Journey to Becoming a Thai English Teacher: A New Perspective on Investigating Teacher Shortage[1]

Denchai Prabjandee

Burapha University

In this study, the author provides a unique perspective on teacher shortage by focusing on teacher retention, in terms of why teachers stay in the teaching profession, rather than focusing on teacher attrition, or why teachers leave the teaching profession. The change in perspective created an opportunity to study the journey of how teachers chose to become a teacher, which is a bridge between inspirations of becoming with inspirations of staying in the teaching profession. The findings revealed that teachers attributed their decisions to enter the teaching profession to destiny, pride, schooling, and motherly qualities. They also reported that they stayed in the teaching profession because of the students, a sense of belonging, a mission, and their hometown. This study contributes to teacher education programs because it raises awareness of how teacher educators could use these rich histories to educate student teachers that endeavor to enter the teaching profession.

Cet article présente une perspective originale sur la pénurie des enseignants qui est centrée sur le maintien en place du personnel enseignant (pourquoi les enseignants restent dans la profession), plutôt que sur le départ des enseignants (pourquoi les enseignants quittent la profession). Le changement d'optique a permis d'étudier le parcours qui a mené les enseignants à choisir leur profession, ce qui lie le désir de devenir et le désir de rester membre de la profession. Les résultats indiquent que les enseignants attribuent leur choix de profession au destin, à la fierté, à leur scolarité et à des qualités maternelles. Ils ont également indiqué que ce qui les motivait à rester enseignants c'était les élèves, le sens d'appartenance, leur mission et leur ville d'origine. Cette étude contribue aux programmes de formation des enseignants en montrant aux formateurs comment puiser dans la richesse de ces parcours pour appuyer les étudiants en pédagogie.

Teacher shortage is a global phenomenon; many countries throughout the world have witnessed teachers leaving the teaching profession early, especially beginning teachers during their first five years (Hong, 2012; Schaefer, 2013). Previous researchers have been concerned about the teacher shortage crisis and it is becoming a hot issue in the field of education (Guarino, Santibañz, & Daley, 2006; Hong, 2012; Macdonald, 1999; Peters & Pearce, 2012). Like other countries, Thailand has also been affected by the teacher shortage crisis, especially with respect to English teachers. As a result, the question of why there are an inadequate number of teachers warrants the need for research.

Previous researchers (e.g., Changying, 2007; Hahs-Vaughn & Scherff, 2008; Hancock &

Scherff, 2010; Ingersoll, 2001; Kersaint, Lewis, Potter, & Meisels, 2007) have investigated the teacher shortage by examining factors affecting the teacher attrition, or why teachers leave the teaching profession, and the literature produced two themes: individual factors and contextual factors (Olsen & Anderson, 2007; Rinke, 2008; Schaefer, Long, & Clandinin, 2012). For the individual factors, existing studies pointed out that teachers left the teaching profession because they felt burned out and they had dissatisfaction with their jobs. The reasons for this were family-related issues, inadequate administrative supports, stress, or challenging student behaviors (Hong, 2012).

For the contextual factors, Ingersoll (2001) investigated the teacher shortage crisis by analyzing organizational factors, occupation, and work. He explained that teacher shortage was not about an imbalance between increased student enrollment and teacher retirement; rather it was the teacher turnover that caused this shortage. Ingersoll found that teachers left the teaching profession because they had dissatisfaction with the teaching profession or they wanted to pursue other careers. Additionally, previous studies provided that teachers left the teaching profession because they did not receive enough professional support and salary (Olsen & Anderson, 2007; Schaefer et al., 2012).

Schaefer et al. (2012) questioned the literature on teacher attrition and argued that, "prior research seemed to focus on providing correct answers, quick fixes, and decontextualized data" (p. 115). They further critiqued previous studies as not incorporating individual and contextual factors; often times, those studies focused on only one aspect. Additionally, they noticed that previous researchers treated teacher attrition as a stable event, something that happened at one moment, rather than characterizing it as a developmental process that is negotiated over time (Schaefer et al., 2012). Therefore, they suggested that future research shift the perspective to study why teachers stay in the teaching profession, rather than why they leave the profession (Schaefer et al., 2012). As such, in order to understand why teachers stay in the teaching profession, I investigated why teachers entered the teaching profession since it serves as the starting point of their professional journeys.

Background Literature

Previous literature that examined why teachers stay in the teaching profession focused on beginning teachers, in terms of them being *leavers* and *stayers* (e.g., Harfitt, 2015; Hong, 2012). Olsen and Anderson (2007) added a group called *shifters*, who were described as teachers who left the teaching profession temporary, migrating from one school to another. In this study, I only focused on the perspective of stayers with attempts to understand why they entered and then remained in the teaching profession.

Entering the Teaching Profession

In the past three decades, researchers have attempted to answer a fundamental question: Why do teachers decide to enter the teaching profession? Previous researchers have pointed out that schooling experience, either positive or negative, was one of the reasons to become a teacher. To elaborate, Huberman (1993) found that a love of a subject, enjoyment of learning, successful learning, and desire to do better than earlier teachers impacted the determination to teach. Lortie (2002) revealed that the participants in his study reported having positive learning experiences at schools, which is why they wanted to continue working in a school setting.

Consistently, Hayes (2008) found that the participants became teachers because they studied with successful teachers, had an aptitude and interest in the subject, and a thirst for knowledge. Recently, Burton and Johnson (2010) pointed out that the participants in their study became teachers because of an inspirational teacher who encouraged them to go beyond the status quo and they wanted to return the feeling of empowerment to their students.

