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**Professional identity and pedagogical space:  
Negotiating difference in teacher workplaces**

*Alex Kostogriz and Eleanor Peeler  
Monash University*

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University of Melbourne,  
Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

[Alex.kostogriz@education.monash.edu.au](mailto:Alex.kostogriz@education.monash.edu.au)  
[Eleanor.peeler@education.monash.edu.au](mailto:Eleanor.peeler@education.monash.edu.au)

## **Professional identity and pedagogical space: Negotiating difference in teacher workplaces**

*Alex Kostogriz and Eleanor Peeler*  
*Monash University*

### **Abstract**

This paper explores ‘spatial struggle’ in the formation of professional identities of overseas born teachers. The basis of this struggle arises from a limited number of subject positions available for them in pedagogical spaces of the Australian system of education. We argue that relations of power/professional knowledge in teacher workplaces as well as the binary strategy of ‘us’ and ‘them’ generate marginal locations for overseas born teachers within schools. This construction of marginality is informed not only by discourses of what counts as being a professional but also by the conception of workplace – spaces of the school, staffroom and classroom – as monocultural, pre-given and bounded entities (McGregor, 2003). By rethinking workplaces as relational, as spaces that are connected to other sociocultural places as well as spaces of semiotic flows, we can also rethink the professional becoming of overseas born teachers. This involves a critical understanding of their positionality, which can be conceptualised as a struggle for voice within “a cacophony of past and present voices, lived experiences and available practices” (Britzman, 1991, p. 8). It is because of this polyphony of voices and multiplicity of experiences that the process of professional identity formation for ‘alien’ teachers should be seen as becoming in continual negotiation of power/knowledge relations within workplaces. Recognising this dynamic is important for re-constructing our pedagogical spaces and, in turn, for a more equitable workplace practices.

### **Introduction**

Something exciting is taking place in educational research as the category of ‘space’ slowly but surely is being applied to rethink the ways we conceive of the situated nature of pedagogical practices. The familiar category of ‘context’ is being replaced, and ‘space’ is becoming a major player (see Edwards & Usher, 2000), enabling us to take into account not only the situationality of teaching, learning and professional identity but also their dynamics based around the ontology of movement, flows and networks. This tendency is particularly obvious in the current uses of Actor-Network Theory and Activity Theory in education research to analyse the practice-side of teaching, learning and identity and their embeddedness within communal spaces (Engeström, 1999; Nespor, 2000). The implication of these theories has been quite important in transcending the spatial-discursive category of context as fixed and bounded (Gotham, 2003) by shifting the focus on extended in time and space social relationships and practices. According to Lefebvre (1991), to understand these social practices and relationships we need to focus on the production of space which can be revealed through ‘deciphering’ connections between the ways we represent, perceive and use spaces. Deciphering the production of space then has to do with the spatial-semiotic analysis of social institutions such as workplaces as well as the lived and embodied experiences of people that enable them to ‘orient’ themselves in their social worlds.

Orientation in social space is the ability to navigate – perceive, decode and make sense of or read – different locations and places that have been historically produced and have acquired cultural-semiotic meanings. For instance, the production of teacher workplaces embody a close association with how professional space is perceived as a set of appropriate practices and professional attributes; how the representations of professional knowledge is constructed and decoded; how this space is lived in the daily reality of local, routine and situated events of the classroom and how the local is informed by the life of teachers outside the classrooms and staffrooms – i.e. by practices in other social spaces that have been networked to the professional space of teachers. Teachers’ ability to navigate the professional space (i.e., workplace) would entail then a perception of spatial-semiotic configurations of workplaces that have been materialised in a set of taken-for-granted practices (i.e., a tradition). Due to their historical nature, these professional practices are often enacted in teacher workplaces in unreflective ways as things-we-have-always-been-doing. Next in the ability to navigate a professional space comes the decoding of workplace representations that include pedagogical knowledge(s), ideology and discourses which operate in the local workplace. Finally, navigating and making sense of the workplace involves lived experiences of teachers through which any workplace acquires its meaning for teachers. This is the arena of ‘space users’ who seek not only to understand how to go about in local workplaces but also to change them through the individuation and appropriation of both what is inside and what flows from the outside, cutting through a relatively secluded local space (cf. ‘spaces of flow’ in Castells, 1996). This dimension is particularly important because it involves the recognition and understanding of local spaces as nodal points in the networks of social relations, discourses, material resources and representations (Nespor, 2002). Understanding the navigation of professional space in such a way makes it possible to capture its relation to the larger spatial-discursive constructions and, by the same token, to consider how teachers’ professional identities are enmeshed in the interplay of local situationality and broader sociocultural networks.

