma. Bullough & Draper (2004) presented a case study where the mentor, the ST, and the supervisor failed to negotiate and justify their power and positions. Facing divergent beliefs between her two masters, the ST first refused to take sides, attempting not to offend either of them, but was ignored by both sides. Recognizing the mentor's influence over her future, the ST sided with the mentor and dismissed the supervisor as "impractical and unrealistic, filled with good ideas but not for high school teaching" (p. 415). The disregard for the supervisor's opinions was also evidenced in the study done by Katz and Isik-Ercan (2015) and Valencia, Martin, Place, and Grossman (2009).

Conflicts with students. Conflict with students is not a major theme in the relevant literature but is mentioned occasionally. One conflict with students comes from STs' more progressive teaching methods. Several studies have shown students refused to think or didn't develop a liking for more progressive teaching methods because they were accustomed to traditional teaching methods, which disappointed and dissatisfied STs (Gaudelli & Ousley, 2009; Smagorinsky et al., 2004).

Conflicts with students can also come from students' rude, disrespectful, or unruly behaviors in class. STs reported that they had been sworn and cursed at and challenged by their students. In the ethnographic study that explained the changes six science STs underwent during their one-year practicum, Rozelle and Wilson (2012) described how a student challenged the ST when the ST asked a student to stop talking. In the case study done by Cooper and He (2012) of STs' concerns and role-perception development in practicum, a ST felt bad when she expelled a pupil from the classroom. Another ST described how she got used to using authority to deal with student conflicts, "you just have to develop that 'thick skin'" (Gaudelli & Ousley, 2009, p. 936).

Conflicts with peers. Most documented peer conflicts surface in paired practicum. Dang's case study (2013) detailed how conflicting conceptions of student teaching and varying language competences caused conflicts in co-planning and co-teaching in their paired-up practicum, and how they negotiated the conflicts within collaboration, which provided great learning opportunities for both. In another case study of a 15-week paired-up practicum in secondary schools, tensions were reported arising from paired-placed partners' incompatible personalities, philosophies of teaching, discipline strategies, and ideas about instructional activities (Nokes, Bullough, Egan, Birrell, & Hansen, 2008).

Stressing that dialogue could not only work through these tensions but promote learning, this research also pointed out that mentors' different attitudes toward conflict could lead to different conflict-coping strategies: some mentors encouraged STs to reflect on their disagreement and come to a compromise, others chose to avoid conflicts.

Other factors can also lead to peer conflicts. The ST in Jang's study (2004) disengaged herself purposefully from active communication with her peers as she thought they were incompetent to help her. Gaudelli and Ousley (2009) revealed how different viewpoints can generate conflicts among STs. Copland's (2010) linguistic ethnographic study of post-observation feedback clarified that STs' different expectations of the purpose and performance of feedback could lead to unpleasant peer relationships.

Inner struggles. A number of studies about inner struggles often focused on the gap between vision and reality regarding the role of teacher and teaching itself within an individual. Cole and Gary (1993) studied how STs' romantic vision of being a teacher before practicum was shattered when confronting the hard realities and complexities of the day-to-day teaching. Student teachers in Rushton's case study (2003) depicted how STs transferred from being puzzled about whether to "love kids to teach" or to "like kids and care about their work, but … do not have to love kids," (p.178) to being competent in their job.

Alsup (2006) summarized the conflicts in her study into three types: 1) between being a student at the university and a teacher at school; 2) between personal convictions, skills, and professional role expectations; and 3) between what is taught at university about teaching and learning and what is experienced at the practice school. These findings were echoed by other studies conducted by Leijen & Kullasepp (2013), Valencia

et al (2009), and Pillen, Beijaard, and Brok (2013). The latter produced a list of 13

conflicts after their comprehensive literature review and added four new conflicts based

on their quantitative research, which Pillen, Brok, and Beijaard (2013) classified into

three themes according to content, namely: "1) the changing role from being a student to

becoming a teacher, 2) conflicts between desired and actual support given to students,

and 3) conflicting conceptions of learning to teach" (p. 89). Cooper and He (2012)

supplemented one new STs' inner conflict of focusing on content delivery versus student

moral development. Correa et al. (2014) studied the conflict between what she wanted to

do as a person (to show affection to comfort a bullied student) and what the public image

of a teacher allows her to do, that is, to keep some distance with students and not to show

emotions.

Conflicts in Chinese practicum. Compared with the rich international literature

which cites numerous types of conflicts, domestic literature on practicum conflicts of

Chinese STs appear much less often. Except that the conflict with the mentor remains to

be the dominant type, other types of conflicts are found to be much less diverse and less

frequent.

Conflicts with the mentor. One conflict that emerges consistently across most

research into practicum arises mainly from the dissatisfaction with the mentors' various

job assignments unrelated to teaching. Most student teachers complained about too many

non-teaching jobs but too little teaching time. These non-teaching jobs vary, including

"marking students' assignments and exam papers, checking their discipline, giving

dictations, checking recitation of texts, and cleaning the office" (Yan & He, 2015, p.

236); working from around seven in the morning till ten at night "with students at the

morning reading sessions, midday self-study periods, evening classes, and night-time dormitory inspection" (Yan & He, 2015, p. 236); "typing, and making photocopies" (Yuan, 2016, p. 193); editing and data-inputting (Zhu et al., 2018); "printing test papers, assessing the exercises of students, supervising the self-study of students, and examining sanitary conditions"(Zhan & Wan, 2016, p. 677); and administrative projects (Deng et al., 2018). Student teachers report they feel like "servants"(Yan & He, 2015, p. 236), "cheap labor or an office assistant"(Zhu et al., 2018), "a secretary", "stressful and meaningless" (Yan & He, 2015, p. 236), "depressed and lost" (Yuan, 2016, p. 193), overwhelmed and exhausted (Deng et al., 2018; Zhan & Wan, 2016), angry and confused (Deng et al., 2018). Sometimes, these jobs were required to be completed at the sacrifice of the teaching time (Zhu et al., 2018), which annoyed STs. They challenged these conditions, for example: "I don't come here to be a secretary or assistant in the school" (Yuan & Lee, 2016) and "What's the point of the practicum?" (Yan & He, 2015, p. 236), given the little time devoted to teaching.

Another dominant conflict between mentors and STs centers on different teaching pedagogies coupled with the mentor's control versus the ST's autonomy. Like their counterparts in international literature, Chinese STs suffer similar setbacks in their experimentation of more progressive teaching approaches as their attempted efforts are similarly disrupted by their mentors.

Yuan (2016) documented instances in which the mentor not only prescribed what student teachers should teach, but also exercised strict control on their teaching style and pace. Both student teachers were asked to cut interactive or communicative activities in lesson plans and to focus on grammar and vocabulary. The only time the student teacher

was allowed to adopt a communicative approach was when the supervisor came to observe his teaching. In another case a ST was interrupted by the mentor in her interaction with students in class and was hurried to the next activity. Embarrassed and upset, they felt they were like the mentor's "spokesman," "assistant." "puppet," "follower," "I did not see 'me' in my own teaching" (p. 194). Pedagogical conflicts coupled with conflicts of authority versus autonomy were also reported by other researchers (He & Lin, 2013; Trent, 2010b, 2010a, 2013; Yuan & Lee, 2016; Zhu, 2017; Zhu et al., 2018).

A third type of mentor-ST conflict is caused by the mentors' attitude to student teachers and to students. Student teachers reported that they were not trusted nor welcomed by the mentors (Yan & He, 2015), treated like "being at the bottom," "an outsider and sojourner" (Yuan & Lee, 2016, p. 832), an assistant by "spying" on students to help with the control of the class, or secluded in the school (Gao & Benson, 2012; Tang, 2003; Yuan, 2016), which disengaged mentors and STs.

The conflicting attitudes between the mentor and the ST to students further exacerbated their relationship. The ST in Yuan & Lee's (2016) study believed a teacher should love, respect, and care for students, which set him into a dilemma when the mentor required him to announce in front of the class the names of the students who failed the exam. When both the mentor and the vice principal tried to shirk their liabilities for the injured student in a student fight, he fell into complete disillusion. In another study student teachers questioned the educational equity after witnessing and following their mentors' employment of more inquiry-centered teaching methods in the fast-track class while drills and exercises in the slow-track class (Zhu et al., 2018).

Conflicts with students. Conflicts with students often appear in the classroom and are coupled with the misalignment between the high expectations rested upon teachers in the Chinese context and ST's perceived inadequacy. In the Chinese context, a teacher is held in high regard. Respect and authority are paid to teachers because of their expertise in their disciplines and their moral integrity (Gao & Benson, 2012). Student teachers' professional inadequacy is usually demonstrated in their insufficient mastery of subject knowledge and inflexible employment of pedagogical skills, such as "imperfect command of the language and their inability to teach English through the medium of English" (Gao & Benson, 2012, p. 133). Conflicts are manifested in students' noise in class, complaining about the ST's assigned homework (Tang, 2003), being naughty, and speaking harsh words to STs (Gao & Benson, 2012).

Inner conflicts. To Chinese student teachers, one major source of inner conflict comes from contrasting pedagogies. This type of conflict is particularly apparent among EFL STs. They all realize the dichotomy between traditional approaches (focusing on vocabulary and grammar with pattern drills) and communicative language teaching approaches (CLT). On one hand they want to apply CLT in class and to make learning fun to motivate students, on the other hand they were concerned about the effect of CLT and worried they might waste students' time and negatively impact their academic scores (Wang & Clarke, 2014).

Zhu et al.'s study (2018) revealed time conflicts in practicum, specifically, the time schedule of practicum coming into conflict with job-hunting schedules. Since practicum usually occurs in the fall semester which also happens to be the peak season of job-hunting, student teachers feel torn between practicum and job-hunting. Besides,

setbacks from hunting for a job impacted their confidence in being a teacher and hindered learning.

A third source is the conflict between the role of a subject teacher and the role of a class teacher. Being both the subject teacher and the class teacher are two major tasks for STs with different responsibilities. After assuming both roles during practicum, some STs wished to assume only the role of a subject teacher in the future but were concerned about the disadvantage of being disengaged from students (Zhu et al., 2018).

In reviewing various kinds of conflicts STs have experienced in both non-Chinese and Chinese practicums, similarities and differences are revealed. First, divergent pedagogy, mentors' strict control, and attitude/care to students can generate mentor-ST conflicts across contexts, but Chinese STs are reported to be dissatisfied with too many non-teaching tasks imposed upon them by mentors, which are seldom reported in non-Chinese practicum. Besides, personality conflicts are not mentioned in Chinese practicum.

Second, all STs may face unruly students. But Chinese students challenge STs' authority mainly due to STs' incompetence in subject knowledge, which is not mentioned in non-Chinese practicum.

Third, all STs suffer inner struggles with varying causes. Most Chinese STs' inner conflicts are Chinese-specific, such as the role conflict between Banzhuren and the subject teacher, time conflict, and the application of progressive teaching approaches versus its impact on an exam-oriented educational system. Similar concerns seldom appear in non-Chinese practicum literature.

Fourth, the absence of conflicts with supervisors and peers in Chinese practicum

doesn't mean their nonexistence in reality. The limited available literature could be the major reason for this lack.

In all, these conflicts help us to understand that the practicum, as a transitional period to teaching, is a hard journey characterized with tensions, complexities, and struggles. Conflicts also involve other issues such as power, authority, interests, and systems. While conflict could be sometimes intimidating for STs and unconducive to learning, there are also opportunities for professional growth (Moussay, Flavier, Zimmermann, & Méard, 2011), which also indicates support and help from teacher educators are necessary.

Micropolitics

Politics refers to "decisions about the allocation of valued goods for a given society or organization: that is who gets what, when, and how" (Blase & Blase, 2002, p. 7). Evidently, it involves issues such as power, influence, control, strategies, negotiation, values, and exchange (Blase, 1991) . There are two broad perspectives on the politics of education: macropolitics and micropolitics. The former refers to a school's external environments at local, state, and federal levels, to take America as an example (Willower, 1991), as well as the interactions of these environments "within, between, and among levels" (Blasé & Björk, 2009, p. 238). Macropolitics is important for understanding micropolitics, or the politics at the school level, as micropolitics involves the internal and external organizational systems in the school setting (Conway et al., 2018) as well as the "immediate, ongoing, dynamic interaction between and among individuals and groups" (Blase & Blase, 2002, p. 9) at all levels of public education.

Definition. Micropolitics offers a new perspective in studying human behavior in educational settings. It is a concept about power originating in the fields of public administration and management. Burns (1961) was the first in public administration to view organizations as political systems. He asserted that organizational life possessed both cooperative and conflicting elements: individuals and groups are "at one and the same time cooperators in a common enterprise and rivals for the material and intangible rewards of successful competition with each other" (p. 261). The dynamics of "the exploitation of resources, both physical and human, for the achievement of more control over others, and thus of safer, or more comfortable, or more satisfying terms of individual existence" (p. 278) constituted political activities in organizations.

Iannaccone introduced micropolitics to education in the mid-1970s, but it was not until the late 1980s that significant works were produced (Blase, 2005). Perceiving micropolitics as a continuum covering a wide range of dimensions, such as interests and power, Hoyle (1986) lays an emphasis on the strategies employed by both individuals and groups to achieve their ends. Ball (1987) focused on political conflicts within schools while acknowledging the possibility of consensus. He stated that schools, like all the other social organizations, are "arenas of struggle… with actual or potential conflict between members" (p. 19). Hargreaves (1991) examined contrived collegiality and its associated forms of power and conflict in teachers' work.

After a review of relevant literature, Blasé (1991) developed an inclusive definition of micropolitics which is still used today. He defined micropolitics as "the use of formal and informal power by individuals and groups to achieve their goals in organizations" (p.11) and states that "Both cooperative and conflictive actions and

process are part of the realm of micropolitics" (p. 11). The "use of formal and informal power" is called political action. Individuals and groups take political actions or employ strategies and tactics when they perceive differences in needs, values, and ideologies and are motivated to "use power to influence and/or protect" (Blase & Blase, 2002. p. 9) to further their interest (Hoyle, 1982). Different from unconsciously motivated actions that are routine and habitual resulting from socialization and "actions that limit or prevent others' influence" (Blase & Blase, 2002. p. 10), these consciously motivated actions are "intended, calculated, or strategic" (Blasé & Blasé, 2002. p. 10), and therefore, have political significance. In the view of Blasé (2005), this definition addresses all kinds of decision-making structures and processes in school settings: "conflictive and cooperative-consensual, group level and individual, formal and informal" (p. 265). Examples of these political structures and processes are hierarchal authority, policy, and cultural norms.

Professional interests. Viewed broadly, micropolitics focuses on different interests of the members of an organization (Blasé, 1991; Blasé & Blasé, 2002), encompassing tensions, conflict, struggle or rivalry, collaboration, and coalition-building as well. One central tenet of micropolitics is the behavior of organizational members is driven by interests (Kelchtermans, 2007). These interests form "desired working conditions" (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002a, p. 756) to do a good job. "Good" means doing a job in an effective and personally satisfactory way. The desired working conditions constitute what Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002a) term professional interests.

According to Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002b), professional interests include five components (see Table 1). Self-interests refer to professional identity or professional "selves" and its social recognition. They includes how teachers look at themselves as a

teacher (self-image), what they perceive one has to do to be a proper teacher (task perception), how they evaluate or judge their success (self-esteem), why they choose teaching as a career (job motivation), as well as what they expect about the future (future perspective) (Kelchtermans, 2007). Self-interests are at stake if this professional personal understanding conflicts the dominant normative ideas in an organization.

Material interests refer to the availability and access to teaching materials, funds, specific infrastructure, and time that are required for proper job performance. Infrastructure refers to not only computers and sport facilities. It can also be a staff room for communication about lesson preparation or desks for marking student homework. Time for meetings, lesson-planning, training, and other professional activities are included in this category too.

Organizational interests contain procedures, roles, positions, contract conditions, and formal tasks in the school. Although schools are largely autonomous in their internal organizations and structure, varying interests from different organizational members always emerge, interfere, conflict, or converge in the ongoing negotiation and decision-making process.

Cultural-ideological interests refer to "the more or less explicit norms, values and ideals that get acknowledged in the school as legitimate and binding elements of the school culture" (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b, p. 114). They manifest the normative values and ideals about ''good'' teaching and education in the school, constitute the norms for teachers' professional actions in the school, guide their life and work, and define the school.

Social professional interests are about the quality of professional and personal relations in and around the school as an organization. According to Kelchtermans (2007), they form vital sources of social recognition, job satisfaction, and motivation and rank high among the desirable working conditions of teachers.