Apart from schooling experience, previous researchers also found that the decision to become teachers was driven by extrinsic, intrinsic, and altruistic reasons (Low, Lim, Ch'ng, & Goh, 2011). The extrinsic reason refers to external sources such as salary, family, or compensation. Hayes (2008) found that family was a strong influence on the decision to become teachers. Lortie (2002) pointed out that the participants became teachers because of money, prestige, or employment security. This was consistent with the study of Huberman (1993) that participants became teachers because of access to higher status, a way of earning, or job security.

Another influential factor was intrinsic, which is defined as a job-related motivation that is driven by internal factors, such as the nature of the job. This factor provides the opportunity for learning or matching jobs with personal interests (Low et al., 2011). Lortie (2002) found that the participants became teachers because they perceived that teaching was a valuable career with moral worth. Moreover, Low et al. (2011) described the altruistic reasons as the "factors that go beyond any tangible benefits that the teaching profession has to offer" (p. 196). Huberman (1993) revealed that the desire to share knowledge, determination to guide others, and enjoyment to work with children were influential factors to becoming a teacher.

Further, Lortie (2002) found that being a teacher allowed flexibility for teachers to do other things, such as mothering, and termed this notion *time compatibility*. Huberman (1993) revealed that some teachers became teachers because they initially had no reasons, and later on, they had nowhere else to go. Olsen (2008) conducted a study with 13 secondary school teachers in the United States and found that gender was an important factor influencing reasons for entry into a teaching career. He explained that gender "illuminated underlying identity aspects that connect the teachers' prior experiences to their decisions to enter teaching and their emerging professional identities" (p. 27). The participants reported growing up playing a female teacher role, having influential women teachers, and perceiving teaching as mothering.

Even though the extrinsic, intrinsic, and altruistic reasons revealed an understanding of the decision to teach for teachers, they were not applicable to explain reasons as to why a teacher would want to teach in an urban education context. Timir (2009) argued that existing literature on the decision to teach assumed the homogeneity of teachers. Timir argued that the altruistic, gender-related, and job flexibility reasons were not part of this urban-school teacher's decision to teach. Urban-school teachers decided to enter the teaching profession because they perceived teaching as a social justice. Clayton and Schoonmaker (2007) also pointed out similar findings; the teachers in their study narrated that they became teachers because they wanted to be an agent of social change. The findings in these two studies challenged previous notions of why people entered the teaching profession because different contexts may yield different reasons.

Finally, through a narrative inquiry perspective, Harfitt (2015) investigated beginning teachers in Hong Kong who left the teaching profession and rejoined the profession again after two years. The data revealed that teachers re-entered the teaching profession because of their students, in the sense that their relationships with their students drew them back to the teaching profession. Schaefer and Clandinin (2011) used the term *sustaining moments* to describe this type of relationship.

Retention in the Teaching Profession

Recently, the question of why teachers stay in the teaching profession has gained an interest among researchers. Existing studies have investigated teacher retention in terms of stress (Wilhelm et al., 2000), job satisfaction (Perrachione & Rosser, 2008), and resilience (Gu & Li, 2013; Hong, 2012; Peters & Pearce, 2012). In *What Keeps Teachers Going*, Nieto (2005) investigated why excellent teachers for linguistically diverse students in the Boston area stayed in the teaching profession. She argued that regardless of the difficulty they encountered, teachers stayed in the teaching profession because of the relationships they developed with their students. Teachers viewed teaching in several ways such as teaching as love, hope, intellectual work, democratic practice, or shaping futures (Nieto, 2005).

Through psychological lenses of self-efficacy, belief, value, and emotion, Hong (2012) examined beginning teachers responses to resilience by comparing teachers who had left the teaching profession with the ones who had stayed in the profession. The results showed that staying teachers reported having more self-efficacy than leaving teachers; they believed they could handle the many challenges because they received administrative supports. The staying teachers also developed emotional boundaries between themselves and students while encountering failures, whereas leavers often felt responsible for students' learning. This perception led to emotional burnout and attrition of the teaching profession.

In the Australian context, Peters and Pearce (2012) examined conditions that kept beginning teachers in the profession. Even though beginning teachers experienced challenges and difficulties they tended to stay in the profession as long as they received adequate professional supports, especially from the principal. Peters and Pearce found that the principals played an important role in creating a school culture where teachers could engage in the integrated and interactional working environment. The principal could initiate an induction program and be open for conversation during the initial years of teaching. This supportive working environment nurtured resilience for beginning teachers (Peters & Pearce, 2012).

Instead of asking why teachers stayed in the teaching profession, Freedman and Appleman (2009) asked how to retain teachers in an urban education context. They examined how a teacher education program kept teachers in urban schools. Through a five-year longitudinal qualitative study, they tracked 26 new teachers who graduated from a credential program. The data revealed that teachers attributed their reasons for staying to the credential program because they felt they were well prepared in doing hard work. The teachers also received ongoing support from their cohort network. The findings affirmed the importance of the teacher education program in preparing and supporting teachers to remain in the teaching profession.

Finally, Rinke (2011) conducted a longitudinal study to examine teachers' perceptions of their careers. The data yielded "a continuum from integration to participation" (p. 646). This continuum defined a degree of professional engagement, motivation to enter teaching, and decisions to stay or leave the profession. At the end of integration, teachers entered the teaching profession with full active engagement and decided to stay no matter what happened. In the middle of the continuum, teachers integrated themselves into several school projects, but they separated themselves from other teachers and considered leaving. At the end of participation, teachers participated in educational discourses for a while and considered leaving the profession. Rinke concluded that individual and contextual factors of teacher attrition did not work separately, but instead, simultaneously informed teachers' career decisions.