Traditionally, schools have been considered as bounded containers in which professional identities of teachers are shaped by practices and social relations (McGregor, 2003). But with the recognition of complex embeddedness of the local within wider sociocultural networks, the construction of teacher professional identities can no longer be conceptualised in terms of socialization to the practices of local professional communities. While approximation to the abstractly conceived professional identity is important for any novice teacher to become an insider of the professional community, it is clear that teacher identities can not be fully understood as simply situated. By looking at what and how teachers do locally and relating this to sociocultural networks, research into teacher professional identity has been able to transcend the notion of identity as a discrete unity and look at it as emanating from multiple lived experiences and sociocultural histories of teachers (e.g. the multiplicities of professional selves). For this particular reason, the current studies of teacher identities (Sachs, 2001) focus increasingly more on the process of becoming rather than being, reflecting a shift from the view of professional identities, however heterogenous, as temporally and spatially frozen and to the view of their formation and transformation or to what one is doing and who one

becomes in the interaction between the tradition of local workplace and the flows of meanings, values, discourses and cultural artefacts through it.

Recent studies of teachers' workplaces (McGregor, 2003) illustrate how space is folded into everything teachers do as well as into the sphere of human and professional relationships. How workplaces of teachers are imagined, represented and conceived is directly related to the construction of teachers' professional identities. An example of this can be the discursive production of teacher workplace as a professional community (Louis & Kruse, 1995; Scribner et al, 1999) in which such spatial notions as centre and periphery not only indicate a degree of members' participation in pedagogical and/or administrative activities but also provide locations from which teachers identities are articulated. The production of space, as Lefebvre (1991) and Foucault (1986) cogently argued, is therefore related to the use of language (discourses) through which people construct, imagine and formulate their understanding of places, making sense of their situationality in those places and, hence, of their situated identities.

In this paper we examine the relationship between professional spaces, discourses and politics in the construction of overseas born teachers' professional identities. In particular, we are interested in how these teachers come to understand and negotiate their professional selves through their lived experiences of new professional and sociocultural spaces. We argue that the official production of professional space in the Australian system of education does not take into account the lived experiences of foreign teachers or devalue them in terms of their professionalism. This becomes particularly clear in the data collected during interviews and the interpretation of these data in relation to the spatial production of professional identities in workplaces. We argue that the use of particular metaphors for the portrayal of teacher workplaces underscores their values, ideological nature and political technologies of inclusion and exclusion in dealing with similarities and differences. While some metaphors to represent teacher workplaces are politically more acceptable than others, it is precisely those that try to "de-politicize the realm of the spatial" should be contested (Massey, 1992, p. 66). Therefore, our first step in understanding the uncertain nature of overseas born teachers' professional identities is to examine the relationship between the production of professional space (workplaces) and the use of 'community' as a metaphor deployed to generate this space.

### **Contesting 'community' as a professional space**

'Community' as a metaphor for representing the configuration of, and relations within, different sociocultural groups is, as Bauman (2000, p. 92) argues, "the last relic of the old-time utopias of the good society". For the ideal of community, present in the dreams of better communal life, harmony, security and social equality, is a spatial and ideological construct which is problematic. Traditionally, the liberal concept of 'professional community' (e.g. Louis & Kruse, 1995) has been used to create a new image and understanding of teacher workplaces, teacher roles and social relationships. This image (model) assumes the construction of the enhanced sense of teacher professional identity emanating from the idea of symmetrical participation in the development of innovative workplaces and the answerability of all community members for school improvement, effectiveness and enhanced professional and learning outcomes (Andrews & Lewis,

2002). The essential attributes of identity in such a professional community become self-awareness, critical reflection, personal development, effective communication, cooperation and willingness to enrich the community (Crowther et al., 2001). These attributes are indispensable for participation in the community of practice that is committed to establish a stable cadre of teachers through such socialisation strategies as mentoring, ongoing support and sympathy.