These five categories of professional interests often play their part simultaneously and are pursued by individuals via micropolitical actions. Therefore, micropolitical actions are interventions for "establishing, safeguarding or restoring the desired working conditions" (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002a, p. 756). Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002b) posit that the concept of professional interests offer a powerful conceptual and interpretative-analytical tool to "describe, disentangle and understand the different aspects of the micro-political reality…in schools and in beginning teachers' professional socialization in particular" (p. 109).

Table 1 Categories of professional interests (borrowed from "The micropolitics of teacher induction. A narrative-biographical study on teacher socialization," by G. Kelchtermans and K. Ballet, 2002, *Teaching and Teacher Education, 18*, 110.)

Self-interests	Issues of professional identity and its social recognition
Material interests	Availability and access to teaching materials, funds, infrastructure, and structural time facilities
Organizational interests	Issues concerning roles, positions or formal tasks in the school as an organization
Cultural-ideological interests	Normative values and ideals about ''good'' teaching in the school
Social professional interests	Issues on the quality of interpersonal relations within the school

Micropolitical strategies. Researchers classify strategies, actions, and tactics from different perspectives. In a study of teachers' vulnerabilities, Blasé (1988a) identified six strategies: acquiescence, conformity, ingratiation, diplomacy, passive-aggressiveness, and confrontation moving on a continuum from being reactive to being proactive. Reactive strategies are for the purpose of "maintaining the situation or protecting the teacher against changes or external influences" (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b, p. 116), whereas proactive strategies aim at "changing the situation and influencing the conditions" (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b, p. 116). Strategies and actions are "cyclical or iterative, rather than as positions on a continuum" (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002a).

Blasé and Anderson (1995) classify micropolitical strategies into three models. Power-over model views power as a scarce resource and associates power with dominations and control. Strategies like coercion and cooption belong to this type. It aims at enhancing one's own power at the expense of others, therefore it is a vertical or hierarchical approach. Competition for power usually pits people against each other. In power-through model, power doesn't have to be a scarce resource. In this model, goals are accomplished through "motivating individuals and groups who feel a sense of ownership in organizational goals" (Blasé & Anderson, 1995, p. 12). Both parties adapt to each other's needs. The power-with is an empowerment model where the superior establishes a close relationship with subordinates so that the subordinates can have "the motivation, freedom and capacity to act purposefully with the mobilization of the energies, resources, strengths, or powers of each person through a mutual relational process"(Surrey, 1987, p. 2) .

According to Kelchtermans & Ballet (2002), micropolitical strategies can take different forms, "talking, pleading, arguing, gossiping, flattering, being silent and avoiding comments, avoiding taking sides, accepting extra duties…"(p. 117), to name a few. They think an inventory of such strategies is not necessary or even possible as micropolitical actions are "context-bound" (Blasé, 1991, p. 11). What matters is the interactions between the individual and the specific context that endows an action with micro-political significance, "the consequences or the meaning that actions have for others" (Blasé, 1997, p. 942).

Micropolitical literacy. Some researchers view micropolitical literacy as an essential component of the teacher identity development of prospective teachers (Curry et al., 2008; Hong, 2010). Exerting a significant influence at the very beginning of a professional career that lasts throughout the subsequent career stages (Wu & Chen, 2011), this literacy impacts a teacher's commitment to the profession.

Kelchtermans & Ballet (2002b) define micropolitical literacy as the competence to understand and navigate proactively the issues of power, roles, norms, and interests within an organization. It encompasses three aspects: the knowledge aspect, the operational or instrumental aspect, and the experiential aspect (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002a). The knowledge aspect refers to a command of the "grammatical" and "lexical" knowledge of power, roles, and interests so that the actor can "acknowledge ('see'), interpret and understand ('read') the micropolitical character of a particular situation" (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002a, p. 765). This subjective knowledge varies "from rudimentary and superficial to refined and complex understandings"(Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b, p. 117).

The instrumental or operational aspect refer to micropolitical strategies and tactics to be effectively applied to "establish, safeguard or restore desirable working conditions" (p. 765), that is, to "leverage a situation toward their advantage" (Curry et al., 2008, p. 662). Since these tactics are context-bound, what works in one school may seem ineffective in another. Therefore, the operational aspect concerns how capable a person is to influence the situation proactively or reactively.

The experiential aspect refers to how a person feels about his/her micropolitical competence, including both negative and positive emotions. As these three aspects change from context to context and can generate new knowledge for subsequent actions and emotions, micropolitical literacy is dynamic and an ongoing learning process (Curry et al., 2008).

Research in micropolitics. Since its inception in educational research around the 1980s (Conway et al., 2018), researchers have made noteworthy advances in applying micropolitics to examine different aspects of schooling. A plethora of studies are devoted to the various relationships in schools to highlight the influence of micropolitics on school leadership and various relationships among the stakeholders in educational settings: the relationship between principals and teachers (S. J. Ball, 1987), the relationship between administrators and teachers (Anderson, 1991; Blase, 1988b), the relationship between principal and parents and student (Corbett, 1991); collegial relationships among teachers (Hargreaves, 1991), and teachers' relationship with students and parents (Cusick, 1983; Lortie, 1975). In teacher education, Kuzmic (1994) and Kelchtermans & Ballet (2002b) focused on beginning teachers' socialization to examine the influence of micropolitics on their professional development. In school

management, Hoyle (1986) analyzed the culture and organizational structure of schools and requisite micropolitical knowledge necessary to navigate school politics successfully. Blasé (2005) and Blasé and Bjork (2010) focus on school reforms to illustrate the pervasiveness of micropolitics in schools. In instruction, Blasé and Blasé (2002) discussed micropolitics in instructional supervisory structures, processes, and practices and suggested that a micropolitical perspective could contribute to a better understanding of instructional supervision.

Nevertheless, practicum has not been sufficiently discussed through the lens of micropolitics. Kelchtermans & Ballet (2002) noted that practicum offers STs a rich environment for micro-political learning. But scant research has been done in student teaching practicum and limited research into power in mentoring relationships (Ehrich & Millwater, 2011). No research reviewed by Blasé and Blasé (2002) was about interns and mentors (Ehrich & Millwater, 2011), although they acknowledged a micropolitical perspective could contribute to a better understanding of practicum (Blasé & Blasé, 2002). Hodkinson and Hodkinson's (1997) case study revealed how the interests of the physical education department, the school, and the university played out in one ST's practicum experience. It pointed out the virtual absence of a micropolitical dimension in teacher education literature, suggested that such a dimension should be included, and indicated conflicts had the transforming potential in educational settings.

Ehrich & Millwater (2011) continued to contribute to the micropolitical literature in practicum. They used the three models of micropolitical strategies developed by Blasé and Anderson (1995)—namely, power over, power through, and power with—as the theoretical framework to examine student teachers' reflective reports. Five key themes

emerged from the collected data that highlighted mentors' micropolitical strategies in mentoring.

Zhu et al. (2018) adopted grounded theory to examine Chinese student teachers' professional vulnerability from a micropolitical perspective and revealed STs' vulnerability in five aspects. Although Zhu et al. (2018) discussed conflicts in the study, STs' micropolitical literacy is not the researchers' major concern. Besides, the participant number of this grounded theory was only seven and all came from Beijing in China. Much room exists in examining student teachers' conflicts from a micropolitical lens in other areas in China.

Briefly, STs' micropolitical literacy in practicum conflict is an under-examined topic which deserves further study. As most previous studies into Chinese student teachers or practicum are done in an outlaying area or a small town or in a school with academically low-achieving students (He & Lin, 2013; Wang & Clarke, 2014; Yuan, 2016; R. Yuan & Lee, 2016), educational settings of regular urban schools should be considered in order to have a comprehensive understanding of STs' micropolitical literacy in practicum conflict. What do former Chinese EFL student teachers' stories about their practicum experiences reveal about conflicts and conflict resolution within practicum? How does a micropolitical lens offer insight into the realities/experiences of student teaching in a Chinese context? My study attempts to engage in examining how ST make sense of and respond to the political realities when they encounter practicum conflicts in a regular urban middle school in an economically dynamic South China city. This study conducted with a micropolitical lens is to offer us a deeper understanding of STs' practicum conflict experiences and contribute to the research of micropolitics.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine Chinese ST's micropolitical literacy in practicum conflicts by describing Chinese EFL STs' conflict experiences in urban practicum schools. An objective of this study was to investigate STs' conflict-coping strategies and motives so that teacher educators and school personnel would be aware of the political realities STs confronted to support STs through their journey of practicum confidently and competently.

To achieve this purpose, I used the following two research questions to guide my study:

Research question #1

What do former Chinese student teachers' stories about their practicum experiences reveal about conflicts and conflict resolution within practicum?

Research question #2

How does a micropolitical lens offer insight into the realities/experiences of student teaching in a Chinese context?

Case Study

Case study is one of the most frequently used qualitative research methodologies in educational research. Influenced by Miles and Huberman's (1994) understanding of the case "as a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context" (cited in Merriam, 1998, p. 27), Merriam (1998) defines the case as "a thing, a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries" (p. 27). To be specific, a case can be a person, a group, an event, a program, or a policy at a concrete level, or a relationship or a decision

process at a less concrete level (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Therefore, qualitative case study is "an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon such as a program, an institution, a person, a process, or a social unit" (Merriam, 1998, p. xiii). It explores an issue through one or more cases within a bounded system (i.e., a setting, a context) and possesses three unique distinctive attributes: particularistic (focusing on a particular situation, event, program, or phenomenon), descriptive (presenting a rich, thick description of the phenomenon under study), and heuristic (illuminating the reader's understanding of phenomenon under study) (Yazan, 2015a). Merriam (1998) confirms that qualitative case study "provides the reader with a depiction in enough detail to show that the author's conclusion 'makes sense'" (p. 199).

This research utilized case study as its methodology as case study generates an in-depth understanding of a complex contemporary issue within its real-life context (Schwandt & Gates, 2018). One objective of my study was to examine the STs' micropolitical literacy in coping with practicum conflicts. Involving relationships, interests, and power, STs' micropolitical literacy is a complex contemporary issue that warrants an in-depth understanding. Two research questions were exploratory and explanatory in nature. Due to its distinct attributes mentioned above, case study enjoys great advantages to answer the explanatory and exploratory questions (Yin, 2017), making it a feasible research strategy for my study. In addition, my study interviewed four participants at different practicum placements which established multiple cases. Using these cases as specific illustrations, case study explored STs' micropolitical literacy in depth and contributed to our understanding of how STs perceived and interacted with the reality they were situated in during practicum.

Espousing constructivism, Merriam (1998) comments that "reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds" (p. 6), therefore, "the reality is not an objective entity, rather, there are multiple interpretations of reality" (p. 22). She thinks a qualitative researcher should try to "understand the way people make sense of their world and their experiences in this world" (Yazan, 2015, p. 137). Therefore, to Merriam (1998), data analysis is "the process of making sense out of the data. And making sense out of data involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read—it is the process of making meaning" (p. 178). In order to enhance the credence of data, she recommends some strategies such as member checking, thick description, and external audits, which will be adopted in this study.

Case study also provides "an especially good design for practical problems" (Merriam, 2009, p. 43). The design for this study is illustrated in Fig. 1:
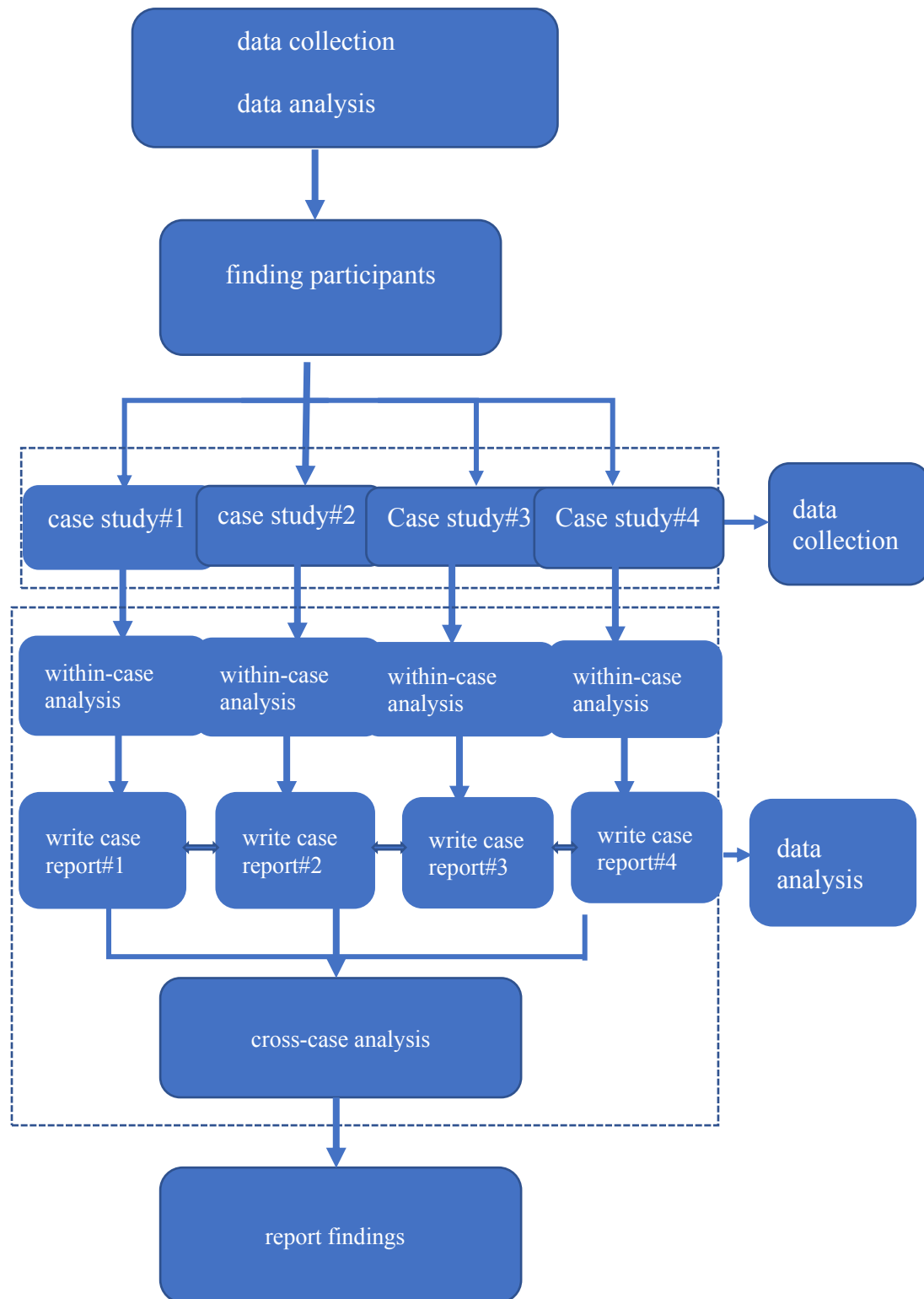
Figure 1. Case study design adapted from Yin (1994), p. 49

Setting

The research was situated in the School of English and Education (SEE) in Southern China where I worked as a faculty member for the convenience of data collection. SEE was established in 2001, originally responsible for English teaching for all non-English major students on campus, including both under- and post-graduates, with five teaching divisions. In 2005, an Education Department was established, committed to a four-year teacher education program entitled English and Education. English and Education was aimed at cultivating English teachers for schools and various training institutions. In 2018, this teacher education program was separated into two programs: Education and English Education, with its first enrollment for the latter program coming in the fall of 2019. Therefore, the current study focuses on the alumni of the former English and Education program. Through the time of this study, practicum had a history of around ten years.

Different from traditional English teacher education programs which focus only on improving teacher candidates' English proficiency and language knowledge, SEE's teacher education program focuses on both language-related and education-related knowledge, making the core courses encompass two modules: courses in English language and literature, and courses in education. Language-related courses improve and consolidate STs' English language proficiency and furnish STs with requisite subject knowledge, while education-related courses provide STs foundational information of what to teach and how to teach.

As a convention in many universities in China, the practicum under study was conducted in the fall semester of the fourth year in public schools and lasted six weeks.

Due to the fame in foreign languages studies and teaching my university enjoys in South China, SEE has established a wide network of cooperating junior high schools in nearby cities within two-hour driving distance. STs in this program enjoy freedom to choose their practicum sites by themselves or among the options provided by SEE. If applicants outnumber what the partnered school can admit, SEE will intervene and assign a school to STs.

Like most teaching practicum situations in China, the practicum under study ideally consisted of "tripartite responsibilities" (Yan & He, 2010), that is, conducting classroom teaching, undertaking the work of Banzhuren (class teacher), and carrying out educational research.