Research Questions

In reviewing the literature on decisions to enter into and to stay in the teaching profession, the following research questions were used to guide the pursuit of knowledge in this study: (a) Why do English teachers in Thailand decide to enter the teaching profession? (b) What motivates them to stay in the teaching profession?

The Study

Goodness as a Theoretical Perspective

In this study, I looked through the theoretical lens of *goodness*, taken from the portraiture methodology (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983). Even though goodness was not originally claimed as a theory, it warrants the place of a theoretical perspective since it views the world through the lens of strength, health, and resilience (Schendel, 2009), which is closely related to education (Alexander, 2003). Lawrence-Lightfoot (1983) was inspired by her experience of being an object of drawing, so she developed the portraiture methodology to study goodness of high-school cultures and institutional characters. She defined goodness as being a dynamic, complex, and situational determined construct. Lawrence-Lightfoot (1983) wrote:

> Goodness is a much more complicated notion that refers to what some social scientists describes the school's "ethos," not discrete additive elements. It refers to the mixture of parts that produce a whole. The whole includes people, structures, relationships, ideology, goals, intellectual substance, motivation, and will. It includes measurable indices such as attendance records, truancy rates, vandalism to property, percentages going on to college. But it also encompasses less tangible, more elusive qualities that can only be discerned through close, vivid description, through subtle nuances, through detailed narratives that reveal the sustaining values of institution. (p. 23)

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) expanded the notion of goodness, resisting traditional research that attempted to document failures or to fix things, describing this traditional research as a "pathological lens" (p. 8). They stated that the attempt to research failures often leads to blaming victims or inaction. Therefore, Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) took a different perspective in order to explore goodness. She said that the researcher who takes the stance of "What is good here?" is more likely to decipher different realities than the one who tries to find sources of failure (p. 9).

It is important to note that Lawrence-Lightfoot did not define goodness as only an ideal, perfect, or celebrated state, but rather also included vulnerability and imperfection. She argued, "the counterpoint and contradictions of strength and vulnerability, virtue and evil are central to the expression of goodness" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 9). Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis expanded the notion of goodness into the myriad ways of how the participants perceived goodness. Through this lens, the researcher does not impose the definition of good on the inquiry, but attempts to document how the participants defined goodness.

Chapman (2005) extended the notion of goodness by integrating this concept to the stance of critical race theory. She interpreted the notion of goodness as an empowerment of the practitioners and the researchers. In addition, she saw the stance of portraitists as critical in researchers' attempt to document marginalized groups by giving them an opportunity to express their voices. Moreover, the fact that portraiture methodologists try to reach out to audiences

beyond the academic world warrants a critical lens since it "gives voice" to those who barely have a chance to engage in a conversation about research (Chapman, 2005).

Participants

The participants in this study were three female Thai English teachers (Lertluck Tangpanit, Chutima Chaolilitkul, and Kasemsiri Watthano)[2]. They were purposefully selected because they were unique, interesting, and willing to participate (Stake, 1995). I was particularly interested in English teachers because Thailand has lacked teachers in this field for many years. I was also interested in experienced teachers, who had been teaching for five or more years. Additionally, I was interested in studying teachers from different levels: middle school, high school, and university in order to gain a variety of data. By selecting teachers from different levels, I did not have preconceived ideas that their teaching statuses were different.

Lertluck Tangpanit is a soon-retiring Thai English teacher, but her exuberant energy does not hint that she is close to retirment[3]. Lertluck was born in a rural area in the northeast part of Thailand and was born into a family of teachers. Lertluck has been teaching English for almost forty years at Benchama Maharat School, a prestigious high school in Thailand. Unlike other teachers, she had been determined to become a teacher at this school since she was a young girl. She began her career at this school and will soon be retiring from there. As a teacher, Lertluck has always understood and cared for her students, and emphasized the importance of morals to her students.

Chutima Chaolilitkul is also soon retiring from middle school in the northeast part of Thailand. The students refer to Chutima as "the most polite and kindhearted teacher" that they have ever seen. Similar to Lertluck, Chutima was also born into a family of teachers in a rural area of the northeastern part of Thailand. In that rural area, teaching was a very prestigious job. As a teacher, Chutima is always polite and kind to her students. She believes that all students are unique in their own ways, so she tries to bring different activities to help her students learn.

Kasemsiri Wattano describes herself as "sassy". She is in her late twenties and is a slender young woman who appears majestic. Her students often say she looks "too young" to be a university teacher. Kasemsiri likes fashion so her outfits are posh, stylish, and elegant. This fashionable aspect makes her memorable to her students. Unlike the other two teachers, Kasemsiri was born in the metropolitan area of Thailand (Nonthaburi), where teaching was not highly regarded. Her mother was a teacher and her father was an engineer. As a teacher, Kasemsiri is well known for bringing creative child-centered activities into her classroom.

Data Collection

In this study, the portraiture methodology was employed. Portraiture methodology is an inquiry to investigate the complexity of life journey, attempting to blur the boundary between arts and science (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Portraiture regards relationships as a means to investigate a central story that is aesthetic, rigorous, and grounded in context. This central story is called a *portrait*, and is crafted from emergent themes, sources of evidence, and rich metaphors reflecting institutional rituals. The voice of the researcher is made explicit throughout the research process (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

Five data elicitation techniques were used: life story interviews, photo-elicitations, classroom observations, artifact collection, and shadowing. The life story interview seeks to

understand an individual's life in context (Atkinson, 2007). In this study, the life story interview was semi-structured, eliciting each participant's childhood experience, academic background, reasons for becoming a teacher, and reasons for staying in the teaching profession. Since the life story interview required memory recall, I provided the participants with the interview questions in advance to facilitate this process and to avoid intimidating topics.