While the ideal view of professional community has become a compulsory appendage to almost every school revitalisation project, many researchers have warned about borrowing the notions of community from anthropology and applying them directly to teacher workplaces (Little, 2003). It is clear that by assuming a unity based on a mutuality of interests and communal support, school collectives generate a logic of hierarchical opposition of what counts as professional and unprofessional and hence who can be included and excluded and what kinds of relationships between 'old-timers' and 'newcomers' are. As Young (1990) noticed, any desire for community implies a desire for social wholeness and common identity that at the same time produces a spatial boundary between inside and outside and therefore such binaries as self (identity) and the other (non-identity), resulting either in exclusion or homogenisation and suppression of difference.

The spatial-discursive production of professional communities then is not so much different from the construction of larger (national) communities described by Benedict Anderson (1991) as 'imagined'. Like national communities, professional communities of teachers are imagined as collectives that have a significant history and a common cultural heritage, assuming the homogeneity of 'insiders' and ignoring their class, race or gender differences. This discursive production of professional spaces does not take into account dynamics of power in social relationships between teachers but rather emphasizes the image of a deep, 'horizontal comradeship' which assumes intimacy and trust and creates an illusion of equal opportunities in building and managing the workplace. Even though this may not occur in practical life, the community must see itself this way for teachers to feel united and to ensure that school philosophy and the singularity of communal or professional interests are sustained. This is also important in establishing the communal strategies of dealing with newcomers and strangers. Because the unitary professional identity is culturally, racially and experientially purified the recognition and inclusion of difference (racial, linguistic, sexual, gender or dis/ability) requires multiple strategies to resist the 'contamination' of purified professional identity by assimilating it. This depends on school philosophies – ideologies, practices and regimes – which can be contingent and both spatially and temporally tied to workplace responses to the specific types of difference.

Designing professional spaces on the basis of the relative homogeneity of teachers has historically produced at least three strategies for professional community maintenance. By drawing on Matusov's (1999, p. 166-173) analysis of learning communities, we can define these strategies as related to so-called 'filter', 'funnel' and 'linear' models of community upkeep. The 'filter' model is based on a selective process in which "the community attracts those prospective members who fit with its philosophy of practice

and repels those who do not”. This becomes explicitly clear in such selective practices as job interviews. The job application process is mutual and asymmetrical, involving the potential teachers considering whether to apply or not to apply, and school administration making a decision whether to shortlist or not to shortlist a candidate on the basis of the application. Difference in this model is filtered already at the initial stage and hence is neither wanted nor expected. Unlike the ‘filter’ model, the ‘funnel’ model of professional community maintenance “involves an initial diversity of community members”. But later, those newcomers who do not fit into the communal philosophy of workplace become marginalised (silenced) or forced to leave. These marginalised teachers however may choose not to be silenced or to leave. Lastly, the ‘linear’ model of community maintenance is based on a process of homogenisation and involves progressive assimilatory strategies in dealing with difference. Within such a community of teachers, there is a strong sense of professional developmental trajectory – the proper way of doing things. According to the estimation of teacher’s proximity to this ideal trajectory, their diversity can be seen as ‘developmental’, reflecting the assimilatory tendency, or as ‘residual’, reflecting a deviation from the appropriate way of doing things. Hence, all three models of professional community maintenance embody particular strategies for dealing with diversity: ranging from exclusion (the ‘filter’ model), to marginalisation (the ‘funnel’ model), to assimilation (the ‘linear’ model).

Notwithstanding differences between these models of professional community maintenance, the idea of a workplace as a homogeneous (or homogenising) social entity with a single philosophy of teaching and professional development can produce major contradictions. This is particularly the case in professional communities which are characterised not only by the racial, ethnic, socioeconomic and linguistic diversity of teachers, but also by diversity in terms of their professional histories and experiences. The resolution of this contradiction can only be reached in an ecological model of professional community that makes diversity a resource rather than a problem. Thus, while recognising that communities of teachers will remain to a large extent imagined, we invite researchers and practitioners to (re)imagine workplaces as multivoiced collectives whose professional practices are related to the practices, discourses and lived experiences in other sociocultural spaces and places. Our idea of the ecological model of professional community does not necessarily refer to a sense of harmony through domination, but rather to a shared set of different professional practices that may become enriching for all teachers.