One supervisor was assigned to each placement. The supervisor was expected to visit STs and observe their teaching from time to time. But no details were specified on how to and how often to supervise STs as well as the assessment. Theoretically, supervisors were expected to come from the Education Department. But as supervising is not a coveted job, with increasingly demanding research requirements from the university, many teachers try to escape the extra load of supervising. Therefore, any teachers deemed qualified to supervise by the deans are required to join the supervisor team. For example, I, who teaches in Division IV, was invited to supervise due to a shortage of supervisors four years ago. Each supervisor needed to observe one public teaching session by the supervised STs and offer assessment.

Two mentors were assigned to each ST by the practicum school. One was the subject mentor responsible for the ST's English teaching, the other was the class mentor responsible for guiding the ST in class management, for each ST took charge of one

class. Both mentors would evaluate the ST's performances, one in English teaching and the other in the work of Banzhuren, at the end of practicum.

Participants and Sampling Strategy

I used purposive sampling (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012) to locate my participants in this study. Purposive sampling was adopted because it gave me access to graduates who were willing to share their practicum conflict experiences. Graduates in the most recent three to five years were my prospective participants mainly for the following reasons: a) negative impact from revealing their conflict experiences could be minimized as they had already completed their practicum; b) their working experience and reflection would offer more insight into this topic and contributed to the study of micropolitics; c) their memories could be traced to contribute to the details for this research purpose. Volunteers with a longer than five-year graduation period were screened out.

Specifically, I used two methods to locate my participants. I made use of group WeChat (a popular social media in China) for annual graduates. In mid-2019, I posted a recruitment notice in group WeChat (a popular social media platform in China) for graduates in 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019 and welcomed anyone interested in sharing their experiences to contact me for further information regarding the nature and the process of the interviews. Simultaneously, I also used snowball sampling strategy (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012). I have supervised student teachers in the last four years, although I have not taught any subject courses in the teacher education program since 2007. I spread the news among my supervised student teachers, colleagues, and interview participants that I was looking for participants for my research. I sent them the recruitment notice so that

any potential participants could contact me directly without revealing their identity to others, since the recruitment notice had my contact information. A brief definition of conflict and examples of conflicts were attached in the recruitment notice so that participants could have an understanding of the study topic. Examples of conflict were chosen from the list Pillen, Beijaard, and Brok (2013) provided in their study. The recruitment notice is attached in Appendix B.

The first recruitment notice was posted in WeChat groups on a Saturday at the end of June. Since no one contacted me, I reposted it in mid-July. Immediately one responded and we had a WeChat talk. She said she would have contacted me earlier but forgot amid preoccupations upon graduation. She had moved to another city, reported to work, got settled down, and began her induction training. When she read the post again both from her supervisor's WeChat and my second posting, she did not wait and contacted me immediately. This information was a very important reminder and I posted my recruitment notice for the third time. Three more responded.

This gave me four participants. However, one dropped off two hours before our first interview, blaming herself for being naïve and inexperienced; she opted not to participate in the study. I sensed her insecurity and uneasiness and accepted her refusal willingly. Another participant turned out to have done her practicum in a language training organization after our first interview, which did not meet my requirement of conducting teaching practicum in a regular urban school. Since I only got two valid participants, I posted the recruitment a fourth time and asked my participants to spread the post among their cohort members. The second two participants showed up by the end of July.

In all I had four participants for my study. These four participants were all females. Three graduated in 2018 and one in 2019.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were the primary data collection tool in this study. As one of the most important and essential sources of case study information (Yin, 2003), interviews give the researcher access to important and in-depth data about participants' experiences and feelings by exploring and examining their experiences and feelings more easily than through observation (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012). Rubin and Rubin (2005) compare interviews to night goggles, ''permitting us to see that which is not ordinarily on view and examine that which is looked at but seldom seen'' (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. vii). Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) regard an interview as "an active process of social production of knowledge between the interviewer and the interviewee in a conversational relation. Thus, it is open-ended, contextual, linguistic, narrative, and pragmatic" (p. 21). It allows participants to share the facts of a matter as well as their insights into events. Another advantage of semi-structured interviews is that they offer the researcher the freedom to deviate from the established questions in order to probe more thoroughly into important and helpful responses, "views and opinions where it is desirable" (Gray, 2005, p. 217). Therefore, semi-structured interviews were used in this study to investigate STs' attitudes, interests, feelings, concerns, and values.

But interviewing is not simple or straightforward. Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) state the interviewer is not merely "tape recording" (p. 10) but is actively involved in following up on the participants' answers, "seeking to clarify and extend the interview statement" (p. 20). Freedom, safety, and trust are essential so that the participant is

willing to talk about private events recorded for later public use. To afford participants freedom, safety, and trust, I used the following two strategies.

First, after locating my participants, I set up the preparatory work for the ensuing interviews. I had a chat with each participant after we added each other as friends in the WeChat. To achieve understanding and rapport, I employed "to give" strategy. I introduced myself to them first. I shared with them my stories as a university student, my working experiences, my EdD study experience, and my research, which they reciprocated with their self-introduction and other life stories. I then informed them of their confidentiality, their potential contribution to the study, the consent form, and their commitment to two interviews. I also sent them the consent form, a list with demographic information, and some open-ended questions. I told them if they were interested after reading those materials, they were more than welcome to sign the consent form, fill in the demographic list, schedule the interview time, and send them back to me. A sample of the list is attached in Appendix B.

Second, I conducted interviews in a comfortable way. I allowed the participants to choose the interview locations at their convenience. Most of the interviewees chose a public location such as a local tea house or their favorite café houses. As one participant had already begun her job in another city, we had to resort to WeChat and did two online interviews. All the meeting places were quiet, convenient, and accessible to both the participants and the researcher and provided an opportunity for adequate privacy. I gained approval from the participants to record the interviews for accuracy and truthfulness. I listened to their experiences attentively and respectfully, treating each as a

person rather than a participant so that they would feel free and comfortable to share their experiences.

According to Brinkmann and Kvale (2015), the purpose of interviews is "to know how they (interviewees) describe their experiences or articulate their reasons for action" (p. 3) and "to understand the world from the subjects' points of view, to unfold the meaning of their experiences, to uncover their lived world" (p. 3). To gain participants' view of their conflict experiences, I conducted eight semi-structured interviews for this study, two rounds for each participant. Six face-to-face personal interviews were conducted in a public place chosen by my participants and two online interviews.

Interviews were conducted in Chinese, the participants' mother language. The first interview was to build up rapport further with my participants and to learn about their practicum experiences. After the initial interview, I reminded them of the second interview time, place, and questions. In the second interview I asked for the details based on their first interview and solicited their thinking about their practicum experiences and lessons they had learned. I encouraged them to think how conflicts took place and what these conflicts meant to them. At the end of both interviews I invited them to contact me anytime if they had additional ideas to share. I also gained their permission for further communication if any missing or unclear information was needed or should be clarified. Questions for both interviews are attached in Appendix B.

All interviews were recorded with wireless recording machines. I took field notes, which were brief descriptions of the contexts of the interview (setting, participants, time), noticeable acts of the participants, and the researcher's personal perspectives/experiences. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and translated by the researcher into English.

Qualitative studies utilize member checking as "the most crucial technique for establishing credibility"(Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314). Since most of the interviewees were grounded in English learning and teaching, I sent both the transcripts and the translations to each interviewee to double-check that the transcripts conveyed their experience well and was properly translated. Two of them supplied additional explanations of their views in the transcripts, but none revised anything in the translations.

Besides interviews, other materials were collected. One participant provided several journal entries, two lesson plans, one teaching video, and her practicum summary report. Another participant presented the pictures of the wish cards her students sent upon her departure from the school. Another one offered me the lesson plan for her teaching unit. These materials helped me to understand them and their relationship with mentors and students.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted in four phases. Phase one was the preparation stage for analysis. Since interviews were done verbally in Chinese, I first transcribed them verbatim. Then the transcriptions were translated into English. The process of transcription and translation helped me to familiarize myself with the data (Riessman, 1993).

Phase two was the within-case analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I treated the interviews with the same participant as an independent data item (Braun & Clarke, 2006) which offered "a detailed description of each case and themes within the case" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 179). I first buried myself among the data to extract conflict

experiences. Then I tried to discover the themes within each case. To do so, I engaged

myself in thematic analysis, a method for "identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns

(themes) within data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 6) so that rich data can be minimally

organized. I read the transcripts, examined the collected data, "played" with the data in

the array (Yin, 2013) (see Table 2), searched for causes of the conflicts which led to

themes by using coding (initial, focused, thematic) and referred to my field notes. These

steps were iterated so that I found themes that answered research question one.

Table 2 Information array of participant Summer

Name	Placement	Conflicts	What did she do?	Themes
Summer	EFLS	Whose method worked better?	Proposed jigsaw reading, argued, and became silent	Power differential, face/authority, empowerment
		Mentor's reviewing	Said nothing but sat in the back and became silent	Power differential, face
		Homework	Said nothing and remained silent	ST and mentor's different teaching philosophy (exam-vs-quality education)

Phase three was cross-case analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). During this

comparative analysis, I juxtaposed the information arrays of four participants (see

Appendix D) so that common themes that went across the cases surfaced. This method

also helped to address the second research question, that is, the insights into the

realities/experiences of student teaching in a Chinese context.

Phase four was compromised of efforts to achieve greater validity and ensure

trustworthiness. Several strategies were employed to this end. First, I provided a rich and

thick description of each case in different episodes to fully demonstrate the participants' conflict experiences. Stake (2010) states, "a description is rich if it provides abundant, interconnected details…" (p. 49). A thick description allows the readers to decide whether the findings can be transferred to other settings because of their shared characteristics (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The second strategy I used was member checking. According to Stake (1995), participants "play a major role directing as well as acting in case study" (p. 115). In light of "the most critical technique for establishing credibility" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314), I sent the data, analysis, interpretation, and conclusions back to my interviewees to solicit their views of the accuracy and credibility of their accounts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). None showed disagreement in their feedback, where traditional Chinese ideas, such as maintaining harmony despite disagreement and showing respect for teachers, might have played a role.

The third strategy was external audit. I invited a colleague in another school to "examine the process and the product of the accounts, assessing their accuracy" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 262). I got the participants' approval to send the transcriptions, interpretations, findings, and conclusions to be checked under anonymity by my friend. My friend checked from his perspective to minimize subjectivity of my interpretations. Disagreements between us in case analysis were abandoned after our discussions. As the researcher, I hope these strategies helped to represent their stories well.

Research Ethics

Measures were taken to regulate the ethics pertaining to this study. First, I obtained the approval from GFU IRB by the end of June, 2019. IRB approval meant that the board determined that in my study "participants will not be placed at risk or that potential risk is minimal compared to the potential benefits of the study" (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012, p. 21). Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2012) also state that the most basic and important ethical issue in research is the protection of participants, which means that research participants should "not be harmed in any way (i.e., physically, mentally, or socially) and that they participate only if they freely agree to do so (i.e., give informed consent)" (p. 21).

To observe this rule, I first gained the informed consent from my participants. After locating my participants, I emailed a letter of consent with my email address to my participants first. Three signed their consent form when I met them in their first interview. One of the participants sent back her digital signature to my email box as she was working in another city. The letter of consent stated clearly the purpose of my research and how the findings of the research would be disseminated. Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and safe, that they could exit at any moment, how confidentiality would be protected, and how information they shared would be used in the research or in the future.

Second, I maintained an awareness of participants' well-being in my research process. Before I began each interview, I reiterated to them their rights to quit or terminate participation at any time and how I would maintain confidentiality. I also informed my participants that they could refuse any questions that would challenge them

beyond their comfort level. When one of my participants quit two hours before our initial interview, even if I was already on the way to meet her, I mentioned nothing of it and thanked her for her frankness.

Third, I employed strategies to ensure or to protect the confidentiality of the participants as well as of the people and institutions involved in their shared stories/experiences. I used anonymity to ensure confidentiality and avoid privacy invasion and potential harm. As listed in Appendix C, participants could choose their preferred pseudo-names for themselves and their practicum sites. When they asked me to do that for them, I used four seasons (Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter) to represent my four participants and four directions (Eastern, Southern, Western, and Northern) as the names of their practicum schools. I utilized the "find and replace" tool in the word processing program to remove names from data sheets or coding records to maintain anonymity so that no person or institution could be identified in my findings.

I also reduced the risk of harm to the participants by gaining consent to archive data in a safe, private place only the researcher has the access to, which included the signed letters, recordings, accompanying textual transcripts, translation texts, and field notes. The raw data and other materials will be destroyed by the researcher after being archived for five years upon the completion of the dissertation.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This study examined the practicum experiences of four former EFL student teachers in four foreign language schools in a southern province in China. The results of this study reflected the interview data of these four Chinese EFL teachers who did their practicum one or two years ago. In this chapter I first provide a biography of each participant, with their major conflict experiences elaborated in episodes. Direct quotes were used to reveal participants' feelings and thoughts. Each participant's conflict-experience narration is followed with a within-case analysis. Towards the end of the chapter, I also present the major themes resulting from the cross-analysis of the interview data in the section of thematic overview. Some quotes from interviews were used again to support my findings.

In this case study, I personally interviewed four student teachers over the course of a five-week period to accommodate participants' schedules. I attempted to investigate their practicum experiences and examine their micropolitical literacy in confronting practicum conflicts. My research questions were:

Research question #1

What do former Chinese student teachers' stories about their practicum experiences reveal about conflicts and conflict resolution within practicum?

Research question #2

How does a micropolitical lens offer insight into the realities/experiences of student teaching in a Chinese context?

To answer these research questions, I did eight interviews in total, two for each participant. All interviews were conducted in China and in Chinese.

Demographic Information

I used pseudonyms in this study to identify each participant and their practicum school in lieu of their real names. Participants were named after the four seasons of the year and schools were named after the four directions. Table 3 provides the demographic information of each participant.

Table 3 Demographic information of the participants

Name	Sex	Graduate Year	Mentor	Practicum School	Practicum Grade	Current Status	Documents Provided
Spring	F	2019	Mrs. F	Southern Foreign Language School (SFLS)	Grade 8	Grade 10 EFL teacher	Lesson plans
Summer	F	2018	Mrs. E	Eastern Foreign Language School (EFLS)	Grade 8	Grade 4 EFL teacher	None
Autumn	F	2018	Mrs. W	Northern Foreign Language School (NFLS)	Grade 8	Grade 7 EFL teacher	Cards from students
Winter	F	2018	Mrs. J	Western Foreign Language School (WFLS)	Grade 8	Grade 11 EFL teacher	Lesson plans, class video, summary report, journals, and observation notes

The following section begins with each participant's biography, including a brief introduction of the participant, the practicum school, and the mentor. The biography is then followed with each participant's practicum experience embedded in episodes and ends with an analysis. Each participant had complex experiences that impacted their perspective on practicum, teaching, students, mentors, and themselves.

All of my participants graduated from their teacher education program and were working as a school English teacher by the time of the data collection: one in elementary school, one in junior high, and two in senior high. Three of them had been working for one year except Spring who taught for less than one month by the time of our first interview.

Participant One: Spring. Spring graduated from university in May 2019. She came from a middle-class family. Her father was a teacher and her mom a state-owned factory worker. Due to incompatibilities in their personalities, her parents did not get along with each other and she was raised single-handedly by her mom.

She did her practicum in 2018 at Southern Foreign Languages School (SFLS). SFLS is a boarding school famous for its open culture, frequent international exchanges, and responsible teachers who stay on campus from Monday to Friday. Coming from affluent families, students are carefree. Spring chose this school because SFLS provided free boarding and lodging. Due to an unsure future upon graduation, Spring decided to take the graduate exam which would occur one and a half months after the completion of practicum. She had thought living on campus could offer her more time for her exam preparation without daily commuting, which turned out to be wrong.

Her mentor, Mrs. F, was a very experienced and responsible teacher. She devoted herself entirely to her students and got rewarded with her class being the top class year after year. The first sight of Mrs. F impressed Spring as a responsible and loving teacher. In fact, Mrs. F was so responsible and devoted that she could not even afford time for her own child, which she revealed to Spring in their later talks.

What Spring felt most dissatisfied with was the long working hours at school. She worked from 7:00 am till midnight, with a 2-hour noon break. She would have been able to mind her own business when night study ended at 9:30 pm. But since Mrs. F preferred to work in the office late into night, she felt compelled to follow suit. Her job was supervising students' morning reading, observing or teaching, grading homework, supervising students' morning exercises, intervals, and night study, of which grading was the most time-consuming. Each time when Spring mentioned grading, she would repeat the word "grading" three times (Gai, Gai, Gai in Chinese), which revealed her strong negative feelings about it. This full schedule in practicum posed a threat to Spring's personal commitment.

Episode 1: I was torn apart between practicum and my exam preparation.