Apart from the life story interview, I also used the photo-elicitation method. Harper (2002) defined photo-elicitation as a method that employs photographs as a means to conduct interviews in order to activate an individual's memory. I asked the participants to bring photos that represented their journey of becoming a teacher. I then asked them to share stories about the photos. Guided questions were also used. For example: Can you tell me about the photo? How does this photo represent your journey to becoming a teacher? Can you give examples?

Additionally, I conducted eight hours of classroom observations per teacher to sketch the context of their teaching (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). The observation was conducted on different days and months to gain a variety of data. Together with conducting classroom observations, I also gathered artifacts such as classroom handouts and course outlines. Finally, I employed the shadowing technique, asking the participants to identify a day that represented a normal teaching day for them and followed them like a shadow. This shadowing technique allowed me to ask questions to clarify hunches, ideas, and preliminary findings.

For this paper, the main data were from the life story and the photo-elicitation interview. The other techniques were used as supplementary. The combination of these techniques helped to decipher the complexity and multidimensionality of the journey to becoming teachers. Metaphorically speaking, it is like peeling an onion and bringing forth multiple layers of understanding.

Data Analysis

Before analyzing the data, I attempted to enhance the quality of the data set by paying attention to the transcript quality (Poland, 2002). To analyze the data, I employed the Zoom model, which was developed to maximize an understanding of the multilayered meanings of life history. The term *zoom* is a visual metaphor that highlights the active involvement of a researcher trying to analyze the data from different perspectives (Pamphilon, 1999).

Using the Zoom model, four different foci were adopted. First, I focused on the macro-zoom level in terms of how the teachers' sociocultural background had shaped them. I also focused on the meso-zoom level, paying attention to themes that had been constructed and reconstructed to form coherency across the teachers' narratives. Additionally, I looked through the micro-zoom level or the narrative dimension of stories, which consisted of pauses, key phrases, and emotions embedded in the narratives. Finally, I adopted the interactional-zoom level, zooming into myself to play with my subjectivity (Pamphilon, 1999). It should be noted that the Zoom model is not a linear process. When I encountered contradiction in one level, I zoomed in or out to scrutinize the contradiction. The product from this Zoom model was multilayered themes. I sent these themes to the participants for member checking purposes (Merriam, 2009). After using the Zoom model, I found that this model had potential benefits. The Zoom model provided the language, angles of vision, and points of interest to decipher the complexity of qualitative data.

Findings and Discussion

The data revealed that the journey to becoming a teacher was a paradox of struggle and success, routine and reward, and boredom and delight. Throughout their journeys, the three Thai English teachers were engaged in professional reflections, and they centered those meanings on their students, missions, and careers. This section presents a collective portrait of the three Thai English teachers. The limited space does not allow for a full representation and discussion, so I have focused on salient themes.

Inspirations of Becoming

The data revealed that the three teachers described their inspirations of becoming English teachers through the themes of destiny, pride, schooling, and mother. These themes are neither mutually exclusive nor linear; they contributed to the inspirations of becoming teachers with no particular order, creating the multidimensionality of the journey to becoming a teacher.

Destiny. All three Thai teachers described their journeys to becoming an English teacher as destiny. Based on the description by the three teachers, destiny means different things to them. Lertluck described her destiny as a source from the Devas, a member of divine beings in Buddhism, but Chutima and Kasemsiri did not mention any source of destiny. There were several incidents that made the three teachers attribute their journeys to becoming an English teacher to destiny. They felt that those incidents were accidental, difficult to explain logically, and beyond their expectations. Lertluck explained, "It seemed like I was born to be an English teacher. Multiple Devas have threaded my life destiny, putting me into places with the end goal to be an English teacher." She described her birth into a family of teachers as the Devas' blessings. She also said that the Devas inspired her to love English because her remote hometown made it difficult for her to love English.

Throughout her life, Lertluck felt that she was given blessings from the Devas to have education. She started her schooling at the kindergarten level, which was not typical for anyone in her hometown. When she was in middle school, she felt that the Devas took her to see Benchama Maharat, where she was impressed with the majestic school building. Since that moment, Lertluck was determined to become a teacher at Benchama Maharat. During her practicum teaching when Lertluck was studying the certificate of higher education, she believed that the Devas offered blessings for her to pursue a Bachelor's degree, and she felt that she was accepted to the best teacher preparation school in Thailand because the Devas listened to her wishes.

When Lertluck did not pass a selective examination to major in English during her Bachelor's degree, she was disappointed and lost her self-confidence. She decided to major in geography. Luckily, she met a friend who suggested that Lertluck write a letter to the Dean for consideration of changing her major from geography to English. Lertluck finally got into an English major. "If I had not met this friend, I would not have become an English teacher. Who knows? I think only the Devas could make that happen," concluded Lertluck with a smile.

Lertluck courageously decided to take the selective examination in order to teach at Benchama Maharat School. Since it was the most difficult school to get into, she was not confident that she would pass the exam, so she prayed for blessings from the Devas. When Lertluck passed the selective examination, she attributed this success to the Devas. After teaching at Benchama Maharat for some time, Lertluck wanted to teach at a university. She passed a written exam but failed during the interview. She ascribed this failing to her destiny; the Devas did not want her to teach at the university level. Based on all of these unexplainable

incidents, Lertluck felt that she became an English teacher because of her destiny, prescribed by the Devas.