For instance, Matusov’s (1999) ecological perspective on joint activity within a heterogeneous community lies outside the traditional model of community idealisation. Instead, people in such a model are considered to be life-long learners in the flow of an ongoing activity or a collective inquiry. Notwithstanding their sociocultural differences, they still can form the cultural-semiotic ‘niches’ of mutuality and open channels for various forms of collaboration. According to the ecological perspective, a community of teachers can establish a multifaceted relationship of mutual interdependence and support among its members. In this ecological model, diversity is valued, and communal relations are not based on the homogenisation of participants. On the contrary, participants’ diversity becomes a source of openness and ‘incompleteness’ of their professional

identities, leading to the productive enrichment of a community of teachers and hence to enhanced possibilities in recognizing and valuing the diverse professional and sociocultural experiences of its members.

Our ecological model of producing professional space is based then on the recognition of both differences and similarities in the construction of new professional identity. ‘Openness to unassimilated otherness’ (Harvey, 1993) in this model presupposes the construction of a new understanding of universality of teacher identity as the member of community that is based both on the recognition and inclusion of differences within the collective of teachers and on the examination of the similarities as the basis for alliance formation between seemingly different teachers and groups. This model becomes equally important for disrupting the liberal notion of professional communities based on homogenisation and marginalisation and for articulating a new vision of workplaces that empowers the different and the marginal through a critical approach to the spatial-discursive configuration of workplaces which would reflect the fabric of multicultural society such as Australia.

### **Uncommon knowledge: Migrant teachers in Victorian schools**

The cultural politics of education in Australia have produced quite a distinct asymmetry between the multicultural makeup of classrooms and the number of migrant teachers working in the schools. For instance, classrooms in Victorian schools are microcosms of society, reflecting a rich and diverse tapestry of sociocultural diversity. While one in four students comes from a language background other than English, teachers represent predominantly middle-class Anglo-Saxon population and only two percent of teachers are migrants from language backgrounds other than English (Santoro et al, 2001; Inglis & Philips 1995). This is not just to say that the value of overseas born teachers has not been recognised – there have been a numbers of inquiries into the situation in the teacher workforce, leading to the projection of teacher shortages in particular key learning areas and identifying migrant teachers as a possible solution (Peace, 2001). But, what we would like to highlight are the challenges faced by overseas teachers, as they become members of a professional community in new for them cultural circumstances. Because these challenges are deeply rooted in the politics of workplace, we can explicate them through the concept of space as a site for negotiation of professional identity and professionalism in a community of teachers.

In this paper we refer to a small group of overseas born teachers who represent different sociocultural and historical trajectories of migration that might be typical to a larger group of migrant professionals (see table below). Common traits of this group are their overseas born status and language background other than English. Their migrations are set within diverse historic periods and thus can be located in the specific discourses of immigration, education and social politics in Australia. These have to do with how the foreigners have been differentially conceived by immigration laws and hence filtered with regard to their possible contribution or burden to this country. For example, the politics of inclusion in the late 1970s facilitated the intake of refugees from Vietnam who were more likely to have limited English language proficiency than recent arrivals. The trend towards improved professional and English language skills (Ruddock, 2001) has

brought new waves of migrants whose experiences typify a different historic moment in the 1990s. The foreign teachers presented in the paper are migrant professionals who arrived at different points of time, driven by personal, familial and political agendas. Among recent arrivals, many responded to the demand for native speaking teachers in the LOTE area (Multicultural Policy for Victorian Schools, 1997; Peace, 2001). They are empowered to some extent by multicultural policies in language and literacy education to sustain linguistic diversity and position Australia advantageously within the world's multilingual knowledge economy.