Thinking graduate study would offer her another three years to consider her career, Spring decided to take the graduate exam. She had thought her practicum would be facilitative to her exam-preparation with a lot of free time and no commuting. She did not expect what happened. In fact, she felt so overwhelmed with practicum work and exam-preparation that she began to lose hair and weight. Without sufficient sleep, she wore dark circles around her eyes every day.

Among all the work Spring had to do, grading was the most time-consuming. Every day she would have piles after piles of worksheets, exercise books, and papers on her desk. Grading writing took up more time: "I had to read line by line, circle out mistakes, and write down my suggestions. Otherwise grading would lose its value." When her first week was spent in grading, Spring did not expect this to be her routine major job, expecting she would have more free time later. It was a week later that Spring realized free time was a fantasy. After exchanging information with the other cohort members, Spring realized that her grading load was the heaviest. Thinking she could not afford such commitment to practicum, Spring summoned up her courage and told Mrs. F her plan to take the graduate exam, expecting Mrs. F would reduce her grading load. To her disappointment, Mrs. F said nothing.

Unsure whether she conveyed herself well to Mrs. F, Spring dropped hints to Mrs. F from time to time. In the office, Spring would hold a book before Mrs. F and murmur gloomily, "I don't think I can finish this book." She would speak loudly to her cohort members that she was not well prepared for her exam while Mrs. F was within earshot. In the last two weeks, she even took her exam books with her while observing Mrs. F's class. Throughout the practicum, Mrs. F dismissed all Spring's hints and did not reduce her workload. Though Spring understood Mrs. F's intentions, she did not want to give up her personal plan: "Her stance on this issue is clear. To her, practicum is to serve students whole-heartedly. There is no space for personal issues. But what about my graduate exam? How wrong I was to conduct my practicum here!"

Spring learned to schedule her time in a very systematic way. She made use of her fragmented free time. Even if Spring was deficient in sleep, she studied during her lunch

break. While students did exercises in class, she read her own books. No matter how busy she was, she would schedule at least one hour for reading before grading. She would hold the graded homework longer, misleading Mrs. F to think that she had not yet finished grading and could not take more grading work.

This struggle between the practicum and her personal commitment ran throughout Spring's entire practicum. In retrospect, Spring laughed at her tricks but said she did not feel guilty about her behavior, because "I finished grading all homework Mrs. F assigned to me and I graded each piece of homework very carefully." But she wished she had told Mrs. F confidently and respectfully about her need for reading time.

Episode 2: I prefer jigsaw reading.

Spring was an adamant advocate for quality-oriented education. Spring's teacher education program convinced her that education was to cultivate competencies in students which were far more important than scores on exams. According to Spring, these competencies included cooperation, problem-solving, information-processing, and cross-cultural communication. She was committed to applying what she had learned in university to her teaching.

Spring had eight teaching sessions in two classes in total. Everything went well with her teaching. She taught the compulsory contents of her unit: grammar, vocabulary, and Passage 1 of the unit. Then she decided to offer her students a "real" reading experience with an online article by an American writer. She chose jigsaw reading as her teaching method so that each student would assume responsibility and cooperate to comprehend the reading.

When she submitted her lesson plan, Mrs. F had a look and asked her to change her plan. She wanted Spring to review all the grammar and vocabulary in the textbook for the upcoming midterm exam, which accounted for 40% of the exam. Spring described their communication as follows.

> I paused for a second, considering how I should respond and giving her more time to consider her decisions too. Then I told her I preferred to try a jigsaw reading of the online article. Mrs. F thought for a while and asked for details about jigsaw reading. So, I explained to her what jigsaw reading was, what advantages it had, and how I would apply it to my teaching. Mrs. F affirmed the advantages of jigsaw reading but shared her two concerns. One was the reading article might be hard for students. The other was students' misinterpretation of the article in this self-help reading. Still worried about students' performance in the mid-term exam, Mrs. F suggested me trying jigsaw reading with Passage 2 of the unit. She thought it could help students review its vocabulary and grammar. I told her frankly and politely that there was no point in doing so since passage 2 had already been previewed by students. She thought for a while and asked for my other reasons for jigsaw reading. I told her it was to involve and motivate those mischievous boys in class who seemed disinterested in English. Hearing this, Mrs. F didn't insist any longer and accepted my teaching plan willingly with some revisions provided.

Spring felt lucky and happy that Mrs. F did not force her to change her lesson. Her teaching was very successful. Mrs. F was pleased and said she would try jigsaw reading sometime. But she told Spring reading for students was more than simply getting

the main idea. She thought students should learn to express themselves with proper words and appropriate sentence patterns, which set Spring into deep thinking.

Spring's teaching after graduation deepened her understanding of Mrs. F's words. From this interaction, she gained more understanding of student needs, students themselves, and the importance of a high score for students. She said she would accept her mentor's suggestion now, though cultivating students' competence was still her major concern.

Episode 3: How should I treat my students, as a friend or as a student?

Spring encountered challenges from her students from time to time. Whenever those moments occurred, Spring would recall her student experiences to consider what strategies she should adopt. Spring argued students respected two kinds of teachers: a strict teacher and a charismatic teacher. Since Spring hated to be a strict teacher in her student teaching, putting on a serious face all day long, she decided to be a teacher with personal charisma.

To display her charisma, Spring managed to make her teaching interesting. To do so, she tried to relate teaching to life. She spent a lot of time considering how to teach grammar in an interesting way, how to design activities to gain students' attention, and how to activate students' interest. For example, instead of using "Xiaoming" (a general name used to refer to somebody) in her examples, Spring preferred students' idols, classmates, or game characters. "If I sensed students' boredom, I would bring up some funny things I had learned from the Internet to cheer them up", Spring said. With a small age gap and little pressure for academic achievements, Spring gained students' favor quickly.

Since this method was based on the precept of treating students as friends, it posed a threat to her authority as a teacher. "If you are friends, your authority is also at risk," Spring laughed, "When you attempt to correct them, they hear it, but they won't take it seriously. They won't realize you are serious but to continue doing what you are totally against."

During a night study, a boy student placed his chair over his head, at which the whole class laughed wildly. Afraid of being blamed for the noise and deemed as lacking professionalism, Spring raised her voice to silence the class and to stop the boy from doing it again. But one second later, he placed the chair over his head again. Laughter became louder.

Spring decided to give the boy a good lesson. Being the only child from a wealthy family, these children were spoiled, "People around them are too gentle and too nice to them---family members, teachers, and student teachers. They need to be disciplined." Pretending to be very angry, Spring approached him and said in a loud and serious voice, "If you dare do that again, you shall come to the blackboard and write down the whole passage we've just learned." This stopped the boy miraculously and the class regained silence.

Analysis. Spring revealed three interpersonal conflicts in her interviews: two with Mrs. F and one with her student. The first conflict with the mentor focused on Spring's need for time to prepare for her exams. Mrs. F thought STs should be committed only to practicum and dismissed Spring's hints for more free time. Thinking she could make use of practicum to prepare for her exam, Spring did not expect practicum at SFLS would be so demanding. Different task perceptions of practicum posed a threat to Spring's self-

interests and subjected her to a lot of strains in balancing practicum and her personal commitment.

The second conflict was about the teaching contents and methods before midterm exam. Mrs. F deemed reviewing grammar and vocabulary before midterm exam could benefit student with a higher mark, which posed a threat to Spring's cultural–ideological interests—cultivating students' competence. Just as Ball (1994) points out, cultural-ideological interests are essentially matters of ideological struggle. In this case, it was Spring's constructive teaching for cultivating students' competencies versus the mentor's traditional teaching of textbook knowledge, caused by the long-standing struggle between exam-oriented education and quality-oriented education in China. As this conflict was much related to Spring's professional self-esteem and task perception (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b), it also threatened Spring's self-interests.

The third conflict with the student was caused by her role as a student teacher who treated students as her friends. Spring admitted students treated her differently from Mrs. F, "even the sight of Mrs. F could silence the class." Due to the friendliness Spring demonstrated to students, the boy treated Spring as a friend and tried to please the class and Spring as a friend would without realizing he might cause trouble for her. When Spring's identity as a teacher was threatened by the identity as a friend, it also threatened Spring's self-interests.

Reading the micropolitics of the situation. It is clear that Spring came to practicum with some knowledge of the political contexts of the school. She was deeply aware of the professional relationship and the power differential between her and her mentor, which may come from traditional Chinese culture. She knew she had to respect a

mentor's decision, revere mentor authority, and comply with the work the mentor assigned. With this active reading of the politics of practicum, she demonstrated her deference to Mrs. F. When Mrs. F worked in the office, she worked in the office too, impressing Mrs. F that she was a hard-working ST. She graded all the assigned homework conscientiously despite her complaints in the interview.

She performed similarly well in reading her situation with students. She was cognizant of teacher authority over students and the noise in the third conflict. On one hand, she knew gaining students' recognition was vital for her successful completion of practicum and managed to win over students with her well-designed teaching. On the other hand, she knew if she could not silence the noise in her class immediately, she might run into trouble: her mentor and other colleagues would think negatively of her quality as a teacher; she would face criticism from them and perhaps negative evaluation of her practicum.

But her political knowledge of practicum was not sufficient. She was not aware of the nature of the school, her practicum work at the school, nor her mentor. She came to this school simply because she wanted no daily commuting. Since she did not know much about her mentor, it took her some time to understand Mrs. F's work ethics. Free from the pressure to be responsible for students' academic performance, she could not realize the strain prevalent exam-oriented education exerted over students and teachers. Her understanding of the school, the mentor, and the students shaped her strategies to deal with her situations.

Tactics to navigate conflicts. In confronting these conflicts, Spring resorted to different tactics. In her first conflict, Spring adopted accommodation. She reconciled her

personal demands with the demands from a more powerful force in the environment, her mentor. Awed by her mentor's authority, Spring dare not initiate a talk with Mrs. F to negotiate openly her concerns but to imply to Mrs. F her request for more study time. When she finally understood Mrs. F's stance, she took active measures to satisfy the mentor's demands and to protect her own interests in the meanwhile. Compromising self-concern to accommodate the mentor's requests, Spring navigated hard to resolve her first conflict.

In resolving the jigsaw reading conflict, Spring and her mentor conducted an effective in-depth communication, setting up a collaboration model. Though it was Mrs. F who initiated this communication, Spring contributed to it with good preparation, courage to share her ideas frankly with the mentor, and her concern for students, which dissolved Mrs. F's doubts and influenced Mrs. F's decision positively.

In disciplining the boy student, Spring demonstrated tactfulness. She first did what STs would usually do and raised her voice to ask the class to be silent. After experiencing failures, she changed her tactic immediately. She assumed teacher's role and displayed teacher's power. The typical punishments used by Chinese teachers was to make students copy the text many times on their own exercise books. Spring innovated and challenged the boy student's face with a dictation in front of the class. Though the disciplinary tactic might be viewed as contentious, it helped Spring, a ST without teacher authority, to successfully deter the student's gimmicks and to avoid negative consequences.

Participant Two: Summer. Summer graduated in 2018. She came from a teachers' family. Her dad was a math teacher and her mom a Chinese teacher. Influenced

by her parents, Summer chose to study English education. Upon graduation, she tried several jobs, but felt called to be a teacher. So, she quit her job and became an elementary English teacher in J City. When Summer talked about her job, her voice became animated and her face brightened. She said she felt proud to be a teacher because "I can help a child to become better."

Summer did her practicum in Eastern Foreign Language School (EFLS). To locate her ideal practicum school, Summer referred to her seniors, made a comparison among all the university's partnered placements, and concluded that EFLS was her ideal school, because it provided STs with the most teaching practices.

EFLS is a k-9 junior high school. It began to assume local reputation for its variety of high-quality student programs, such as English opera and the robotics program. It embraces a collaborative atmosphere and encourages its teachers to be innovative. Summer said almost all the methods introduced in her methodology course were applied in EFLS, which thrilled her.

Mrs. E was Summer's mentor, an experienced teacher in teaching and mentoring and the course leader for Grade 8. Summer thought Mrs. E fulfilled her duties well. She checked Summer's lesson plans carefully, offered Summer nearly 20 teaching hours in total, observed all her classes, and provided timely feedback, for which Summer was very thankful. Two most useful things she learned from Mrs. E were the orderly arrangement of blackboard writing and clear instructions to students. Even so, Summer encountered some conflicts with her mentor, which influenced her as a teacher.

Episode 1: I made her lose face.

One day during her first week in practicum, Summer was approached by her mentor for opinions of her teaching. It was a reading class about how four kinds of animals protected themselves from danger. In class, Mrs. E first helped students become acquainted with the words in the reading passage. Then she raised questions about the text and played the recording so that students could find the answers while listening to and reading the text. After that, students were grouped to discuss their answers to her questions. Summer thought about jigsaw reading and noted it down in her notebook. In her junior year she demonstrated a jigsaw reading teaching plan in her methodology class and was highly praised by her professor.

When Mrs. E asked for her opinions, Summer could not wait to introduce jigsaw reading. She talked so enthusiastically about jigsaw reading that she did not realize Mrs. E's smile had already disappeared. Standing before her was a sullen Mrs. E. who defended herself strenuously. When Summer commented that jigsaw reading could cultivate communication among students and help them learn to listen to the others, Mrs. E countered that her students only enjoyed talking rather than listening, implying that students would not appreciate jigsaw reading. Mrs. E added that jigsaw reading could not help students in exams. She argued that jigsaw reading advocated cooperative learning whereas students had to read independently in exams. Her defensiveness made Summer realize she must have done something wrong.

> I came to realize that I was wrong for not giving her face but making her lose
> face. My well-intended proposal was taken as a challenge to her authority, a
> denial of her teaching capability, and a threat to her position. How dare I, a

student teacher, make suggestions to her, an experienced teacher, a mentor, and
the course leader?

Realizing this, Summer turned silent immediately. Mrs. E concluded that "Jigsaw
reading is not that wonderful" and insisted on not using it in her next class. "I was
disappointed. She refused my suggestion and denied the strength of jigsaw reading. But
considering my status, I don't think I should say anything more." Even now when her
colleagues asked for her opinions about their teaching, Summer would only focus on
positive parts and praise them but to keep her real thinking to herself.

> In our culture, novices and student teachers are treated in the same way. They
> are expected to learn from experienced teachers. Suggestions to improve
> pedagogy from novices are considered to be a challenge to veteran teachers'
> authority and disrespectful. In reflection, I came to know Mrs. E didn't intend
> for my suggestions but to claim my recognition of her capability and leadership.
> But I took it seriously and literally and suggested innocently. …But I still hold
> that STs should be empowered to convey their immature ideas. We share the
> same goal as our mentors to serve the welfare of our students. Though we are
> young and inexperienced, our ideas can enlighten them too.

Episode 2: She retaught what I had taught.

Summer thought her defiance against Mrs. E's face caused her disfavor with Mrs.
E, which was demonstrated in her reviewing of Summer's teaching. Each Monday
morning after Summer's one-week teaching, Mrs. E would review in class what Summer
had taught in the previous week. It first happened after her first week of teaching. As she
was leaving for her Monday teaching as usual, Mrs. E stopped her and said, "I will teach

today." Summer felt uncomfortable at this short notice but had to obey and sat in the back of the classroom. To her surprise, Mrs. E reviewed what she had taught in the entire previous week, but with greater clarity.

Without realizing the value of Mrs. E's reviewing at that time, Summer felt humiliated. "She didn't respect me at all. She didn't inform me beforehand, nor did she appreciate my efforts. All my efforts were wasted. Did I teach poorly, or did she feel threatened?" Students began to make noises, protesting that there was no need to relearn what was taught, to which Mrs. E paid no attention. Many students turned around to look at Summer. "I felt so embarrassed. I lowered my head to avoid their eye contact, pretending I was grading their homework. She didn't like me." Summer shared her discomfort with her cohort members. They concluded Mrs. E did so to reassume her authority.

From that time on, it became a routine. Each week after Summer's teaching, Mrs. E would review what she had taught. What surprised Summer was that students performed much better both in homework and quizzes after Mrs. E's reviewing.

This conflict with Mrs. E was not resolved until Summer took over a pregnant colleague's class weeks before the final exam in her first-year teaching. Even though the colleague assured Summer that all the teaching units had been finished, students' performance in the quiz compelled Summer to review two units. "Suddenly my misunderstanding of Mrs. E got resolved. Her reviewing was for the good of students, but I took it personally… But why didn't she tell me directly? Is it to save my face?"

Episode 3: There is no point for students to have so much homework.

Summer liked EFLS in many aspects but not their practice in homework, which she viewed as extensive. Every day students had to finish several worksheets and one paper designed by their teachers. Every week they needed to write one essay and take two quizzes. It is generally assumed that the more exercises students do, the higher score they earn. But Summer found it not necessarily true.