Chutima described two accidental events that affected her motivation to enter the teaching profession. The first incident was when she decided on a major while she was pursuing a certificate of higher education program, equivalent to a high school degree nowadays. Initially, she intended to major in science because she performed well in this subject. While Chutima was sitting in the room of the science major, her friends dragged her out of the room and took her to the English major room instead. Chutima lightheartedly narrated, "So, my major was English. I think I majored in English by chance!" The second incident took place when she decided to transfer from a rural school to a city school. Chutima did not expect to teach at Benchama because she thought it was a privilege. At first, she decided to go to another school, but there was no vacancy. Chutima came to Benchama and found out that there was only one position available. "It was unbelievable, but I think it was my fate," summarized Chutima.

Kasemsiri felt that her whole journey of becoming a university English teacher was predestined. When she was in high school, she knew that she wanted to become a schoolteacher. However, during college Kasemsiri changed her mind and decided to become a university teacher instead. Because a university teacher required at least a Master's degree, Kasemsiri decided she would become a university teacher after she worked at a school for a while. "By the age of thirty, I would become a university teacher," narrated Kasemsiri. Luckily, she was given the opportunity to apply for a teaching position in her hometown soon after she graduated. She felt that it exceeded her expectations to become a university English teacher so early, and concluded, "It must be destiny."

In this study, destiny contradicted what was reported in previous studies. Nieto (2003) argued that the journey to become an English teacher was not about destiny. She argued that being a member of a specific group, such as a family of teachers, did not limit or guarantee the possibilities of one's life. It seemed to me that Nieto described destiny as a fixed, limited, and unchangeable circumstance that was prescribed by external sources, and individuals could not take control over their destiny. However, the three English teachers in this study described destiny as a direct result of their current endeavors, actions, and behaviors. In other words, their destinies were alterable, and they had some power to change their destinies.

Pride. In Thailand, teaching is regarded as an honorable, high-status profession. All three teachers in this study mentioned that they became English teachers because they thought teaching was equivalent to pride. The notion of pride, as described by the teachers, was made up of collective, emotional, and pleasurable moments that they gradually internalized from several external sources, such as family heritages, schooling experience, interaction with others, verbal compliments, and society. However, pride in the Thai context is not something to express verbally because it is perceived as arrogant to show pride publicly. When the three teachers talked about pride, they meant they felt proud quietly from the inside. In other words, pride in the Thai context is appreciative rather than expressive.

As a young child, Lertluck remembered she was proud to grow up in "the family of pride." Her grandfather was a nobleman who was given his title by the King. Her grandfather donated his personal property to establish a school. The school acknowledged her grandfather's contribution by inscribing his name on the school's plaque. Every time she visited that school, she felt proud and developed a determination to become a teacher.

Apart from the family heritage, Lertluck was also a source of pride for her family because she was an exceptional student. The moment that Lertluck felt the most proud was when she

became an English teacher at Benchama Maharat because it had been her dream since she was in middle school to become a teacher there. "I wanted to work at Benchama Maharat because it was a privilege and filled with dignity," said Lertluck with a smile and continued, "I wanted to work at a good place, where people dressed up well, and they were polite. Benchama Maharat matched perfectly with my expectation."

For Chutima, she decided to become a teacher because she was born into a family of teachers. Both of her parents had been elementary school teachers in the rural area, and growing up, she had experienced several moments of pride. In the rural area context, when her parents were invited to a community event, they were treated very well. The locals respected her parents and many of them called her, "the daughter of teachers." Those moments brought pride to her and these moments had an impact on her decision to become a teacher.

Unlike Lertluck and Chutima, Kasemsiri's source of pride was her schooling experience. Kasemsiri was proud that she went to a school that allowed her to develop a love for English, and her schooling experiences affected Kasemsiri personally and professionally. Kasemsiri decided to become a university English teacher because it was regarded as high-status, which brought pride to her family. It is difficult to become a university teacher in Thailand because individuals need to have at least a Master's degree, and the competition is high. She initially wanted to become a schoolteacher, but she changed her mind to become a university teacher due to the pride this job provides.

The three teachers were gradually internalizing a sense of pride, and this internalization process affected their decisions to become English teachers. The theme of pride was consistent with previous studies (Huberman, 1993; Lortie, 2002). In the study by Huberman (1993), teachers entered the teaching profession because they perceived teaching as a way to access higher status. Based on the stories of the three English teachers, the term higher status did not mean that they had low status and wanted to change this by becoming English teachers. Instead, these teachers were already in high status, and they wanted to maintain this status to carry on their pride.

Schooling. The theme of schooling emerged from all three of the teachers as an inspiration to become an English teacher. From their perspectives, schooling referred to a process of formal, informal, and non-formal education that they grew up with. This theme covered a wide range of schooling including their families, embodying the roles of teachers, excellent students, and teacher impressions.

Growing up, the three teachers embodied the role of teachers. Lertluck and Kasemsiri invited their siblings and friends from close-by houses to role-play being a teacher. Both of them reported that they had fun playing this role. Chutima did not mention this role-playing, but she helped her mother with school-related jobs, such as grading.

Additionally, all three of the teachers in this study liked school and they performed well academically. Chutima was always in the top of her class and she was particularly good at science and English subjects. Kasemsiri exceled in her English classes because her school emphasized the importance of learning English. Lertluck did not mention explicitly about the content subject where she performed exceptionally. She only said that she was always in the top of her class. Since these three teachers excelled in school, they wanted to continue working in a school environment.

Chutima and Kasemsiri met their inspirational teachers at a young age. Both of them had a favorable impression from their favorite English teachers. Chutima said, "I still remember my favorite English teacher's name. She made English fun, and I really liked to learn with her."

