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Exploring English Novice Teachers' Identity Transformation Influenced by Community of Practice

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Abstract

Research studies have acknowledged the roles of constructing teachers' identity in early stage for novice teachers. Before entering the real context, novice teachers have formed their professional identity based on their experiences. However, due to the reality shock and different cultural context, transforming into professional identity stage can pose enormous challenge. The challenge has become more serious as the efforts are not supported by sufficient studies and references focusing on the contribution of Community of Practice (CoP) to their identity transformation in Indonesia. Thus, this study aims to explore the English novice teachers' identity transformation and contribution of CoP to their identity transformation. This research employed a qualitative study. Imagined and practiced identity transformation theory and CoP theory were used to gather the data by conducting interview to three English novice teachers having been teaching for less than two years. The researcher employed selective coding in analyzing the data. It was found that the three participants transformed their imagined identity into practiced identity and CoP contributed to their identity transformation. Thus, teacher education program should prepare student teachers by exposing them to the real context. Further, the schools are urged to set regulations and habits to facilitate novice teachers to adapt with the new social context.

Keywords: community of practice, English novice teachers, teachers' identity transformation

Introduction

This study was initiated based on the research interest on teachers' identity which keeps growing. Furthermore, in the last decades, teachers' identity has been recognized to have the essential role in the nature of teaching and learning (Pennington & Richards, 2015). Moreover, many researchers have acknowledged the crucial roles of teachers' identity formation to novice teachers. Many researchers generally agree with the idea that novice teachers often experience reality shock to cope with their role as professionals. As a result, it might influence their identities. This is largely due to the feeling of inadequate preparation for the challenges, uncertain and dynamic nature of authentic educational circumstances

they face in their initial years in the transition from teacher education programs to the initial years of teaching (Caspersen & Raaen, 2014; Senom, Razak Zakaria, & Sharatol Ahmad Shah, 2013; Xu, 2013). According to Farrell (2012), novice teachers may be considered as those who initially enter a new cultural context, in which case, they are also required to transform their identity as real teachers.

Regarding this issue, Castaneda (2011) states that student teachers have already been prepared to meet the pressures of teaching job challenges such as coping with assignments, assessment, or the practicum which may challenge their motivation and the professional expectations. However, the challenge does not stop once they finish their teacher education. The challenges they might encounter in the real workplace are, for example, resolving administrative and pedagogical issues such as routines, class size, job stability, low salaries or the assessment of their professional capabilities. Further, in line with Castaneda (2011), Pillen, Den Brok, and Beijaard (2013) demonstrate that novice teachers bring their own teaching and learning principles on the basis of prior experiences as students, biographies, personal qualities, norms and values when joining the teaching profession. At the same time, they are subject to many demands from students, parents, colleagues, school leaders and the community by the contexts in which they work. Thus, novice teachers have to adjust to the conditions that come with the teaching work.

At teacher education program, novice teachers experienced teaching practicum which allowed them to experience being teachers in a real context. At that moment, they formed the initial imagined identities in the pre-service stage. However, once they enter a real-world teaching context as real teachers, they might transform their imagined identity into practiced identity. It is because practiced identity is an identity which is nurtured and placed into action by the particular composition of the available resources, and expanded or reduced by concrete social process practices. Such concrete teaching practices are virtually unavailable for novice teachers during the pre-service stage (Farrell, 2012).

Xu (2012) conducted a three-year longitudinal case study on the transformation of the professional identities of four English teachers. The study was conducted to investigate how professional identities of these novice teachers transformed the initial imagined identities formed during the pre-service stage into the practiced identities formed during the novice stage. In his study, Xu categorizes identity into imagined identity (language expert, learning facilitator and spiritual guide) and practiced identity (language attrition sufferer, routine performer, and problem analyzer). Moreover, identity transformation factors are categorized into internal factor such as personal and educational experience and external factors such as institutional and social factors.

Some researchers have formulated the factors which might influence teacher identity transformation such as anxiety, tensions, and social contexts. There are a lot of research studies discussing how anxiety and tensions influence teacher identity transformation. However, less has discussed how social contexts can probably influence teacher identity transformation, specifically for novice teachers. In response to this, some researchers suggest that the impact of a school context actually has an effect on the fragile identity of a newly formed teacher (Day, Kington, Stobart, & Sammons, 2006). That is because transitioning from a

university environment as student teachers into a school community causes numerous conflicts as actual new teachers. Thus adaptations and identity adjustments are required.

Responding to the studies concerning identity formed influenced by social context, Kuswandono (2013) in his research concludes two major points to explain how identity is socially constructed. The conclusion responded to De Ruyter and Conroy (2002) stating that identity is to a large extent “socially constructed” (p. 11). Further, Kuswandono (2013) explains that there are at least two relational processes intertwined. They are “(a) self and identity at the individual level, which can be defined as “an organized representation of our theories, attitudes, and beliefs about ourselves” (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004, p. 108); and (b) cultural and professional environment, which is at the institutional and society level (Samuel & Stephens, 2000, p. 61).” The second point suggests that the contexts in which people live are never static. Thus, the identity which people have is invariably multifaceted (Chong & Low, 2009), dynamic and developing (Smit, Fritz, & Mabalane, 2010).