> Their study load is so heavy that students don't have time to digest and review what's been taught in class. It is quite often that a student makes the same mistake three or four times a week: in Monday's homework, Tuesday's homework, Wednesday's quiz, and the weekly quiz. This problem kept me questioning the current school practice of homework.

Contrary to the conventional perception of homework, Summer thought the key was not how much homework students had finished, but how well they had learned. In Summer's view, homework is necessary, but it should "reinforce learning, but not guilt or shame." Repetitive exercises without comprehension increased workload, mistake incidence, and shame but deflated confidence. Summer insisted three things were vital to student learning: 1) teachers should help students understand with examples how language and grammar worked in different contexts and how to transfer their learning to exercises (or practices); 2) students should have sufficient reviewing time; 3) teachers should select exercises for students which helped consolidate their learning. To Summer, immersion in exercises and quizzes made both teachers and students exhausted and discouraged.

Unfortunately, Summer and her cohort members did not dare to try this idea in practicum, nor did they share it with their mentors. Instead, they kept grading piles after piles of student homework, which Summer explained as follows:

It would be a challenge to her (Mrs. E) and to the school. As the course leader decides and organizes the designing of worksheets and papers, we dare not say anything against homework, let alone require the school to make changes. We are simply student teachers, not experts. We prefer to keep this idea and apply it in our own classes in the future.

Summer did try her idea when she became a teacher. She did not assign homework to her students but required them to review their learning at home. It turned out to be very effective, "My class did as well as other teachers' classes who had done a lot of homework."

Analysis. Summer encountered both interpersonal and intrapersonal conflicts in her practicum. Her first two conflict experiences centered on face and authority. In the first conflict, instead of praising Mrs. E for her constructive teaching to build up harmony and to display her obedience as a ST should do, Summer threatened Mrs. E's authority and face by proposing jigsaw reading as an alternative to her mentor's plan, which put Summer's social-professional interests at stake and created a conflict. In the second conflict, Summer thought Mrs. E disrespected her and threatened her face by reviewing the contents she had already taught. It menaced her self-interests, particularly her belief about herself as a teacher and her self-esteem. The intrapersonal conflict over homework was triggered by contrasting perceptions or beliefs of education. While homework is predominantly regarded as an effective practice to raise students' scores in China's exam-

oriented education, Summer held that only selective homework served to reinforce learning. How Summer dealt with homework reflected the vulnerability of her cultural-ideological interests.

  Reading the micropolitics of the situation. Summer's conflict experiences demonstrated her awakening awareness of micropolitics in practicum. When her mentor inquired about her opinion in her first practicum week, her micropolitical reading was infantile. Accustomed to the democratic learning environment on campus where fresh ideas were encouraged and appreciated, Summer did not interpret her mentor's inquiry appropriately. It was after she began her job that Summer came to comprehend Mrs. E's intention of inquiry. In practicum, Summer did not know that Mrs. E inquired to confirm her authority over Summer by gaining her recognition of her teaching capability. Conversely, Summer mistook the inquiry as a sincere consultation for better and more effective teaching methods. Instead of giving positive feedback to Mrs. E, Summer, a ST with a lower position, proposed jigsaw reading. In the Chinese context, any juniors are regarded as "immature, aggressive, and lacking appreciation of his or her seniors" (Leung, 2008) if they fail to give face to the seniors by showing appreciation. Therefore, Summer's proposal could be taken as a criticism of her mentor's teaching, a very severe example of face-loss. Instead of giving face to her mentor as a person with a lower status should do, Summer made her mentor lose face (Jia, 2006) and challenged her authority.

  Summer's reading of Mrs. E's reviewing was not positive or open-minded. Instead of interpreting Mrs. E's reviewing as a face-saving strategy by avoiding judging her teaching directly or even negatively, Summer took her mentor's reviewing as embarrassment and humiliation to her. Though the real intent of Mrs. E's reviewing was

unknown without verifying with Mrs. E, positive reading of her context could improve interpersonal relations and navigate Summer through her practicum much easily. But what Summer responded—sitting in the back obediently despite her dissatisfaction—demonstrated Summer's increasing awareness of the micropolitics of her context: the power differential.

What Summer learned from her practicum experiences was the consciousness of authority, which she picked up quickly and utilized as a yardstick for her behavior. She did not share her homework idea with her mentor; "I need to protect myself and leave a good impression on her." Moreover, she concluded that "the higher position a person enjoyed, the less possible for him/her to accept opinions from below," because "a leader usually thinks he/she is better than the other teachers. Accepting opinions from a subordinate exposes his/her inadequacy and weaknesses, which threatens their administration." Summer began to develop a micropolitical consciousness. But her micropolitical consciousness constrained her more constructive behavior.

Tactics to navigate conflicts. Constrained by mentor authority, Summer used the tactic of critical compliance throughout her practicum and even at her present school. Critical compliance was first used by Goodman (1988) to describe a tactic used by the STs in her study. In the study STs appeared to accept the status quo of the traditional teaching methodology but with a critical attitude. It was the same with Summer. She appeared to comply with her mentor's power differential but remained critical: when she stopped arguing with Mrs. E over which teaching method worked better, she still preferred jigsaw reading; when she sat quietly throughout Mrs. E's reviewing, she reserved her dissatisfaction; and though she did not mention a word about homework, she

felt it wrong to assign so much homework to students. Though this tactic helped avoid the escalation of conflicts and contributed to a harmonious relationship, Summer expressed her wish and the need to empower STs.

Participant Three: Autumn. Autumn was a graduate in 2018. She works as an English teacher in a private junior middle school in Q city. She came from a poor family in a village. People in her village respected teachers very much which developed an intense love for teaching in her. She used to think teaching was her dream job.

Autumn did her practicum in Northern Foreign Language School (NFLS). Different from her classmates, she was a substitute for a teacher on maternity leave. Her practicum was called post practicum (Dinggang Shixi in Chinese), which meant she acted as a full-time teacher. In her case, her practicum lasted for almost one semester. She was selected to be an 8th grade English teacher after both written and oral interviews.

NFLS is a famous public k-12 boarding school. Selected out of keen competitions across the province, its students are diligent, intelligent, and self-disciplined. The school rules are very strict. Students are required to do physical exercises every afternoon and no mobile phone is allowed during their school time.

Mrs. W was Autumn's mentor and the course leader. Being busy with teaching and administrative work, she provided Autumn little guidance or assistance, of which she had notified Autumn prior to her taking the position. Mrs. W observed Autumn's teaching once and offered her positive feedback. Though she had told Autumn to come to her for help if needed, Autumn regarded it as a courtesy. Two or three weeks before the end of her practicum, Mrs. W had a serious talk with Autumn and blamed Autumn for disappointing her. She chose Autumn to do post practicum because she appreciated

Autumn's passion for and creativity in teaching. "She said I was very lazy," Autumn said, to which she did not deny or explain, but felt Mrs. W should make attempts in inquiring why she became so. Autumn said reflectively, "She only saw the outcome, but didn't see what's behind it. I used to rest expectations on her too. I expected she could visit my classroom and offer me guidance and help."

In her post practicum, Autumn established a good relationship with students. Even if she was not required to supervise night study, Autumn insisted on visiting her classes every night. She believed being seen by students was an easy means to be accepted by students.

To win students' recognition, Autumn said she worked hard to make her class interesting. She would play videos, organize discussions, and design games, all of which were to involve students and activate the class atmosphere but not for a high mark. She often awarded students with small gifts. "If they can get all the words right in dictation three times in a row, they can get a chocolate bar," said Autumn. "Once a group was awarded with an apple because of their performance in a debate. They placed it on their desks as a token of encouragement till it went bad." Speaking of her students, Autumn shined, "I don't think I can find any student in my present class as good as my practicum students."

Her efforts paid off and she was accepted by her students. Students often invited her, rather than their class teacher, to do jogging exercises with them in the afternoon. When her office was later moved to another building far away from the teaching building, students would still come to visit her. Upon her departure, each student sent her a card with their best wishes.

Autumn would have had a good time at NFLS except for the relationship with the other English teachers at school. According to Autumn, interpersonal conflicts characterized her practicum: "I don't mind running errands for them, such as printing and sorting out newspapers. As a student teacher, I feel obligated to do so. What made me sad was our relationship. They seemed so aloof."

Episode1: Where was my office?

The aloofness Autumn felt began on her arrival, with no office, no table, no computer, and no milk. Autumn was a Grade 8 teacher for two classes. One was an advanced class and the other was an ordinary class. Except that, nothing was prepared for her arrival, "I didn't have an office nor an office table." In the fully packed teachers' office, there were two vacancies. One belonged to the teacher on maternity leave, and the other to the dean of the international program, who seldom came to the office as he had another office nearby. Mrs. W suggested Autumn ask for the dean's permission to use his table. Autumn did so but was refused. Then Mrs. W asked Autumn to call the teacher on maternity leave, who gave Autumn the permission to use her table but only during her absence.

NFLS equipped each office table with a desk computer. Feeling inconvenient to carry her personal laptop to the office every day, Autumn asked whether she could use the desk computer on the desk. The teacher on maternity leave equivocated, which was a refusal in the Chinese context. These experiences impressed Autumn that "the teachers here are not cooperative and hard to get along with." She felt unwelcomed and uneasy, "They didn't prepare anything for me. No office table nor computer. I didn't dare say much as a novice."

What made Autumn feel unwelcome was more than that. There was a refrigerator in the office which stored daily milk free for teachers. But not for Autumn. When she later found out even her classmate at Grade 7 also enjoyed free milk, she felt worse. She chose not to mention it to her mentor, nor her supervisor. She thought Mrs. W must know about it as they were sitting next to each other in the same office. "Why would she bother to get a bottle of milk for a student teacher?" Autumn tried to comfort herself by disregarding the value of milk. But discomfort kept gnawing at her and sank deeper in her.

This discomfort was intensified when the teacher on maternity leave came back. Winter was asked to move her office to another building two blocks away from the main office building. The new office was for teachers in "less important" subjects, such as art, music, and P. E. Autumn said bitterly, "I didn't talk much either in the new office. I hid myself there." Except for receiving notifications and uploading documents online, Autumn had little contact with the other English teachers. In addition, her advanced class was returned and substituted with an ordinary class. Students from the advanced class pleaded with her to stay, which made Autumn sadder.

Episode 2: I was a nobody.

If the office incident isolated Autumn from the other teachers physically, something else segregated her from them emotionally. Once every two weeks, all the 8th grade English teachers would convene to discuss their lesson plans in a classroom. Mrs. W was the person who was in charge of the meeting. As a student teacher, Autumn would always attend and come earlier to help arrange the desks and chairs. While all the other teachers would either volunteer or be invited to speak, Autumn could only sit in the back

and be silent. She was never invited to air her opinion. "I sometimes had very brilliant ideas, but they didn't see any value in me … I think I was nothing in their eyes."

What's more dismaying was no one seemed to appreciate her lesson plans either. There was a digital portfolio of lesson plans and all the teachers were asked to contribute to it. No matter how much painstaking effort Autumn spent on lesson plans, very few showed interest in hers, "my documents had the smallest number of downloading." When colleagues complimented each other's lesson plans, they never said a word about Autumn's.

Being nobody was also the label delegated to ST at the faculty meeting. All the front seats of the auditorium were for the faculty with teachers' names on them, but the seats for student teachers were arranged at the back, nameless and segregated. "I felt sad, voiceless, nameless, and helpless. My cohort member would always remind me that 'you are only a student teacher here.' But I don't think I shall be treated in this way."

Episode 3: The Shanghai Incident

All the above built up exasperations in Autumn. But what happened a week before Autumn moved her office was a devastating blow. Word spread that two teachers would be selected to receive one-month professional training in Shanghai. Anyone could apply. All of a sudden, the teachers' office bustled with excitement. One by one, each shared their reasons for not applying: taking care of children, being too old for a tight schedule, or forthcoming relatives' visits. Autumn took their words literally and felt happy secretly, not realizing disclaimers was typical Chinese courtesy to save face. Though her cohort member reminded her of her role as a student teacher, Autumn fancied she could go to Shanghai. So, she applied. It transpired that all the teachers applied.

Getting to know the truth, Autumn was dumbfounded. She felt cheated and angry, "They are hypocrites. … How can their speech be so inconsistent with their behavior?" In reflection, Autumn attributed her eagerness for the Shanghai training to her unpleasant interactions with the other English teachers in the office, "I felt devalued, detached, and ignored."

Her outstanding performance in university nurtured her pride, "I felt like I was so capable that the whole world should focus on me." This proud feeling grew stronger after she observed the other teachers' classes. Compared with the other teachers' ineloquent English and strong accents, Autumn saw herself far above them. She got national scholarships every year due to her diligence, passed CET- Eight (the highest-level Test for English major students in China), and attended international conferences a couple of times. She had thought her excellence would earn her respect and recognition as it did in university. Unable to adapt herself to the cold shoulder she received in practicum, Autumn felt depressed so that she wanted to escape. Since she could not say "I quit" to Mrs. W, the Shanghai training became her last straw, "getting to know the truth was like watching the escape door close right before my eyes. Since then I became lazy and inactive. Nothing could interest me."

Analysis. Throughout her practicum and the interviews, Autumn expressed strong disappointment at her unpleasant interpersonal relationship in the office, to which she ascribed all her conflicts. She felt unwelcomed in the office. Upon closer inspection, unpleasant interpersonal relations mainly resulted from the lack of a sound practicum management at the school, reflected in a series of denials Autumn experienced: denial to physical materials, denial to airing ideas at lesson planning meetings, denial to being

known at the faculty conference, and denial to being appreciated by the other colleagues. Among these denials were Autumn's ignored physical, emotional, and psychological needs. The unwelcome social context paralyzed Autumn's social skills, which further aggravated this unpleasant interpersonal relationship. With no one offering help or comfort, Autumn concluded the school teachers were aloof and hypocritical and she could not get along with them.

In light of micropolitics, different categories of professional interests are interconnected and interactive (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b). Professional relationships within schools can be an essential source of recognition, but they can also be potential threats to self-esteem. Material interests are another important means to reflect and enhance one's self-interests (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b). Both are important to a positive self-esteem. When Autumn had no access to her office and had a hard time with the other teachers, Autumn's material interests, social-professional interests, and self-interest were all endangered.

Reading the micropolitics of the situation. Throughout her practicum, Autumn's reading of her situation was confined to its negative dimension, which impaired her communication with the other teachers and constrained her risk-taking efforts. Both the physical and the socio-cultural environment in her practicum was unfavorable and intimidating to a new arriving ST: her material interests were threatened with no office or desk; her social-professional interests were at stake with no help, support, and little appreciation from the other office teachers; and her self-interests were in peril with being a nobody due to her status as a ST.

Since Autumn was mindful of the power differential, her micropolitical reading of her context exerted a great amount of emotional load upon her and led to her isolation. She felt diminished, anxious, fearful, and frustrated. She tried to avoid or move away from any event that she thought might cause a threat or conflict. She did not go to her mentor, because "I felt ashamed to bother Mrs. W with these issues since she has already told me she is busy" and "she might think I am too much self-concerned and arrogant." Nor did she turn to her supervisor because "she was busy with her research and teaching. She would not have the time to mind my business." Each time she interpreted her situation in this way, her vulnerabilities became exacerbated, which further handicapped her active thinking and debilitated her skills in negotiating or safeguarding her interests. Obviously, Autumn was not equipped with necessary micropolitical knowledge to transcend her realities and to find other alternatives to transform her situation.

How people treat, include, and appreciate each other can be very subtle and indirect in the Chinese context, which Autumn was not aware of, nor paid acute attention to, let alone take initiatives in improving her situation. Office talk was a good example. Sharing concerns or discussing didactical questions with colleagues in the office are a very important working condition for STs (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b), to which Autumn was not sensitive at all. When other teachers discussed their own children in the office, it never occurred to Autumn that she could utilize it to build up working relations and make herself known. She refused to participate in it due to what she called "the lack of a common language caused by age gap." She showed no interest, withdrew herself, and kept silent. When asked by other office teachers to assist in a task, instead of reading it micropolitically as a chance to have further interactions, Autumn only responded with

an "Ok." When Autumn's office was moved, she did not create visits to the previous office to make up the missed necessary interactions with the other office teachers but hid herself in the new office, concluding the other office teachers were aloof.

The Shanghai incident again illustrated Autumn's inexperience and insensitivity in reading the micropolitics in her context. Due to her lack of social experiences, Autumn misconstrued the other office teachers' verbal disclaimers. Unable to interpret their disclaimers as a typical face-saving strategy in China, Autumn thought they were dishonest, felt betrayed, and decided privately to cut off from them.