	<b>County of origin</b>	<b>Date of arrival</b>	<b>Languages spoken</b>	<b>Overseas teaching experience</b>	<b>Teaching experience in Australia</b>
<b>Priya</b>	India	2001	Marathi, English, Hindi, Telugu, Urdu, Kannada	English in India, Oman: 15 years	Pre-university college: 6 months
<b>Akiko</b>	Japan	2000	Japanese, English	University graduate: no teaching experience	Primary Japanese LOTE: 6 months
<b>Aya</b>	Japan	1998	Japanese, English	University graduate: no teaching experience	LOTE assistant: 2 years Japanese LOTE 1.5 years
<b>Young Mi</b>	Korea	1997	Korean, English	Secondary Science in Korea: 3 years	Secondary LOTE: 1 year Vic School of Languages: 2 years University: 6 months
<b>Sakura</b>	Japan	1995	Japanese, Filipino, English	Japanese in Japan: 3 years	LOTE assistant: 2 years Japanese language centre: 1.5 years
<b>Nina</b>	Armenia	1994	Russian, Armenian, English	Maths: 6 years at university, secondary school in Armenia	TAFE: 4 years Pre-university college Maths: 2 years
<b>Melati</b>	Indonesia	1988	Indonesian, English	University – teacher training	Secondary LOTE (Q) Asst lecturer 1.5 years
<b>Kim</b>	Vietnam	1981	Vietnamese, English, French	3 months (Science)	Teachers' Aide: 2 years TAFE language centre ESL, Maths: 6 years Victorian School of Languages: LOTE ICT trainer: 2 years

However, these teachers soon realise that being a teacher and a native speaker of languages other than English does not guarantee access to the professional community. Because teacher professional community is imagined in a particular ideological way, there have been a number of gate-keeping mechanisms to 'filter' the inclusion of migrant teachers into the professional space. Generally, these teachers are considered ill equipped to teach locally; their linguistic proficiency and professional knowledge are deemed inadequate for classroom practices (Inglis & Philips, 1995). Hence, despite their prior education and teaching experience, most have to complete additional teacher-training courses which very often disqualify their understanding of professionalism. Even though they receive a general idea of professional values, attributes, teaching methodologies and philosophies in the Australian system of education, most courses do not take into account their previous experiences as valuable. Unfortunately, teacher training courses do not equip them with the socio-cultural knowledge they require to negotiate differences and

minimise the stress they encounter (Santoro, 1999). Therefore, migrant teachers find themselves discursively positioned to comply with the mainstream vision of professionalism and to submit to the dominant cultural norms to get into the teaching profession.

*Provisional access to the professional community*

The rich cultural-semiotic flows that comprise multicultural Australia are not necessarily enacted in workplaces. In schools, where migrant teachers must transcend and share professional communal spaces, their diverse histories and experience contradict local practice and are often the cause of tensions. Professional ‘filtering’ processes provide their access to teacher community but, regardless of their prior experience, migrant teachers encounter constant scrutiny to ensure their performance is appropriate to Australian classrooms, staff rooms and other school spaces. Mentoring programmes may help their transitions but these can be also a means of monitoring what and how the teachers perform.

Current day dilemmas of mean and lean workplaces (Gee 1999) cause other problems for the migrant teachers. Trends towards contract employment induce lack of security, especially for women who work in areas of LOTE and ESL specialisation (Dempster et al, 2001). Notwithstanding the forthcoming teacher shortage (Dunn, 2003; Peace, 2001) and the potential for migrant teachers to fill the gap, the social fabric of schooling that seemingly embraces multiculturalism fails to endorse the presence of the migrant teachers or offer support. Therefore, provisional access is akin to the ‘funnelling’ process which requires them to comply with the school’s philosophies and practices.

The reality of communal routines in classrooms, staffrooms, corridors and playgrounds demands the appropriate ‘decoding’ of practices, while access to individual facilities and workspaces requires appropriate navigation techniques. Provisional access is tentative and from their peripheral locations within the community the migrant teachers must make meaning of the daily routines. Their navigation of the new professional space means making huge cultural leaps between work practices in their own cultures and those in Australia. In so doing, they learn how to make sense of the new professional space by connecting ‘here and now’ to their professional spaces ‘there and then’. Ways of being a teacher in their new school environments often oppose the ways they knew. Their habitual teaching practices, relationships within school communities and understandings of teacher professionalism are disqualified. In this regard, Priya talks about the system of education in India where being a teacher is marked by respect:

Teacher is like God.  
There is a saying, mother father and teacher ...  
I was used to that sort reverence (Interview 1).