Similarly, Kasemsiri met her favorite English teacher when she was in high school. She liked this teacher because the teacher was posh and elegant. "I wanted to be posh like my English teacher," said Kasemsiri. Lertluck did not have a particular favorite teacher, but she liked school. "I always wanted to go to school. I loved the fun I had at school," Lertluck concluded.

The theme of schooling aligned with previous literature (Burton & Johnson, 2010; Hayes, 2008; Huberman, 1993; Lortie, 2002). These studies found that positive learning experiences, inspirational teachers, and successful learning contributed to the decision of becoming a teacher. In this study, Lertluck, Chutima, and Kasemsiri were all successful learners, particularly in English, and they had positive schooling experiences. This finding showed that schooling was a process of forming the desire to enter into the teaching profession.

Mother's quality. Chutima and Kasemsiri talked about their mothers as inspirational influences on their decision of becoming an English teacher. While growing up, they were closer to their mothers than their fathers. As an older child, Chutima's mother expected her to be a role model for her siblings. Her mother taught her to take care of her siblings. Kasemsiri mostly stayed with her mother because her father worked outside, and he always came back home late.

For Chutima, her mother was her idol. She remembered that her mother was an exceptional student. "My mother was always in the top of her class, and I wanted to follow in her path," said Chutima. Her mother influenced several of her decisions. For example, when Chutima was reluctant to make a decision about whether to go to a nursing college, her mother suggested that she go to a teacher college. As an older child, she trusted and respected her mother and decided to pursue a certificate of education.

Similar to Chuitma, Kasemsiri's mother was influential on her life. Her mother chose "the only school" for her, where she learned to love English and became the person she is now. When Kasemsiri was young, her mother also had her take extra classes, such as music, dance, and art, in order to prepare her to have other exceptional talents. When Kasemsiri was in college and lived on campus in an apartment, she called her mother to consult with her when she encountered problems. This close relationship with her mother may have influenced Kasemsiri's decision to become a university English teacher since her mother was also a schoolteacher.

On the contrary, Lertluck was reluctant to attribute her motivation to becoming an English teacher to her mother or any other family members, even though she was born into a family of teachers. Her father was a school principal and her oldest sister was a teacher. When I asked her whether her father expected her to become a teacher, Lertluck replied immediately, "Not really! I remembered my father told my sister to become a teacher. I guess it is kind of seeing and looking at both of them that made me want to become a teacher."

Lertluck talked about the role of her mother as "a super woman." Her mother was a stay-at-home mom, raising and taking care of 11 children. Her father was the head of the family earning money to support the family. When her father passed away, the family received a pension from her father's death. "That pension was the only money we had to support ourselves," Lertluck narrated and continued, "With my mother's long-term vision, she used a part of this money to buy a house in the city. This house was a place for me and my other siblings to stay in when we were in middle school. Without my mother, I would not have had a place to stay while pursuing my education in the city."

In a previous study, Hayes (2008) argued that family was a strong influence on the decision to become a teacher. However, in this study, particularly in Chutima's and Kasemsiri's cases, the mother was the most influential person in their families. Even though Chutima's father was a teacher like her mother, Chutima did not talk about her father as an inspirational motive. Based

on these two stories, their mothers' qualities seemed to be an inspirational motivation to enter the teaching profession.

Inspirations of Staying

The teachers stayed in the teaching profession because of several inspirations. Four interrelated themes emerged: students, sense of belonging, mission, and hometown. There is a connectional device that glues these themes together, the act of revisiting stories. For example, when the teachers were bored with teaching, they revisited the fun they had with students, the sense of belonging they had, or the hometown they wanted to service.

Students. All three teachers attributed an inspiration of staying in the teaching profession to students. They reported that they stayed in the teaching profession because they wanted to help their students become successful, and because of the success stories they heard when previous students returned. The students that these teachers referred to, were mostly those who had graduated and came back to visit them on special occasions, such as on the Teacher's Day (January 16) or the school's anniversary.

Lertluck and Kasemsiri felt that they were given love and trust from students and their parents. When they learned that their previous students were successful, they felt they were part of that success. Chutima talked about the happiness that came from spending time with her students. She claimed that she never counted down to her retirement. This theme was consistent with the findings of Nieto (2003) and Harfitt (2015). Nieto argued that teachers stayed in the teaching profession because of a desire to be part of students' success and the appreciation of their impacts on students. Schaefer and Clandinin (2011) described the relationships teachers created with students as "sustaining moments" (p. 287). With or without realization about this relationship, the teachers in this study gradually internalized emotions and feelings through interactions with their students.

Sense of belonging. The teachers reported that a sense of belonging was part of the reason they stayed in the teaching profession. This sense of belonging comes from the communities they live in such as their community of colleagues, teachers, and students. Through everyday practices (e.g., instruction or interaction with others) at the school, the teachers internalized this sense of belonging, and created an inspiration to stay in the teaching profession.

Lertluck talked about a sense of belonging as her inspiration for staying in the teaching profession. Throughout her forty years of teaching, there were moments that she felt bored and wanted to leave the teaching profession. She was even thought about early retirement because of this boredom but what kept her in the profession was the sense of belonging she had with the other teachers. Lertluck felt that she was a part of this community of teachers. This sense of belonging gave her the energy and motivation to stay in the teaching profession. Lertluck narrated, "When I feel bored, I often think of my fellow teachers. I am at school. I have friends. When the school has a sport day, I can wear the same colored outfit as my friends. We have fun. Why do I have to quit?" Lertluck also felt that she was a valuable person. She thought students and their parents needed her. When she went to teach, she could talk to her students. When the students' parents wanted to consult about their children, they came to talk to her. As a result of this interaction, Lertluck gained a sense of belonging.