Tactics to navigate conflicts. During her entire practicum, Autumn silently endured her negative situation. Her tactic was compliance intended to avoid any possible conflicts or troubled relationships at school, which may have resulted from her limited social skills and lack of strong support system. The only person she shared her feelings with was her cohort member who kept reminding her of her status and admonished her to put up with her situation.

Compliance in this study is a tactic based on protectionist or reactive concerns. It means internalizing others' needs while keeping quiet about and sacrificing one's own interests and needs in order to survive. It is usually accompanied with intense negative emotions. Despite her hard feelings and her wish to make herself known assertively, Autumn tried to contain her grievances and conflicts at the level of personal troubles so that they would not escalate into issues. But these grievances bubbled, simmered along, and soured the office relationship. She entertained that one day she would be noticed and valued. When she kept being ignored, she chose to escape and rested her hope on the Shanghai training. When this hope got smashed, she collapsed and became inactive. Her

compliance did not save her but denigrated her value. Her wish to be a lifetime teacher began to shake. "I had thought being a teacher would be my lifetime job. But now I think I may try other jobs too", Autumn said.

Participant four: Winter. Winter also graduated in 2018 and worked as an English teacher and class teacher in Grade 11 in D city. Winter impressed me as a born teacher. Her smile was pleasant, and she spoke in a measured and calm way. She was an exemplary graduate with outstanding academic performance and readiness to help others, which gave her the nickname of "Mother Winter." Winter said she became interested in education in her junior year. She acted as a cohort leader at her practicum placement. To her, teaching practicum was of significance as it helped her choose her career.

Winter did her practicum in Western Foreign Language School (WFLS). It used to be a boarding high school. Its junior high was established less than ten years ago. Located in a district famous for manufacturing, WFLS admits children of increasing new immigrant families across China, whose varied academic performance often poses a headache to teachers.

Mrs. J was a new mentor and was generous in sparing time to discuss with Winter teaching and education. Instead of requiring Winter to grade all students' homework, Mrs. J would undertake some gradings, to which Winter was very thankful as it offered her time to think and handle other issues.

Winter performed very well in practicum. She graded students' homework, quizzes, and exams responsibly, and reported students' performance to Mrs. J in a timely manner. She helped with students' English speech contests, monitored their morning study and morning exercises, and organized students' sport meeting programs. Based on

her voluntary teaching experience as a junior in the countryside, she solved many student problems in a mature way. In her practicum, Winter observed as many classes as possible and consulted her mentor and other teachers in a humble way regarding effective teaching. "I don't think I should talk too much about teaching due to my inexperience. Otherwise I will be regarded as arrogant. But I will seek their advice on the problems I have identified in their classrooms. They also need new ideas," said Winter.

When other cohort members complained about too much grading, Winter would bring them to their senses and talk about the necessity and the benefits of the job, "As a novice, when your competence is unknown to others, your attitude speaks for you." To Winter, complaints resulted from STs' limited understanding of school teaching. "To be a teacher is more than teaching on the podium. Whatever you are doing now will be your routine work in the future." Winter advised STs to "pull up the sleeves and work" and "consider why I need to do it and how I can improve my work." Winter warned that a complaining ST would lose many grand opportunities.

Her attitude and hard work won her popularity among the other teachers. When she had her public class, a teacher helped to fetch a video to record her class and another helped hand out materials to students.

Episode 1: Mind your own business, Little Assistant!

Winter was loved and respected by her students. But this respect did not come easily. As a stranger to students at the beginning, Winter didn't expect students to treat her as a teacher. Even she did not regard herself as a teacher either. "Most of the time I was observing classes in the back of the classroom or grading in the office, which wouldn't make you feel like a teacher." But when she began her first teaching, she started

to feel "I am a teacher." This proud feeling was quickly thwarted by mischievous students. One day when Winter tried to settle a squabble among students, one or two students murmured defiantly, "Mind your own business, Little Assistant." These words deflated Winter's confidence, "I realized they treated me as an assistant to Mrs. J rather than a teacher to them. They didn't think I was qualified to mind their business or discipline them."

Winter ascribed students' challenge to her absence in students' life and decided to make changes. She accompanied students from morning till afternoon. She reached out to students to know them and to help them. Her enhanced visibility, her help, and her friendliness were seen and felt by students. Gradually they came to see Winter differently.

When her friendliness was misunderstood by students, Winter would have a serious private talk with them, helping them understand the differences between inside the classroom and outside the classroom. "A teacher should be kind and strict," said Winter. "Being kind makes your students feel your care and love, while being strict helps them understand your rules and bottom lines." Student began to address her as "Laoshi" (teacher in English), turned to her for help, and reciprocated her efforts with love and trust. In fact, they loved her so much that they had a good cry over her departure and sent her a torrent of wishes, letters, and chocolates.

Episode 2: I will not give them up!

What perplexed Winter in her practicum was how to deal with underachieving students. Her exploration in this aspect revealed her budding teacher identity. Not long after she began her observation, Winter noticed some students' seating was different from

the rest of the class. While the other students sat in pairs, there were three to five students whose desks were placed at the very end of the classroom, with only one table in a row. Separate and against the window, these desks seemed odd to Winter. Days later Winter could not help asking her mentor for an explanation. Mrs. J introduced them as underachieving students: "They are inattentive in class, playing tricks, talking idly, or sleeping. Separating them from the other students was a helpless act not to distract the class." Winter felt uneasy at these words.

> I feel pity for them. If they are given up now, they are done forever. If each class has three underachieving students and each grade has 10 classes, their number is not small. They shouldn't be given up. If I were one of them, I didn't want to be given up. I don't mean to blame anyone. But isn't it a teacher's obligation to help students and keep inspiring them? I will not give them up.

Winter began to consider how to help them. As she was not allowed to change students' seating, she designed activities to involve underachievers purposefully so that they could move around. Winter thought being away from their fixed seating could help these students cast off their negative identity. But due to their poor English, these students could not really get engaged in these activities. They would return to their seats soon. Even so, Winter insisted that "they wanted to join the activity."

To find out an effective solution, Winter shared with Mrs. J her puzzlements. Hearing what she said, Mrs. J praised her good intentions, but persuaded her to give up her attempt. She suggested Winter focus on the majority of the class for two reasons: on one hand, "she was afraid I would be too focused on the low-achieving students and neglect the other students and the other duties;" on the other hand, "she was even more

afraid that I would become frustrated if the low-achieving students let me down." Winter was set into a dilemma for a time. "Shall I help them or leave them alone?"

Finally, her conscientiousness and responsibility as a teacher-to-be triumphed. She decided to do something. Before embarking on helping them, Winter consulted several teachers graduating from her university about differentiated teaching. Though they admired her drive in helping the underachievers, they told her frankly that differentiated teaching was impractical. The major demotivating factors were teachers' workload and the pressure for a higher score from parents, students, and school leaders.

Incidentally, the talk with these students increased Winter's understanding of underachieving students. Their performance at homework was so bad, "they were in Grade 8, yet they didn't seem to know the words such as "in" and "on" that Winter wondered whether they were careless and lazy. She asked them to come to her office. Instead of criticizing them as Mrs. J usually did, Winter attempted to help them redo the exercises. It was then Winter got to know their life stories. Though school children are required to learn English from Grade 3, not every school (especially in the countryside) could afford English teaching to students. Some students who moved to S city from the countryside had not learned English before. Some learned English at hometown for only one semester. Others did not learn English well in elementary school due to poor learning habits or family backgrounds. They confessed they couldn't understand the teacher or their classmates in class. They also confided to Winter that they had tried to work hard at English but gave up soon due to the lack of necessary assistance.

Different from these students, the other classmates began to learn English at an early age, and many received private tutoring. Most parents offered their kids English

classes since kindergarten. Some sent their children to English-speaking countries for summer or winter camps. As most kids did so well in English, teachers could not pay attention to the small number of underachieving students, which initiated the vicious circle. The less attention these students received, the worse they performed. Bored in English classes, these kids made noise, fell into sleep, or played jokes, which were regarded as distractions to the class and resulted in their segregation.

Having a better understanding of these students, Winter was determined to offer help, "I couldn't change their past, but I can help them to change their now and future." She thought helping them to pick up their confidence should come first. She wanted them to know they were not given up. When Winter asked, "Do you want me to help you with your English?", they grinned and nodded their heads heartily. "I began to tutor them," said Winter, "and we made up our study plans together." Every day after school Winter would spend one hour with them, either one-to-one, or in a small group, starting with the basics of English.

I told them to start small and persist. If today they could only remember five words, that's ok. But if they can keep on working in this way, they'll make huge progress. I will not give them up and I wouldn't allow them to give themselves up.

Winter was pleased with her efforts, "All my efforts were worthwhile." These students began to answer questions in class and did better in homework. By the time Winter left, their score did not improve much, but they told Winter they could understand English class better and began to show interest in English. The other unexpected consequence was Mrs. J began to pay more attention to the underachieving students. She

often asked Winter what she did with them, inquired about their performance, sometimes offered suggestions, and even said she would try these methods with the other underachievers in the future.

Analysis. In Winter's case, she encountered both interpersonal and intrapersonal conflicts. When students challenged her role as a teacher, her self-interests became threatened. This role conflict with students awakened her to teacher identity and authority. Her intrapersonal conflict was caused by the discrepancies between her educational perception and the current school practice of treating underachieving students, threatening her cultural-ideological interests and self-interests. When she was determined to help the underachievers, both her self-interests and cultural-ideological interests came into play. A budding consciousness of education equity began to develop and contributed to her burgeoning teacher identity.

Reading the micropolitics of the situation. Winter demonstrated an unusually mature reading of the micropolitics of her situation. On one hand, she was aware of power differential and her vulnerabilities as a ST. Instead of allowing power differentials to restrict her thinking and actions as what happened to Autumn, she leveraged it. In her view, diligence acquainted STs with teachers' work, promoted STs' professional development, and won favor from veteran teachers. This positive and optimistic view of practicum work was conducive to her learning. She also comprehended the politics in talking: talking too much about pedagogy before veteran teachers was negative to STs, as talking was considered as arrogance whereas listening was associated with modesty and respect in Chinese culture. But when she identified a problem, instead of keeping silent, she would embrace an open attitude to her vulnerabilities and seek veteran teachers'

advice respectfully and humbly. What benefitted her was promoted professional development and improved professional relations at school. When she was engaged in a cultural negotiation in transforming the treatment of underachieving students, her strategic top-down handling fully demonstrated her deliberate consideration of power differential in practicum: she consulted her mentor first to show her high respect for and trust upon the mentor; she then sought suggestions from the other teachers graduating from the same university, which provided her extra help, support, and confidence; and finally she reached out to students to explore feasible solutions.

On the other hand, she was aware of teacher-student relationship. Students' challenge of her role as a teacher alerted her to the awareness that her behavior was perceived, interpreted, and judged by students and defined her image in their minds. This awareness shaped her active measures to establish her image as a teacher. She was also conscious of the necessity of her role shift between a teacher and a friend, which protected her teacher authority and built up a healthy relationship with students.

Tactics to navigate conflicts. Winter took a proactive strategy to deal with her conflicts in a desirable way. To resolve the role conflict, she overcame her negative emotions, analyzed its causes, and took actions to enhance her visibility: she showed up, reached out to students, accompanied them both as a friend and a teacher, and finally established her "Miss Winter" identity.

Likewise, Winter resolved her intrapersonal conflict actively. After recognizing an educational equity issue, instead of submitting to the reality, Winter worked proactively to improve it. She sought advice from Mrs. J, consulted with other colleagues, conducted a friendly talk with her underachieving students, and finally

decided on tutoring tactic. Her efforts not only inspired students, "they worked hard, performed better at homework, and began to answer questions in class," but influenced her mentor too.

Thematic Overview

This study focuses on exploring STs' micropolitical literacy by examining how they dealt with their conflict experiences. Each participant provided a case with their unique practicum experiences and each experience revealed their conflicts, emotions, and handling tactics. From these interviews and resulting analysis, I identified the following themes: (a) All STs acquiesced in and demonstrated deference to the power differential between them and their mentors; (b) STs reported more negative emotions in conflicts with mentors than with their students; (c) Most STs felt the impact of the struggle between exam-oriented education and quality-oriented education; and (d) STs acknowledged their potential to influence their mentors, indicating practicum could be bilateral.

Theme One: All STs acquiesced in and demonstrated deference to the power differential between them and their mentors. One prevailing theme in these four participants' practicum experiences is the power differential with their mentors. In our four cases, all the STs were acutely aware of this power differential in practicum and complied with it by displaying their deference to it. The most typical way to demonstrate deference was to follow their mentors' requests while keeping silent about their own needs or requests. Take Spring for example. Though not explicitly required by her mentor, Spring chose to follow her mentor to work in the office till midnight. No matter how reluctant she was in grading piles after piles of homework, "I don't see the point in

grading, grading, and grading", she graded. Her response—fulfilling expectations as a student teacher—fully exhibited her recognition of her mentor's power and her submission to this power differential.

Deference to power differential was also illustrative in Summer's silence. When Mrs. E became defensive, Summer realized she must have done something wrong and became silent to show her deference. When Mrs. E stopped Summer from teaching on Monday, despite of her displeasure at such a short notice, Summer did not say a word but sat quietly in the back. Again, when Summer had identified students' problems in their homework, she chose to comply, "It would a challenge…, we dare not say anything against …"

Autumn did what she was expected to do and kept silent about her needs and requests too. She returned the advanced class and moved out of the office reticently. She kept her mouth shut even if she had a strong desire to share her opinions at the lesson-preparation meeting. When Mrs. W criticized her poor performance, she said nothing. She withheld all her needs to show her compliance and deference.

Even Winter, who enjoyed a good communication with her mentor, admitted the existence of power differential. When she had questions or plans, she consulted Mrs. J first, which also evidenced her deference to this power differential.

Theme Two: STs reported more negative emotions in conflicts with mentors than with their students. All conflicts brought negative feelings. Throughout her practicum, Autumn's emotions were the most negative: she felt uneasy, unhappy, unwelcomed, dismayed, depressed, sad, voiceless, nameless, and helpless.

The other three also revealed negative feelings. Summer reported being disappointed, uncomfortable, humiliated, and embarrassed. Without gaining enough time to prepare for her exam, Spring felt overwhelmed, dissatisfied, and hopeless. Winter reported the least negative emotions except that she felt uneasy at the treatment of the underachieving students in class.

In contrast, STs reported fewer negative feelings with students, even in conflicts. Among the four participants, only Spring and Winter recalled their conflict experiences with students. Pretending to be angry was the only negative emotion Spring experienced. Though Winter felt discouraged when her students addressed her as "Little Assistant," she was also motivated by them and was propelled to take actions immediately to readjust her role.

It can be inferred that mentors presented more stress to STs than students. It can be related to the perceived power differential where mentors are placed in a higher position than STs. Another potential explanation was mentors' evaluation which played a significant role in STs' job-hunting. As Autumn regretted, practicum was more than a "pass-of-fail" issue: "It is a make-it or break-it."

In contrast, STs felt much easier and more confident in dealing with students. Different from their passive role in mentor-ST relationship, STs played an active and decisive role in ST-student relationship. Spring decided to be her students' friend. Her strategy was to relate her teaching to life. Autumn's strategy to establish a good relationship with her students was "being seen" and making her class interesting. Winter's recipe was accompanying and helping students. With their active efforts, these

STs achieved a desirable relationship with students, which made occasional conflicts between them acceptable and easy to resolve.

Theme Three: Most STs felt the impact of the struggle between exam-oriented education and quality-oriented education. Except Autumn, all the other three participants mentioned their conflict experiences caused by the struggle between exam-oriented education and quality-oriented education. In this struggle, all the STs identified with the latter and implemented constructive teaching methods in their teaching. So did their mentors. But what differed was STs were not held accountable for student performance in exams as their mentors. When mentors tried to reconcile with the reality and to strike a balance these two educational philosophies, they exerted an influence over STs. Mrs. F asked Spring to change her teaching contents and methods because she thought cramming students with grammar and vocabulary was an appropriate strategy before midterm exam.

Neither Summer nor Winter was immune to this struggle. Summer's students were assigned a variety of homework for the purpose of a high mark. Even though her students repeatedly committed the same mistakes, Summer could not change this practice but to grade assiduously. Winter's intrapersonal conflict of underachieving students' treatment was also triggered by the same struggle. Pressured for a high mark and unable to afford time and energy to the underachieving students, teachers had to give them up which triggered Winter's transformative efforts.