Akiko talks about the misunderstanding she encountered:

When students in Japan want to speak  
they just call out  
but teachers don’t really care (laugh) ...  
at first I didn’t realise

they are doing something rude  
in Australian standards to me ...  
I thought they were just being friendly (Interview 1)

Young Mi explains that teacher status and relationships with students in Korea and Australia are at odds and affect the teacher's authority. She is proud of her teacher status as a Korean LOTE specialist and conscious she must now use her second language to teach. She is confused by friendliness in a different way to Akiko:

In Australia ... they want friendship  
but in Korea they're hierarchy of teachers and students ...  
[in Australia] I don't know what I have to do (Interview 1).

This shuttling between spaces of past and present resembles a state of being in between, and as Glancy (2000) describes, walking in two worlds yet walking in none. The teachers have departed, but not yet arrived, are physically and emotionally here and no longer there. Their sense of professional identity is riven with uncertainty, and at the same time, they realise that their authority as a teacher is seriously destabilised not just because the practices of schooling are different but because they are conceived as different or the Other, too. They experience simultaneously a double negation of their professional *and* cultural identities.

With regard to professionalism, Akiko struggles as secondary school training does not prepare her to 'deal with Prep'. She laments being a teacher without a classroom and is denied its intimacy (Clandinin and Connelly, 1996). She 'push[es] a trolley to bring [her] stuff to class' thus is open to observation by other teachers. She yearns to teach 'by myself ... on my own', a sentiment shared by Aya who later reflects:

I just couldn't do any enjoyable things ...  
I couldn't get their attention ...  
I felt like there's this glass or wall in front of me  
and I almost cried in the class  
I cried a lot after the class (laugh) ...  
I felt like I was rejected (Interview 1).

Migrant teachers who are LOTE specialists are Othered by their subject status and its curricular space. Young Mi describes attitudes held in her community that Korean LOTE as the 'lowest interesting subject'. In her classes students 'don't listen, [they] play games and throw paper planes', so she finds teaching is 'like facing a wall'. She believes teachers are:

Watching me  
then they assess me  
instead of helping me (Interview 1).

Being culturally Othered is common to the teachers at different points of time. In Priya's case, racial slurs in her workplace community devoid her career of purpose. Obligations to family and commitment to students are ideals that keep her going. Being perceived as

the Other for Akiko means being perpetually foreign in colleagues' eyes. She counteracts her marginalisation and inability to interact by allowing herself to be observed and by getting involved. Gradually her colleagues consider her 'more proper' and eventually recognise some of her potential. Aya, too, is Othered by Anglo-Saxon colleagues who fail to understand the difficulties involved in her struggle for professional and cultural recognition. Similarly, Young Mi experiences patronising attitudes and is 'treated [me] as a child'. Experiences such as these show that peripheral locations in the communities of teachers, which are probably common to all novice teachers, can become permanent subjugated positions for our participants. The 'funnelling' strategies in their teacher communities reinforce the marginalisation and subjugation of the Other. This leaves only two options for the migrant teachers, which are to remain marginalised or to leave.

#### *Assimilation to the professional community*

One of the participants, Nina, appears to have a different kind of experience that can be characterised as nested within a 'linear' model of community maintenance. This has to do with developing strategies to assist other newcomers. She reflects that someone helped her, and in turn, she shows others that it is achievable to learn the language, study and teach. Having experienced the 'linear' model of community maintenance, Nina recognises the significance of adjusting to the practices of the dominant group, so rather than being Othered she aspires to minimise the distance between herself and the local teachers. In contrast, some participants resist this assimilatory tendency. Melati for example upholds her Indonesian ethics of teaching and is proud to be the sole native speaker of Indonesian LOTE. Kim also resists assimilation and keeps relationships professional as a ploy to maintain her unique identity and a space to keep her cultural beliefs. She talks about the black box where she puts things away but not entirely.