Chutima and Kasemsiri mentioned the teaching job itself as an inspiration for staying in the teaching profession. Both of them loved the nature of the teaching profession including reading,

preparing, teaching, communicating, assessing, evaluating, and grading. They carry out these jobs daily and enjoy it. That is why they have never left the profession.

Mission. Chutima ascribed her inspiration for staying in the teaching profession to the mission she held. The mission was helping her students become successful. As a result of this mission, Chutima devoted herself to teaching and stayed in the teaching profession. She spent a lot of time preparing lessons, reflecting on her teaching practices, and going through materials as if she were a student. As a teacher, Chutima also dedicated herself to professional development to find new or different ways to teach her students.

The theme of mission was consistent with a study by Freedman and Appleman (2009). They reported that teachers stayed in the teaching profession because of a sense of mission that they developed during the teacher preparation program. I propose that Chutima's sense of mission was developed back in her childhood, growing up within a family of teachers, and this mission was internalized through everyday life experience. The teacher preparation program might have helped to develop this mission, but it was not a major source for it. Chutima did not attribute her source of mission to the teacher preparation program even though I asked her explicitly. This showed that a sense of mission developed over time, and it is still developing through everyday experience.

Hometown. Kasemsiri reported that she stayed in the teaching profession because of her hometown. After she obtained a job as a university English teacher in her hometown, Kasemsiri was determined to ensure her students were equipped with the necessary English knowledge. Kasemsiri narrated, "I cannot see myself living outside of my hometown. This is my place. This is my culture. This is where my parents and friends live. I want to stay in my hometown so that I can take care of my parents and my family." It seemed to me that when Kasemsiri talked about her hometown, she likely referred to her family. Teaching gave her a chance to take care of her parents.

This finding was consistent with previous studies (Burton & Johnson, 2010; Lortie, 2002). In the study of Burton and Johnson (2010), the teachers described their reason for staying in the teaching profession as their hometown. Similarly, Kasemsiri mentioned that her hometown was part of the reason she stayed in the teaching profession. In Kasemsiri's case, staying in her hometown gave her time compatibility (Lortie, 2002). She had the job she always wanted and was also able to take care of her family as well. The notion of time compatibility was found in the literature as reasons to enter into the teaching profession, but this study found that it was a reason to stay in the teaching profession. This finding suggests that inspirations of becoming may connect to inspirations of staying.

Conclusion

The purposes of this study were to investigate the journeys of three people becoming Thai English teachers. Through the theoretical lens of goodness, I was able to see a continuum of teacher professional development, representing the complicated, messy, and developmental nature of this teaching journey. The three Thai English teachers in this study developed their inspirations for becoming teachers back when they were young; they had a sense of what it meant to be a teacher through several years of schooling and the stories they heard, and they brought these rich experiences into their college program. Lortie (2002) used the term *apprenticeship observation* to describe these observations during schooling experiences.

The findings from this study raised questions in the practice of teacher education. Do our

teacher preparation curricula make use of those inspirations? Do we, as teacher educators, help our students establish connections between their inspirations and the realities of teaching? Can we reinforce these inspirations? Teacher education programs in Thailand may need to reflect on their curricula and consider incorporating tools, activities, or practices that would help students develop their own biography of being a teacher, reflect upon their journeys of learning to this point, and revisit their biographies throughout the program. This practice may help students step into and remain in the teaching profession. Since this study focused on female teachers, an understanding of male teachers' journeys might be the focus for future research since it might yield different findings. Also, future research should look into innovations to make use of the inspirations that student teachers bring to the teacher education program.

References

Alexander, H. A. (2003). Aesthetic inquiry in education: Community, transcendence, and the meaning of pedagogy. *Journal of Aesthetic Education, 37*(2), 1–18.

Atkinson, R. (2007). The life story interview as a bridge in narrative inquiry. In D. J. Clandinin (Ed.). *Handbook of narrative inquiry: Mapping a methodology*, (pp. 224–245). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Burton, M., & Johnson, A. Z. (2010). "Where else would we teach?" Portraits of two teachers in the rural south. *Journal of Teacher Education, 61*(4), 376–386. doi:10.1177/0022487110372362

Changying, W. (2007). Analysis of teacher attrition. *Chinese Education and Society, 40*(5), 6–10. doi:10.2753/CED1061-1932400501

Chapman, T. K. (2005). Expressions of "voice" in portraiture. *Qualitative Inquiry, 11*(1), 27–51. doi:10.1177/1077800404270840

Clayton, C. D., & Schoonmaker, F. (2007). What holds academically able teachers in the profession? A study of three teachers. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice, 13*(3), 247–267. doi:10.1080/13540600701299775.

Freedman, S. W., & Appleman, D. (2009). "In it for the long haul" How teacher education can contribute to teacher retention in high-poverty, urban schools. *Journal of Teacher Education, 60*(3), 323–337. doi:10.1177/0022487109336181

Gu, Q., & Li, Q. (2013). Sustaining resilience in times of change: Stories from Chinese teachers. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education, 41*(3), 288–303. doi:10.1080/1359866X.2013.809056

Guarino, C. M., Santibañz, L., & Daley, G. A. (2006). Teacher recruitment and retention: A review of the recent empirical literature. *Review of Educational Research, 76*(2), 173–208. doi:10.3102/00346543076002173

Hahs-Vaughan, B. L., & Scherff, L. (2008). Beginning English teacher attrition, mobility, and retention. *The Journal of Experimental Education, 77*(1), 21–53. doi:10.3200/JEXE.77.1.21-54

Hancock, C. B., & Scherff, L. (2010). Who will stay and who will leave? Predicting secondary English teacher attrition risk. *Journal of Teacher Education, 61*(4), 328–338. doi:10.1177/0022487110372214

Harfitt, G. J. (2015). From attrition to retention: A narrative inquiry of why beginning teachers leave and then rejoin the profession. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education, 43*(1), 22–35. doi:10.1080/1359866X.2014.932333.