Theme Four: STs acknowledged their potential to influence their mentors, indicating practicum could be bilateral. In the study, all the participants' mentors were experienced teachers, perhaps except Winter's mentor. It was conventionally thought that

learning in practicum was transmitted unilaterally from mentors, who mentored with their expertise and experiences, to STs, who were the sole beneficiary (Ehrich & Millwater, 2011). Because Chinese culture is based on reciprocity (Jia, 2006), STs should return this favor with respect and compliance. In this study all the four participants did so. But they also revealed their desires to be empowered to play an active role in this process, which was found contributive to their mentors' professional growth. Mrs. F was inspired by Spring's jigsaw reading class and decided to try this method in her teaching sometime. Influenced by Winter's efforts to help the underachieving students, Mrs. J said she would do the same for her students in the future.

Although Autumn and Summer failed to influence their mentors or other teachers, they expressed their wishes to contribute to their mentors or other teachers' professional development. Autumn conveyed a strong desire to participate in and contribute to lesson preparation, "I sometimes identified their problems, …I also had very brilliant ideas." When Summer submitted herself to mentor authority, she insisted that "STs should be empowered so that they have a chance to convey their immature ideas... Though we are young and inexperienced, our ideas can enlighten them (teachers) too."

Summary

In this study four participants shared their varied practicum experiences, with their interpersonal and intrapersonal conflicts, emotions, and strategies encapsulated in episodes. Each derived from their experiences a unique understanding of practicum, teaching, education, students, teachers, and themselves. Through a detailed analysis of the personal interviews of the participants, four themes emerged across these cases, which are: (a) All STs acquiesced in and demonstrated deference to the power differential

between them and their mentors; (b) STs reported more negative emotions in conflicts with mentors than with their students; (c) Most STs felt the impact of the struggle between exam-oriented education and quality-oriented education; and (d) STs acknowledged their potential to influence their mentors, indicating practicum could be bilateral.

Based on these findings, the following chapter discusses the significance of this study and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine Chinese student teachers' micropolitical literacy in practicum conflicts by describing Chinese English Foreign Language (EFL) student teachers' conflict experiences in urban practicum schools. To achieve this purpose, I used a multiple-case study approach to collect qualitative data through interviews with four former EFL STs. The research process included a review of the literature, gathering data in the primary form of interviews, coding, and analyzing the data. All interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and translated. I conducted both within-case analysis and cross-case analysis and found four themes from the data. These four themes were: (a) All STs acquiesced in and demonstrated deference to the power differential between them and their mentors; (b) STs reported more negative emotions in conflicts with mentors than with their students; (c) Most STs felt the impact of the struggle between exam-oriented education and quality-oriented education; and (d) STs acknowledged their potential to influence their mentors, indicating practicum could be bilateral.

In this chapter, I summarize the answers to the research questions and offer implications and recommendations for educational practice. Suggestions for future research are also discussed.

Discussion of the Research Questions

Two research questions have been touched upon in the previous chapter, but additional discussion of the research questions will be elaborated on in this section.

Research question #1: What do former Chinese student teachers' stories about their practicum experiences reveal about conflicts and conflict resolution within practicum?

In sharing their practicum experiences, STs reported diverse conflicts and resorted to a wide range of strategies. Table 4 highlights the practicum conflicts documented in Chapter Four, as well as conflict causes, conflict resolution tactics, and resolution strategies. The following is an illustration of this table.

Conflict types. STs reported a wide range of conflicts, both interpersonal and intrapersonal. Seen from the table, STs had more conflicts with mentors or teachers than with students. Most conflicts STs encountered with mentors or teachers were related to teaching or teaching-related issues. But not all STs had conflicts with students. The conflicts with students centered on student management. Intrapersonal conflicts reflected the gap between STs' ideals and prevalent social and school practices.

Conflict causes. The causes of these conflicts varied from case to case. Altogether three categories of causes were identified. At the micro-level, varying role and task perceptions among the major actors in practicum provoked conflicts among them. At the meso-level or school level, practicum management system was the cause. Beyond the school, prevalent educational beliefs and cultural factors formed the macro-level causes. These three categories are discussed below.

Table 4 Overview of STs' practicum conflicts, causes, resolution tactics, and strategies

Name	Conflicts	With whom	Causes	Resolution tactics	Resolution strategies
Spring	Practicum versus graduate exam	Mentor	Different perceptions of practicum and long working hours	Accommodation	Integration
	Different teaching contents and methods between the mentor and the ST	Mentor	Exam-versus quality-oriented education	Effective in-depth communication	
	Student management	Student	Perceptions of ST's role	Assuming teacher authority	
Summer	Teaching methods	Mentor	Mentor's face	Critical compliance	Acquiescence
	Mentor's reviewing	Mentor	ST's face	Critical compliance	
	Homework practice	Herself	Exam-versus quality-oriented education	Critical compliance	
Autumn	Office conflicts	Other teachers	Being ignored	Compliance	Acquiescence
	Being voiceless and nameless		Being ignored		
	The Shanghai training incident		Other's face		
Winter	Student management	Students	Perceptions of ST's role	Enhancing visibility	Agency
	The treatment of underachievers	Herself	Exam-versus quality-oriented education	Tutoring	

Perceptions. Practicum involves many people, of whom mentors, STs, and students interact with each other most frequently. Different role and task perceptions they hold impact their interaction and can sometimes result in conflicts. In this study, the divergent perceptions of STs' roles between STs themselves and their students contributed to both Winter and Spring's conflicts with their students. Spring and her mentor's different views of practicum commitment caused Spring's struggle between practicum and her exam preparation.

Management system. Utilizing an unsound management system or lack of efficient management can also generate anxiety and lead to conflicts. In the study, long working hours and the treatment Autumn received from her practicum school fell into this category. The long working hours unknown to her consumed her spare time and posed a threat to her personal commitment. Autumn's case revealed a poor or a lack of efficient management system in her practicum school.

Educational beliefs. The prevalent educational belief in China was one of the macro-level causes in this study. Educational policy makers in China have been trying to advocate the quality-oriented education to challenge its long-held exam-oriented educational belief for decades. Previous studies show most teacher education programs endorse the quality-oriented education which is validated by STs' frequent referring to their attempts to apply modern constructive teaching methods learned from university to practicum (He & Lin, 2013; Trent, 2010b, 2010a, 2013; Yuan & Lee, 2016; Zhu, 2017; Zhu et al., 2018). But exam-oriented education still dominates Chinese educational system, which impacted the STs in the study who held dearly to the idealistic quality-oriented educational belief.

Different from previous literature (Trent, 2010b; Wang & Clarke, 2014; Yuan, 2016), prevalent exam-oriented educational belief did not prevent STs from applying modern constructive teaching methods. All STs employed constructive teaching in their practicum: Spring's jigsaw reading, Autumn's various classroom activities, and Winter's spider gram (see Appendix E). Summer's description of her practicum school culture verified her employment of constructive teaching methods.

Despite the application of constructive teaching methods in these practicum schools, exam-oriented educational beliefs weighed heavily on mentors' mind. To strive for a high mark, they supplemented their constructive teaching with exercises, pattern drills, quizzes, and exams tactfully: Mrs. F preferred that Spring cram students with vocabulary and grammar before the midterm exam; Summer's mentor assigned a lot of homework to students; Winter's mentor had to give up working with underachievers in order to spend more time to help the majority of the class. As STs were not held accountable for students' academic achievement, their mentors' reconciliation with the prevalent exam-oriented educational belief posed a threat to STs' ideals of teaching and education, constituting conflicts for STs.

Cultural factors. Another macro-level cause was cultural factors in this study. Culture, as a shared system, influences people's perception and behavior (Liao & Bond, 2011). In both Summer and Autumn's conflicts, face (Mianzi in Chinese) was a major cause. Summer threatened her mentor's face unconsciously with her proposal of jigsaw reading. When her mentor reviewed her teaching contents in class, she felt her face was threatened and lost. Autumn did not realize the other English teachers' disclaimers were to save their faces rather than being "hypocritical."

Conflict resolution strategies. To resolve these conflicts, STs used diverse tactics based on two sets of concerns: protection of oneself or being reactive and power of influencing others or being proactive (Blase & Blase, 2002; Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b). Altogether seven tactics were used by STs: accommodation, effective in-depth communication, and assuming teacher authority (the three in Spring's case); critical compliance in Summer's case; compliance in Autumn's case; and enhancing visibility and tutoring in Winter's case. These tactics were classified into three strategies: acquiescence (Blase, 1988a), agency, and integration. These three strategies are discussed below in the continuum from being reactive to being proactive.

Acquiescence. Acquiescence is grounded in self-protection and survival considerations. It is a reactive strategy (Blase, 1988a). It refers to sacrificing personal needs to satisfy others with compliance, obedience, submission, and compromise. In this study, it was provoked by power differential and accompanied with negative emotions. It included tactics such as (critical) compliance. Though both Summer and Autumn employed this strategy, their outcomes were different. With the absence of a favorable working environment for practicum, Autumn's acquiescence impacted her negatively and worsened her situation: she was totally ignored. In contrast, Summer's acquiescence was based on favorable working conditions. With a collaborative school culture and a good experienced mentor, Summer employed critical compliance discreetly and deliberately to avoid conflicts and to establish a harmonious working relationship.

Integration. Integration is a coined umbrella term to refer to Spring's tactics based on a combination of self-concern and others-concern. It included three tactics: accommodation, effective in-depth communication, and assuming teacher authority. This

strategy reflected flexibility and tactfulness. Timing and calculation were key to this strategy. After understanding her mentor's attitude to practicum, Spring gave up expecting her mentor to reduce the grading workload but not her personal commitment. Instead, she tried to strike a balance between practicum work and her personal commitment. When effective in-depth communication was possible, she made good use of it to negotiate with her mentor. When she was set in a dilemma between classroom authority and the care of teaching (Pillen et al., 2013; Zhu, 2017), she assumed the teacher role and exercised teacher authority to deter the mischievous student from playing his game again.

Agency. Agency is defined as "the capacity of people to act purposefully and reflectively" (Rogers & Wetzel, 2013, p. 63). Duff (2012) claims that agency enables people "to take concrete actions in pursuit of their goals…to actively resist certain behaviors, practices, or positionings, sometimes leading to oppositional stances and behaviors …" (p. 416). In this study, Winter exercised agency in her two conflicts, leading to some transformations. When students treated her as their teacher's assistant, Winter enhanced her visibility: she showed up and accompanied students from morning to the end of a school day. When she felt uneasy about the school practice of treating underachievers, she reached out. She consulted with other colleagues, listened to underachievers' stories and their learning difficulty, and offered tutoring to those students. Though the changes she might have brought to school practices were limited, the people around her began to change: her students began to show interest in English and her mentor said she would try her method in the future.

Research question #2: How does a micropolitical lens offer insight into the experiences of student teaching in a Chinese context?

Blasé (1991) states that "the micropolitical perspective on organization provides a valuable and potent approach to understanding the woof and warp of the fabric of day-to-day life in schools" (p.1). The micropolitical lens lent support with a fresh, valid, and provocative way to understand student teaching in the Chinese context. By "focusing on processes of sense-making and negotiation as the basis for action" (Kelchtermans & Vanassche, 2017, p. 443), micropolitics illustrated how mentors and STs in a Chinese context used power to influence others and to protect themselves, how STs dealt with conflicts or cooperated to achieve their ends, and how they thought about and had strong feelings about what was "so often unspoken and not easily observed" (Blasé, 1991, p. 1-2).

Power. Power is a key component in micropolitics. Micropolitical social scientists such as Pfeffer (1981), Hoyle (1982), Blasé (1991), Lindell (1999), and Leftwhich (2005) regard power as a scarce resource individuals and groups compete for to achieve their goals. Blasé (1991) defined micropolitics as "the use of formal and informal power by individuals and groups to achieve their goals in organizations…" (p. 11). Formal power is associated with positions to which organizations assign resources and grant decision-making authority and control. Informal power comes from other sources, such as critical knowledge and expertise, reputations gained from previous achievements, or support from influential people (Corbett, 1991). Power can be exercised overtly to deliver a decision-making outcome (Pyke, 1999). It can also be exercised covertly if the powerful person influences the decisions of the less powerful in

subtle ways to comply with their interests. For example, by internalizing the interests of the more powerful deliberately, the less powerful maintains peace and avoids conflicts (Foucault, 1980; Lukes, 1974).

The concept of power helped to explain the interplay of power in student teaching. On one hand, mentors enjoyed formal power due to their role in practicum and informal power due to traditional Chinese culture (Tan, 2014; Yum, 2011). They took advantage of the hierarchical mentoring relationship to manage STs (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014; Blase & Blase, 2002; Leung, 2012): they decided the teaching schedule, curriculum, materials and methodology, allocated different work to STs, and offered supervision or mentoring, resonating with the findings of other studies (Trent, 2010b; Yuan, 2016; Zhu et al., 2018). In the face of the reputed power of their mentors, STs subscribed by refraining from pursuing their own interests, trying to "learn the roles played by each actor in the culture, comprehend the messages these people bore, and adopt and devise strategies for gaining the influence necessary to ensure his or her survival in the school" (Schempp, Sparkes, & Templin, 1993, p. 462). They complied with, adapted to, and coped with the constraints and emotional stresses they were subjected to successfully or unsuccessfully, sacrificing their own wishes and desires most of the time. Their perceptions of power and authority influenced not only "the status of each partner and the images they associate with 'good teachers,' but also their willingness to critique the controlling ideologies of the places they call school" (Graham,1999, p. 524).

On the other hand, STs were aware of teacher power and authority over students. To gain teacher power, STs demonstrated their professional competence strategically.

They prepared and taught lessons in a constructive way to appeal to students. They also displayed care and love to students. This use of power over students were consciously motivated, active, "intended, calculated, or strategic" (Blase & Blase, 2002. p. 10).

What is noteworthy is the dominance of the covert use of informal power and the Chinese culture of maintaining harmony in the mentoring relationship. STs' deference to mentors and other teachers to maintain harmony could be viewed as either an active or passive exercise of power by STs. Spring used it actively to further the communication with her mentor whereas Autumn's passive exercise accumulated dissatisfaction and resulted in unpleasant experiences for Autumn.

Interests. From the perspective of micropolitics, interests are the central focus in understanding organizational behavior (S. J. Ball, 1987; Blase, 1991). They drive the behavior of organization members (Ball, 1987; Blase, 1991; Hoyle, 1982; Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002a). Kelchtermans (2007) conceives interests as necessary or desirable working conditions to perform professional tasks effectively and satisfying. These necessary or desirable working conditions operate as professional interests, encompassing self-interests, material interests, organizational interests, cultural-ideological interests, and social-professional interests (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b). If professional interests are absent, threatened, or lost, organizational members will take actions to establish, to safeguard, or to restore them (Kelchtermans, 2007).

This concept of professional interests has been found useful in understanding how and why conflicts came into being in STs' practicum. In this study the accounts of STs' practicum experiences revealed how their professional interests were threatened or absent and how they tried to establish, to safeguard, or to restore them. Autumn serves as a good

example of this. Her material interests, social-professional interests, and her self-interests were either absent or threatened in practicum. She complied throughout the practicum, failed in safeguarding or restoring her interests, and had a very unpleasant experience. Hers and other STs' experiences showed that different categories of professional interests could play together and impact their choices of action strategies (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b).

Different from previous literature, self-interests were found to be central interests in this study despite participants' varying practicum contexts. Curry et al. (2008) found that cultural-ideological interests emerged as the most salient interests for the STs in their study because of their social justice-oriented teacher program. Wu & Chen (2011) echoed the finding of Kelchtermans & Ballet (2002a) that social-professional interests weighed more heavily in decision-making and behavior than the other interests, because STs were concerned about their employment and influential school staff could impact their future employment. All the STs in this study attempted or managed to put into practice their ideals of a good teacher or a good educational practice, which projected not only "a descriptive self-image but also the personal normative idea … to be a proper teacher (task perception) as well as one's evaluative and emotional judgement about the extent to which one is successful (self-esteem)" (Kelchtermans, 2007, p. 485). Spring managed to offer her students a different reading experience; Winter tutored her underachieving students; Summer tried to express her view of teaching and homework; Autumn's practicum experiences manifested her strong desire for social recognition and appreciation. This prominence of self-interests revealed the burgeoning teacher identity among STs and their potential to be change agents.

Strategies. In micropolitics, individuals and groups use strategies in organizational contexts seeking to "use their resources of power and influence to further their interests" (Hoyle, 1982, p. 88). Mawhinney (1999) also argued that understanding of the micropolitics in schools entailed an understanding of strategies used by individuals and groups to gain power. Being reactive and proactive are the two orientations in micropolitical strategies: reactive strategies aim at maintaining the status quo or protecting against changes or external influences while proactive ones aim at changing or influencing situations (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b).