I give up some of my strong thinking (laugh) or ideas but (laugh)  
they're still there but they're not as strong as before (laugh)  
they're probably falling off  
falling into a black box (laugh)  
I lock it up there (laugh) (Interview 2).

Hence, instead of assimilation many migrant teachers develop a *dual* discursive competence that allows them to creatively hybridise their professional and cultural identities (Kostogriz, 2004). This is anti-essentialist and interruptive process in which they selectively deny the past and reconfigure the present. Their professional becoming is characterised by the fractured remembering of the past and involves the creation of 'new maps' of professionalism. In this respect, Priya appears to be in a state of professional transformation. According to her tradition, teachers coax and cajole students, but in her current environment she reinterprets her role in the classroom and her teaching approach. Akiko's mentoring experience helps her bridge difference, hence the creative hybridisation of professional identities enables her to establish herself in her school community and have confidence to say 'I am a teacher!' In Aya's case, she upturns her traditional knowledge to become *au fait* with teaching approaches appropriate to multicultural student groups. She is frustrated by colleagues' perceptions that transformation is easy and by their failure to understand the complex struggles involved.

Tensions between the past and the present constantly interact with the migrant teachers' expectation to teach effectively. At the same time, the demands of the task may undermine their temporarily settled beliefs and trigger further uncertainties and struggles. As a result, migrant teachers face the perpetual conflict that occurs at the intersection of 'heterotopic spaces' – the past and present professional spaces that flow through their situated locations within the professional community (Foucault, 1986). Some teachers are more successful in resolving these contradictions as they aspire to succeed in the future. For example, Nina's ongoing trajectory of identity re-construction shows enormous leaps through her effort to learn English and qualify to teach. She maintains momentum to develop professionally and, at the same time, makes adjustments to her new environment. Nina recognises that change is a constant of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, so her understanding of professional is tantamount to continual motion. Underlying this is constant pressure that:

You are winning that respect every time  
in your new workplace  
and your study place or whatever (Focus group)

Kim's trajectory similarly involves enormous leaps to learn the language, attain qualifications and establish herself as a teacher. Reconstruction of self is a conscious act:

I corrected myself  
means I changed my thinking  
and changed my method of teaching (Interview 1).

While Nina and Kim, who are longer serving teachers, develop strategies to cope relatively well in their new teacher workplaces, other teachers less successfully negotiate the asymmetrical relations of power. Relationships in their school communities are fractured, they make few social connections and find it difficult to cope. Young Mi and Sakura remain on the margins; disconnected and generally rejected by teacher and student groups in their secondary schools. In response to constant rejection and marginalisation Young Mi recalls:

Later on I'm getting used to ...  
this kind of attitude (Focus group).

#### *The spatial micro-politics of teacher workplaces*

Spaces within communities where the migrant teachers work may also be sites of oppression, hostility, bullying and racism. This runs counter the liberal ideals of professional community. Construed as the Other, migrant teachers potentially become targets of racial slurs or deviant behaviour from students. Their sense of professional identity transforms into non-identity; they, as it were, become people without a place even though inside the workplace. Akiko laments she is a teacher without a classroom, Young Mi has no place of belonging with younger or older teachers and Priya contests lesser facilities for contract staff. As situationality and power are intertwined (Allen, 2003), Sakura is helpless to dispute her 38-hour workload, in the same way she is helpless to contest or correct her English-speaking LOTE colleague's Japanese language and cultural knowledge. Sakura's knowledge is ignored as well as her positive input to correcting errors in tests or 'amending' her colleagues' cultural knowledge. From the peripheral location in the community, she sees herself as 'just a native national Japanese speaker'.

Similarly, relations between the marginal locations of the migrant teachers and their professional disempowerment are visible in social relationships between LOTE teachers. Tension arises between English-speaking teachers and native-speaking teachers. Young Mi's relationship collapses when visa requirements demand extension of her teaching hours. Similar social tension exacerbates when Aya and Sakura as assistant teachers, take up further study. Their professional development is seen as a threat to these less qualified colleagues. These cases show how denigration is devastating and, as Santoro (1999; 2001) argues, the Asian 'Other' is positioned as passive and powerless in juxtaposition to the dominant group's activeness and power.