Harper, D. (2002). Talking about pictures: A case for photo elicitation. *Visual Studies, 17*(1), 13–26. doi:10.1080/14725860220137345

Hayes, D. (2008). Becoming a teacher of English in Thailand. *Language Teaching Research, 12*(4), 471–494. doi:10.1177/1362168808097160

Hong, J. Y. (2012). Why do some beginning teachers leave the school, and others stay? Understanding teacher resilience through psychological lenses. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory to Practice, 18*(4), 417–440. doi:10.1080/13540602.2012.696044

Huberman, M. (1993). *The lives of teachers*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Ingersoll, R. M. (2001). Teacher turnover and teacher shortages: An organizational analysis. *American Educational Research Journal, 38*(3), 499–534. doi:10.3102/00028312038003499

Kersaint, G., Lewis, J., Potter, R., & Meisels, G. (2007). Why teachers leave: Factors that influence retention and resignation. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 23*(6), 775–794. doi:10.1016/j.tate.2005.12.004

Lawrence-Lightfoot, S. (1983). *The good high school: Portraits of character and culture*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Lawrence-Lightfoot, S., & Davis, J. H. (1997). *The art and science of portraiture*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Lortie, D. C. (2002). *Schoolteacher: A sociological study*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Low, E. L., Lim, S. K., Ch'ng, A., & Goh, K. C. (2011). Pre-service teachers' reasons for choosing teaching as a career in Singapore. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Education, 31*(2), 195–210. doi:10.1080/02188791.2011.567441

Macdonald, D. (1999). Teacher attrition: a review of literature. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 15(8), 835–848. doi:10.1016/S0742-051X(99)00031-1

Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Nieto, S. (2003). *What keeps teacher going?* New York, NY: Teacher College Press.

Nieto, S. (2005). *Why we teach*. New York, NY: Teacher College Press.

Olsen, B., & Anderson, L. (2007). Courses of action: A qualitative investigation into urban teacher retention and career development. *Urban Education, 42*(1), 5–29. doi:10.1177/0042085906293923

Olsen, B. (2008). How reasons for entry into the profession illuminate teacher identity development. *Teacher Education Quarterly, 35*(3), 23–40.

Pamphilon, B. (1999). The zoom model: A dynamic framework for the analysis of life histories. *Qualitative Inquiry, 5*(3), 393–410. doi:10.1177/107780049900500306

Perrachione, B. A., & Rosser, V. J. (2008). Why do they stay? Elementary teachers' perceptions of job satisfaction and retention. *The Professional Educator, 32*(2), 1–17.

Peters, J., & Pearce, J. (2012). Relationships and early career teacher resilience: A role for school principals. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory to Practice, 18*(2), 249–262. doi:10.1080/13540602.2012.632266

Poland, B. D. (2002). Transcription quality. In J. F. Gubrium & J. A. Holstein (Eds.). *Handbook of interview research: Context and method*. (pp. 629–649). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Rinke, C. R. (2008). Understanding teachers' careers: Linking professional life to professional path. *Educational Research Review, 3*(1), 1–13. doi:10.1016/j.edurev.2007.10.001

Rinke, C. R. (2011). Career trajectories of urban teachers: A continuum of perspectives, participation, and plans shaping retention in the educational system. *Urban Education, 46*(4), 639–662. doi:10.1177/0042085911399790

Schaefer, L. (2013). Beginning teacher attrition: A question of identity making and identity shifting. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice, 19*(3), 260–274. doi:10.1080/13540602.2012.754159

Schaefer, L. S., & Clandinin, D. J. (2011). Stories of sustaining: A narrative inquiry into the experiences of two beginning teachers. *LEARNing Landscapes, 4*(2), 275-295.

Schaefer, L., Long, J. S., & Clandinin, D. J. (2012). Questioning the research on early career teacher attrition and retention. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research, 58*(1), 106–121.

Schendel, R. K. (2009). *Voices of striving elementary readers: An exploration of the enhancement of struggling reader research through portraiture methodology*. (Doctoral dissertation, University of Northern Colorado). Retrieved from http://gradworks.umi.com/33/97/3397127.html

Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Timir, E. (2009). Choosing to teach in urban schools among graduates of elite colleges. *Urban Education,*

44(5), 522–544. doi:10.1177/0042085909339373.

Wilhelm, K., Dewhurst-Savellis, J., & Parker, G. P. (2000). Teacher stress? An analysis of why teachers leave and why they stay. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice, 6*(3), 291–304. doi:10.1080/713698734.

Notes

1. This article is part of the author's doctoral dissertation. At the University where the author graduated, it is not required to publish a dissertation. This manuscript was written after the author received his doctorate degree.

2. The participants decided to use their real names because they wanted to be acknowledged. The participants understood that I would use their real names in all publications, and they signed the consent forms.

3. In Thailand, the retiring age for teachers is 60.

Dr. Denchai Prabjandee is a faculty member (Bilingual, Multicultural, and ESL Education) at Faculty of Education, Burapha University, Thailand. He is currently teaching graduate students in the field of Teaching English as a Global Language (TEGL). His research interests are teacher professional development, teacher identity, bilingual education, and ESL education.