An Extended Positioning Analysis of a Travelling Kindergarten English Teacher Story

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The purpose of this paper is to explore the positions one female teacher took up with regard to teaching English to young learners and how the teacher constructed her identities through a series of positioning. Data collection methods included a three-hour intensive interview and a collection of lesson plans and reflections for a period of one month. Her narrative orientation brings into focus the complex interplay amongst a teacher’s own educational and personal experiences, the pressures she faces from stakeholders in language education, and her own knowledge and belief system. In addition, the identity of this teacher as an English teacher is intertwined with the local context of her teaching, and it highlights conflicts within a larger discourse of English language education in Korea. I conclude by considering the implications of analyzing teacher narratives to gain insight into professional growth in teacher education for those who are training to become early childhood language teachers.

I. Introduction

The importance of children’s English education has been recognized widely in countries
where English is learned as a second/foreign language (Nikolov, 2009; Philp, Oliver & Mackey, 2008; Wu, 2003). However, the surge in interest in second language education with young learners has not been matched by studies of teacher education for young learners and teaching practice (Borg, 2006). It is a crucial issue because teachers play a pivotal role in language learning for young learners; they are responsible for what happens in classrooms (Butler 2004, 2005; Moon, 2009; Wu, 2003).

The purpose of this paper was to explore how an English teacher makes sense of her teaching English to young learners. Researchers state that teachers of young learners need to have certain qualifications that teachers of adult learners do not have (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2010; Johnstone, 2009). According to Nikolov (2009), teachers of young learners are expected to be (1) proficient in their students’ first language (L1) as well as in the second language (L2), (2) familiar with the content and methodology of the general curriculum, and (3) the principles of how young children learn in general and languages in particular. Teachers often fall short of these criteria (Butler, 2007; Lugossy, 2007; Moon, 2009). Unfortunately, teacher education preparation in Korea often dismisses these criteria as well. In most early childhood language education classrooms in Korea, teachers are either general classroom teachers or language specialists. Sometimes teachers are familiar with the curriculum and can embed the L2 in the content. However, their L2 language proficiency may not be fluent. Other times, teachers may be proficient in the L2 but less skilled in implementing age-appropriate instruction. In a third scenario, classroom teachers with limited or no L2 background co-teach with native English speakers. According to Aline and Hosoda’s study (2006), four patterns were observed in this scenario. The Korean teachers acted as (a) a bystander, (b) a translator, (c) a co-learner of English, or (d) a co-teacher. The participation patterns affected the classroom interaction in distinct ways. In these different teachers’ qualifications and attitudes toward their teaching, teachers face a different challenge in teaching language for young learners (Butler, 2004, 2005; Inbar-Lourie & Shohamy, 2009; Nikolov, 1999). Because of these distinctions, how teachers of young language learners make sense of their teaching and how teachers take up their positions should be explored. For this short paper, I focus on one female teacher who had a preparation in early childhood education but is now teaching