Both strategies were found to be used by the participants in this study. A typical example of reactive strategy is the acquiescence used by Summer and Autumn to avoid further confrontations with their mentors/other teachers. Examples of proactive strategies are evident in the ways the four STs tried to establish a relationship with their students. Winter exercised her agency to transform the practice of mistreating her underachieving students.

 This study resonated with the other studies' finding in recognizing that acquiescence was a frequently used strategy (Schempp, Sparkes, & Templin, 1993; Yan & He, 2015). With acquiescence, STs tried to show deference to mentors' authority and conformity to established customs that expected them to learn to live with others and to understand others, although Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) questioned the notion of acquiescence, suggesting that acquiescence indicated "acceptance of non-negotiable institutional values, with little room for negotiation or mutuality" (Nguyen & Parr, 2018, p. 13).

Face. Face and facework are what this study can contribute to the discussion of micropolitics. Face is an important indigenous construct in Chinese culture (Jia, 2006) and forms the basis of Chinese relationships (Bond, 1991). It refers to "the respect, the pride, and the dignity of an individual as a consequence of his or her social achievement" (Leung & Chan, 2003, p. 1575). It can be self-face, other-face, or mutual face (Oetzel, Ting-Toomey, Yokochi, Masumoto, & Takai, 2000). It not only displays one's status but its derivatives such as influence, power, and privileges (Jia, 2006). Facework involves the practices of giving face, saving face, and avoiding face loss (Hwang, 1987). In facework, hierarchy and relationality are inseparable (Jia, 2006). The person with a lower status is expected to give and save as much face as possible to the person with a higher status by being loyal and obedient. To reciprocate, the latter will provide the former safety, protection, care, power, and influence. Therefore, in Chinese student teaching, a ST is supposed to respect and comply with the mentor. In return, a mentor will offer guidance, help, and care to the ST.

Since face is relational, concerns interests, and acts as a "function of positional power" (Leung, 2008, p. 171), facework is an important micropolitical strategy used by Chinese people. Being modest can save his/her own face and give face to others (Leung & Chan, 2003); disclaimer is a preventative strategy to cushion or circumvent potential face loss for self and others (Cupach & Metts, 1994); avoiding criticism of another's performance is an important strategy to save others' face (Hwang, 1987).

Due to STs' inadequate social experiences, both Summer and Autumn in this study had a weak awareness of facework. Their failure in interpreting facework and in doing facework to save others' face led to some practicum conflicts with the mentor or

other teachers. Unpleasant experiences caused by face and facework in student teaching is little discussed in the literature and can offer insights for future research.

Implications and Recommendations for Practice

While this multiple-case study cannot be generalized, it offers insights into Chinese student teachers' micropolitical literacy in practicum conflicts. Based on my findings and discussion, I offer the following recommendations regarding practicum.

For student teachers. Given the political complexity of practicum and their role ambiguity, STs should not romanticize practicum by thinking practicum is only about teaching. Practicum is political too, involving interest, power, and influence. Besides mentors, supervisors, and students, many other people are to exert influence upon them, such as their cohort members, teachers at the practicum school, administrators, and even parents. Each differs in interest, power, and influence. As Popkewitz (1987) reminds, "the notion of power relates not to ownership but to the understanding of changing social relations and innumerable vantage-points from which power is exercised" (p. 5). Getting to know school politics and how it functions is part of what STs should learn in practicum. Hodkinson & Hodkinson (1997) conclude that practicum is "occupational socialization" and "their preoccupations were affective rather than cognitive" (p. 128). Micropolitics helps STs identify the realities of school and teaching so that STs have the chance to examine and reflect how to achieve their goals realistically and micropolitically.

Despite the fact that agency can be constrained by hierarchy in practicum (Kayi-Aydar, 2015), STs should not underestimate their role as change agents. When context influences student teachers, student teachers also affect the structure they are in.

Hierarchy makes STs vulnerable, but vulnerability has positive dimensions (Lasky, 2005). If they are open-minded and expose themselves to the possibility of face-losing and stress for the sake of relationship-building and learning, they are likely to bring about pedagogical and personal transformations. Acquiescence may prevent conflicts temporarily but cannot solve conflicts. But if STs think reflectively and move micropolitically, they can transcend their limits and bring about changes. Even if they fail, they will grow tremendously in failures.

For teacher educators. Given the significance of mentoring in practicum (Leshem, 2012), teacher educators should have a liberating view of their roles. Due to mentors' influence over STs (Griffin, 1986) and their superiority in practicum hierarchy (Zhu et al., 2018), mentoring teachers should emancipate themselves from their traditional role of being "masters." Mentors should take the initiative to develop a new practicum model which Clutterbuck (2004) refers to developmental mentoring. Instead of "powering over" STs, teacher educators should empower STs by "powering with" STs (Blase & Anderson, 1995). Teacher educators should give STs a voice, take time to listen to them, create opportunities for their critical reflections, and invite them into dialogues and collaborations where they engage each other in understanding each other and examining the established school practices. Just as teacher educators play a vital role in promoting STs' professional growth, STs contribute to promoting teacher educators' professional growth. Mentors should recognize that the knowledge, skills, and ideas STs bring to practicum are mutually valuable and beneficial and that learning and growth take place bilaterally. Only in this way can mentors transcend the role of merely being a cooperating teacher and become a mentor in the real sense.

Considering the positive influence supervisors exert on STs (Correa et al., 2014; Nguyen, 2009; Valencia et al., 2009), supervisors at universities should also be encouraged to transform their view of their roles as a supervisor. It is inferred from the interviews that some conflicts would have been averted if supervisors had been more active in practicum. The fact that "she (the mentor) was busy with her research and teaching" (Summer's interview) was not atypical of the current teacher educator context in China (Yan & He, 2010). With the polarization of teaching-research relationship prevalent in universities, supervising STs has been relegated to insignificance and is often neglected by supervisors. To reduce practicum conflicts, supervisors should play a more active role in practicum. Besides school visits and lesson observations as "an overseer or a manager" (Hoffman et al., 2015) or "a neutral arbiter" (Yan & He, 2010, p. 68), a supervisor can establish a "systematic partnership" (Yuan, 2016, p. 196) with school mentors, e.g., through collaborative action research. This systematic partnership can not only create a favorable environment for the scholarship of teaching (Boyer, 1990), but facilitate the transformation of the new liberating role of mentors in practicum. Doing so can also enhance the quality of practicum with higher expectations and increased knowledge, bridge the long-contested theory-practice divide, and collaborate with mentors and STs professionally. With such a liberating view of their roles, teacher educators, both supervisors and mentors, can acquire a deeper understanding of how to educate a teacher and grow professionally.

For universities. The findings of the study suggested that most STs' knowledge of the politics of practicum was insufficient and superficial, which explained their unpleasant emotions and inappropriate skills in managing conflicts. If it is true that STs

are usually ill-prepared with relevant micropolitical knowledge and skills, university administrators and teacher education programs should adjust their curriculum to help enhance STs' micropolitical literacy. Teacher education programs should not focus on preparing STs only in subject matters and pedagogy. They should consider incorporating micropolitics of schools into curriculum. Addressing issues such as power and school culture in curriculum systematically can provide STs an understanding of micropolitical knowledge and strategies so that they can be confident and competent in connecting people, discussing and negotiating important issues with mentors and supervisors, as well as making decisions and solving problems at school level.

In addition, the university should consider training teacher educators to become literate in micropolitics. Blase (1997) argued for an integration of micropolitics in in-service training. Achinstein (2006) and Ehrich & Millwater (2011) advocated micropolitical literacy for teachers' professional development. Incorporating micropolitics into professional training for mentors and supervisors can serve the needs of the school and the teacher preparation program and benefit both the in-service and pre-service teachers.

Recommendations for Further Research

Additional study that includes more former EFL STs may be helpful in exploring the research questions in depth. Additionally, as all the participants in the study were females and did practicum in junior high schools, the participation of male STs and those who did practicum at language training organizations would increase the texture of future studies modelled on this study. Male STs may view the politics in practicum differently and take other micropolitical strategies to cope with conflicts. Politics in training

organizations may exert different influence on STs than urban middle schools. Both can provide increased insight of micropolitics and call for future investigation.

In addition, it would be interesting to incorporate mentors and supervisors' perceptions and experiences into the study. This research only examined STs' practicum conflict experiences without accounting for the perspectives of mentors and supervisors. If the same conflict experience can be triangulated by the other major parties in the conflict, we can gain more insights. Future research can consider incorporating divergent views and voices and explore how conflict comes into being and how micropolitics is "played out". It is believed more case studies would offer more information and grant teacher educators other overlooked insight into practicum conflicts.

Conclusion

In this research, a micropolitical lens revealed four former EFL student teachers' practicum conflict experiences: how they saw and read the micropolitical contexts of practicum, how they navigated them, and how they felt about the complex process of practicum involving roles, power, and interests. Four major themes emerged from the collected data. Based on the findings, recommendations for practice and future research were proposed. It is hoped that both student teachers and teacher educators can draw insights from the study so that student teachers can navigate practicum confidently and competently and teacher educators can think reflectively and critically to maximize the educative value of practicum.

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APPENDIX A: LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT

Title of Project: A Multiple-Case Study of Chinese Student Teachers' Micropolitical Literacy in Teaching Practicum Conflicts in Chinese Contexts

Dear Participant,

My name is Huiyin Li. I am a student in the Doctor of Educational Leadership program at George Fox University in Newberg, Oregon. I am also a faculty member at Guangdong University (pseudonym). As a requirement of my program, I will be conducting research and have chosen to examine the conflict experiences Chinese student teachers encountered in practicum.

Details of the study
You are invited to engage in two 60-minute interviews regarding your conflict experiences in your practicum. The questions are open-ended and relate to your background and your practicum experience. I hope that the findings of my interviews reveal insight into student teachers' awareness of and reactions to the political realities of student teaching in a Chinese context. In order to be fully present during the interview, and to ensure I know what was actually said, I will digitally record the interviews. These recordings will later be transcribed and analyzed for themes.

Benefits
I hope the findings of my interviews will help me and many other teacher educators understand student teachers' conflict experiences in practicum. Participants' identities will remain anonymous in this study. While the personal identities of the participants will be concealed, your voice and personal experiences will be shared as a way for educators and administrators to hear first-hand how student teachers experienced and handled conflicts in practicum.

Compensation
You will receive a gift with a value around $20 for your participating in this study.

Confidentiality
Your identity will be protected in the study. I will use pseudonyms (fake names) to maintain confidentiality in the writing of any results of this study. You will be given the opportunity to choose your own pseudonym and a pseudonym for your practicum school as the names will appear in the study. I will work with you to modify any identifying details that could be used to identify you.

The Key Informants who provided participants' names for this study may have an idea of your identity but will not receive confirmation of your participation. The Key Informant will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement and will be asked not to speak to any potential participant. Your identity will be stored in a secure location that only I have access to. The specific location of your practicum school will not be disclosed in the study.

All research materials (i.e., audio-recordings, transcriptions, and signed consent forms) will be locked in separate, secure locations for a period of no less than five years. I will be the only individual who will have access to these materials. After five years, I will personally destroy all relevant materials and delete the audio recordings.

Risks
Some of the interview questions may be personal in nature and could cause emotional discomfort. Please be aware that your participation is completely voluntary, and you may decline to continue at any time or decline to answer any question at your discretion.

Arranging Interviews/Location
The interviews can be conducted at a place of your choosing. The location of the one-on-one interviews will be a safe, public place like the library, the school, the school district office, or one's home. You will receive a copy of the interview questions ahead of the interview but may be asked additional follow-up questions.

Member Checks
You will have an advanced opportunity to review a final narrative memo of the analyzed data. During the final interview, I will ask you (a) if I have accurately portrayed your experiences, (b) if the memo gives justice to your experiences, and (c) if you have any comments, objections, or additional details to provide. Additionally, more personalized questions may be added based on the data analyzed after the two interviews. If you note any errors or misinterpretations, I will adjust the narrative to reflect changes, incorporating your comments and feedback into the formation of the final narrative.

Use of Study
The results of this study will be used for my research and dissertation as part of my study with George Fox University. If you would like to have a copy of the final result, I would be happy to share a copy with you upon its completion.

Thank you for your time in considering this project. If you have any questions regarding this research, please contact me at clara2006@126.com, or my advisor Dr. Scot Headley at George Fox University.

If you understand the use of this research, please sign below.

Consent
If you agree to participate in this study, please sign your name next to the following items:
Name: _____
Signature: _____   Date: _____

I agree to be digitally recorded:
Name: _____
Signature: _____   Date: _____

APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT NOTICE

I am Huiyin Li, an EdD candidate of George Fox University in Oregon, America. I am recruiting participants for my dissertation study. My dissertation focuses on student teachers' practicum conflicts so that teacher educators can know about these conflicts and offer necessary support for future student teachers. Therefore, your experience is highly appreciated and will be of great significance to many people in teacher education. A brief definition is given below together with a list of potential conflicts in practicum. If you have experienced any conflict in practicum, you are very much welcome to contact me at clara2006@126.com or via WeChat account NO. of claralhy?

Conflict occurs within an individual's mind due to the gap between idealism and reality. Conflict also occurs between people due to different views, goals, and interests. **Some** examples are: feeling like a student versus being expected to act like a teacher; feeling like treating students as friends versus treating them as learners; feeling like being involved in teaching versus minding other aspects of your life; your own teaching approach versus others' approach; unpleasant relational experiences between you and others. Conflicts could have been resolved or remain unresolved. If you think you encountered conflicts in practicum and still remember how you coped with those conflicts, please let me know. A small gift will be presented as a token of my gratitude.

APPENDIX C: QUESTION LIST

Thank you for participating in my study. Please complete the following list and return it to clara2006@126.com. Your valuable opinions and experiences are highly appreciated and will contribute to the study of practicum conflicts.

Please note all the information in this list is confidential and will be used only for this study.

Demographic information:

Your name   _____   Your preferred Pseudo- name _____

Your email   _____   Sex   _____

Your profession (such as teacher, student, or others)   _____

Where did you conduct your practicum?   _____

Your preferred Pseudo-name for the school _____

Which grade did you teach in your practicum? _____

Your preferred initial interview time is _____

Your preferred meeting place is _____ (suggested options are my office room, a café or tea house near your apartment, my apartment, or a park)

Initial interview questions:

1. Tell me something about yourself as a person or as a teacher.

2. Tell me something about your practicum experience (location, mentor, university supervisor, and your work at the practicum school).

3. Did you run into any trouble/difficulty/challenge/conflict within your practicum? If yes, what happened?

4. What was the hard part in your practicum?

Please think about the following questions for our second interview.

1. What details can you remember about your practicum conflict experiences?

2. Why do you think that happened? What do you think it was about? How did you/your mentor handle it?

3. What do you wish could have been different about your practicum and why?

4. How do you think these conflict experiences shaped you as a teacher?

5. What advice do you have for future student teachers?

6. What advice do you have for mentors?

7. What advice do you have for university supervisors?

APPENDIX D: INFORMATION ARRAYS OF FOUR PARTICIPANTS

Information array of participant Spring

Name	Placement	Conflicts	What did she do?	Themes
Spring	SFLS	Practicum work vs. graduate exam preparation	Hints, scheduled time well, tried to balance practicum with exam preparation	Power differential; different perceptions of practicum between ST and the mentor
		ST and mentor's different teaching contents and methods before exam (Exam-prep. vs. Jigsaw reading)	conversation (pause, consideration, explaining, and negotiation)	Mentor's Exam-oriented education mind-set vs ST's quality-oriented education mind-set
		Student management	Shouted at Ss "Be quiet", disciplining the student	ST's role/authority

Information array of Participant Summer

Name	Placement	Conflicts	What did she do?	Themes
Summer	EFLS	Whose method worked better?	Proposed jigsaw reading, argued, and became silent	Power differential, face/authority, empowerment
		Mentor's reviewing	Said nothing but sat in the back and became silent	Power differential, face
		Homework	Said nothing and remained silent	ST and mentor's different teaching philosophy (exam-vs-quality education)

Information array of participant Autumn

Name	Placement	Conflicts	What did she do?	Themes
Autumn	NFLS	Office conflicts	Did what was asked to do and being silent	Power differential, being ignored
		Poor interpersonal relations (isolation, depreciation, and disregard)	Being silent, did as required	Power differential, being ignored,
		The Shanghai incident	Decided to cut off with the other teachers, became lazy and inactive	Face

Information array of participant Winter

Name	Placement	Conflicts	What did she do?	Themes
Winter	WFLS	Student management	Enhanced visibility (accompanying Ss, reaching out, and helping Ss)	ST's role
		The treatment of underachieving students	Consulted the mentor and colleagues, talked with Ss, and tutored them	Equity caused by exam- vs- quality- oriented education

APPENDIX E: A SAMPLE OF WINTER'S LESSON PLAN