'Australian' teachers are a constant threat to Kim. As a newly arrived refugee, with 'no money, no English' becoming a teacher in Australia seems an impossible dream. She works in the factory by day, studies English at night, raises a family and attends university to attain the status of provisional entry. Yet, the shadow of competing with 'Australian' teachers lingers continually. She works doubly hard in short term contracts in the hope of another to follow. Kim plays the spatial game to secure a place on the periphery, which would give her some professional recognition. Current day dilemmas of spatial re-location within the teacher community are interrelated to demarcations between contractual and permanent positions as several teachers learned. In Aya's case, transition from assistant to teacher is awkward. No longer is she responsible for supporting other teachers but now she is personally responsible for students' learning and well being. While Aya is still not fully recognised as a teacher in class, she moves to gain acceptance amongst staff, first watching and smiling and 'just being there'. Young Mi, like Sakura, recalls previous positive teaching experiences when negative vibes from students and staff stir self-doubt. Sakura describes the racial rejection in her multicultural school community some teachers perceive that 'blonde is beautiful, of course white skin's beautiful' (Interview 1).

For migrant teachers different places within the school can be havens or sites of conflict. In the seclusion of her classroom Nina finds comfort but for other teachers classrooms are akin to battlegrounds where students tackle their integrity. White student power manifests control that disempowers ethnically different teachers who 'lose control', lose their second language, their ability to teach and, in turn, professional self-esteem. Similarly, schoolyards can be either hostile places or sites of sanctuary. In schoolyards, Aya and Young Mi feel close to the students who reproach them in class. Young Mi finds distance is minimised and she gains a sense of acceptance. Aya, however, finds schoolyards hostile because for her this is a place where students bully.

Classrooms and staffrooms are places where issues of assimilation to or rejection of mainstream workplace philosophies are an ongoing concern. Migrant teachers pose whether to perform differently or embrace community codes of practice. Degrees of acceptance or rejection by resident members, or those already employed full-time, profoundly impact upon the newcomers' sense of professional self and their teaching performance. Hence, they are caught in a bind of constructing self to others and at the same time are under construction by those they seek to impress (Farrell, 2000; Gee, 1999). Like the nation-state borders that divide, the imagined borders of professional

communities are another site of possible rejection and provisional access for migrant teachers. The perception of Asian teachers as passive, ineffective and weak raises the issues of ethnic essentialism or even workplace racism. Despite the promotion of Asian LOTE programs and directives to employ native speaker teachers, these teachers are often unwelcomed. With confusion between policy and practice, migrant teachers' place is uncertain; their sense of belonging is vulnerable and ability to permeate access is problematic. As we contemplate on these issues, the spatial representation of many teacher workplaces remains bleak – Akiko sits on the margins amongst her colleagues and perceives they are unused to foreign staff as they seldom speak to her; Aya similarly sits quietly, watches, smiles and maintains her peripheral status quo; Sakura refrains from entering the communal space where she is unable to follow conversational flows and her position in the workplace margins is a sign of rejection; she has no place of belonging, like Young Mi, who does not fit with either younger or older teachers who share different sociocultural understanding of being a professional and, hence, *uncommon* to the migrant teachers knowledge.

### **Conclusion**

By drawing on the concept of space, we have problematised the idea of community of teachers. We do not want to say that the word community has lost its meaning. However, we are critical of deploying this word unproblematically, in particular with regard to the understanding of migrant teachers' professional becoming. While teacher communities will remain to larger extent imagined, it is difficult to offer fast and feasible solutions. Yet, we have a utopian vision for such a community which would value diverse experiences of all teachers and see them as the resource rather than the liability. Our imagination of such a community is an ecological co-existence of differences when Akiko, Sakura, Aya, Young Mi and others are not relegated to the margins of workplace but are enabled to navigate and negotiate their workplace spatiality effectively and positively. This appears to be inherent in the process of becoming a teacher in the new cultural-semiotic scape. And it needs a simple recognition: good teacher virtues can only be inspired, they cannot be coerced.

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