Social contexts have been explained to be an important factor in influencing teacher identity formation. Thus, it is argued that identity should grow as a consequence of becoming members of a group. Wenger (1998) suggests that the relation between identity and practice is very close. He explains that identity is constructed as a lived experience of participation in specific communities of practice through three dimensions which are mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire. Community of practice (CoP) is a group of people who share an interest or passion in what they do and learn how to do it better when they communicate on a regular basis (Wenger, 1998). CoP works because each participant has a unique identity, in which their efforts are important for other participants (mutual involvement). To accomplish a mutual and agreed aim (joint enterprise), participants are promoting the development of collective activity and activity among themselves. Over time, the community develops patterns, acts, or ways of doing things that become a sustainable part of its practice (shared repertoire) (as cited in Goodyear and Casey (2015). Applied to the teaching community, CoP enables us systematically think about how a group of teachers approach a common resource to develop an established understanding of how to teach (Shi & Yang, 2014). In addition, it is also acknowledged that CoP offers situated learning opportunities in school settings where teachers work together to solve authentic issues in the classroom (Trust & Horrocks, 2017).

Wenger (1998) explains that participation in community of practice means collaborative learning in situated interactions and negotiations of meaning-making. He adds that learning is not only about skill but also a process of becoming. Hence, participation in community of practice allows teachers to experience learning as a process of becoming. Novice teachers who participate in the practice community reflect the concept of legitimate peripheral participation proposed by Wenger (1998) which explains how newcomers join, learn from, and contribute over time to an established practice community. The CoP evolves through a range of behaviors according to Wenger (1998). The CoP activities can cover problem solving, requests for information, seeking for experience, reusing assets, coordination and synergy, discussing developments, documentation projects, visits

and mapping knowledge as well as identifying gaps.

Although community of practice enables novice teachers to experience learning, it is not as easy as what it seems. In community of practice, the meaning of negotiation done by the novice teachers with the other novice teachers or the novice teachers with the experienced teachers does not always run smoothly and always results agreement. Domination, seniority, tensions and disagreement are inevitable. Thus, living in community of practice might be a challenging experience for the novice teachers. It might influence their beliefs, efficacy and resilience which might transform their identity. This is supported by the research findings obtained by Lomi and Mbato (2020) stating that the novice teachers experienced cultural shocks related to their workplace reality, the schools culture and the reality which did not suit their expectations. It was found that there were also the external challenges such as the negative relationship with the colleagues and students' behaviors which affected their self-efficacy. Therefore, considering the research background above and the gap of the previous research, this paper attempts to investigate how English novice teachers transform their identity and how Community of Practice contributes to the identity transformation of English novice teachers.

Method

This research employed a qualitative study for it focuses on certain events, which happened, and the researcher tried to explain and understand it using some theories. This qualitative study is a narrative inquiry method focusing on the narratives of experiences described by English novice teachers. It aimed to identify the personal, social and relational conditions of teachers' challenges in school. The first aim of this study is to investigate English novice teachers' identity transformation. Thus, the theories used to discuss this issue is the transformation of imagined identity and practiced identity (Xu, 2012).

The participants of this research were three English novice teachers who have been teaching for 0 – 2 years. The participants were from the same university. Furthermore, two of them were from batch 2014 and another one was from batch 2015. The participants were coded into P1, P2 and P3.

For the data collection, in order to investigate the influence of community practice to novice teachers' identity transformation, the researcher used the theories of community of practice from Wenger (1998). The researcher used interview guidelines, which were adopted from an unpublished undergraduate thesis to study EFL pre-service teachers' identity transformation on the development of their professional identity to investigate the novice teachers' identity transformation (Afreilyanti, 2017) which were generated from theory of Gee (2000), Beijaard, Verloop, and Vermunt (2000), Lerseth (2013) and Xu (2013). The next, in order to figure out the influences of community practice to novice teachers' identity transformation, the semi-structured interview questions conducted were adapted from theory of Wenger (1998).

The semi-structured interview was recorded and the data was proceeded into transcripts. In order to present the data collected from the interview, the researcher used selective coding in order to generate categories or themes for analysis and interpret the data. Selective coding is the process in which all categories are unified around a central core category. The core category is used to

represent the central phenomenon of the study (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The categories or the themes refer to identity transformation from imagined identity to practiced identity. The factors contributing to identity transformation were also coded into internal factors and external factors. Further, in order to figure out the influences of CoP to identity transformation, CoP activities were also coded.

Table 1. Example of Coding

Participants	Imagined Identity	Practiced Identity	Factors of Identity Transformation	CoP Activities
P1	Utterance: I wanted to be a learning partner for my students.	Utterance: I see many things do not work properly and effectively. There should be something should be innovation.	Utterance: External factors such as my relationship with colleagues does influence my perception on how I shape an image of a teacher and what to do.	Utterance: We rarely do coordination meeting. Even so, we still try to discuss what to do to develop the learning experience and share what we have experienced. I also often ask questions for things I do not understand yet. However, mostly my seniors only give me their works and adapt them.
	Learning Facilitator	Problem Analyzer	External Factors	Reusing Assets

Results

In this section, the researcher presents the results of English novice teachers' identity transformation and the influences of CoP to their identity transformation. The results of the data analysis on the first research question present the identity formation in imagined identity which transformed into practiced identity. Further, after presenting English novice teachers' identity transformation, this section displays the influences of CoP to their identity transformation. They are as follows.

English Novice Teachers' Identity Transformation

Imagined Identity

In order to figure out English novice teachers' identity transformation, participants were asked to recall their experience when they did their teaching practicum as pre-service teachers. By reflecting their experience, they could represent their imagined identity in the pre-service stage. During the interview, P1 emphasized the importance of students and teacher's relationship to the effectiveness of learning process.

"When I did my pre-service teaching practicum, I always asked the students to see me as their **learning partner**. It was because I wanted them to **feel comfortable** to learn English with me. By doing so, I believed that the materials would be easily delivered and the students could understand them easier. Besides, our age gap was not that big so I was

more comfortable to be their friends. Moreover, in the school in which I conducted the teaching practicum, the students had good English mastery. So, I did not really struggle to deliver the materials, I only needed to **find engaging activities**.” (P1)

From the excerpt above, it can be seen how P1 saw herself as a teacher. P1 focused on facilitating the students in their learning process. She also showed her thought on how a teacher should do to help students learn. In her imagined identity, she believed that a teacher should create a comfortable learning environment to help the students easily grasp the knowledge. Further, she saw herself not to be the centre of the knowledge because she wanted to be seen as a learning partner. She believed that her students and she can learn from one another. Thus, her task was to create an engaging and meaningful learning experience. However, in other case, P2 had different teaching practicum experience. She made an emphasis on the importance of her role to deliver knowledge to the students.

“Reflecting back to when I was as a pre-service teacher, I remember how struggling it was for me to teach English to the students. It was because I did the teaching practicum in a state school which was considered as a non-favorite school. At that time, the students had low level of English competencies. Therefore, I **focused on how to deliver the materials** as easy as possible. I saw myself that I was very **responsible to give them new knowledge** so that they could develop their English competencies.” (P2)

The experience P2 encountered when she was a pre-service teacher helped her shape an image of who a teacher is and what a teacher should do. Because she thought there is an urgency on developing students' English competencies, she focused on content knowledge and pedagogy. Her identity as a language expert urged her to find the best ways to deliver the knowledge to the students. On the other hand, P3 did not really experience the struggle encountered by P1 and P2 when they were in teaching practicum. It was because for some reasons, she only got little chance to do the teaching practicum. However, during that limited time, she could form an identity of a teacher.

“Sadly, when I did my teaching practicum, I did not really get the big chance to do teaching performance. I only taught twice. Thus, I did not really get the sense of being a teacher. However, I was asked to assist the teachers during their teaching activities and did some administrative works. At that time, many students came to me to ask for the materials they did not understand. I guessed it was because they were more comfortable with me since the gap age was not too far. I felt happy that they were comfortable to ask me and learn with me. I think it's important to **build good relationship with the students** so that they are open and willing to learn with us.” (P3)

Her experience on limited exposure to teaching experience did not diminish the image of a teacher she formed when she was a pre-service teacher. She experienced building good relationship with the students until the students got comfortable with her and were brave to ask her several things. She wanted to facilitate her students in their learning process. She also realized the importance of building good relationship between students and teacher to create effective and meaningful learning environment.

Identity Transformation

Based on the results of the interview which have been conducted related to their experience as English novice teachers. P1, P2 and P3 showed how they have transformed their identity in their initial years of teaching. P1 even explained a shocking moment when she started to work at the beginning.

"I am so thankful for who I am now and how I have survived. Besides **experiencing culture shock** because of moving from Yogyakarta to Jakarta, the **school culture** in which I work is also different with the school in which I did the teaching practicum. Although I was given a chance to do **observation**, the adaptation in the first months was so hard. It is because it was so different with my expectation. My teaching partners and I have **big gap age**. I often have different ideas with her. Usually, it is related with innovation in teaching. I try to be creative and implement what I have learned when I was in undergraduate but they often reject my ideas. I often **feel uncomfortable** for I think there should be change to make the teaching and learning activities become more effective." (P1)

P1 explained how shocked she was when she experienced displacement from being a pre-service teacher to be a novice teacher. When she was in pre-service stage, she saw herself to be a learning facilitator for the students. However, based on the excerpt above, she emphasized on how she saw problems needed to be resolved regarding innovation of learning and teaching process. This was confirmed by her when she explained how she is seeing herself as a teacher right now.

"Actually, I often feel tired seeing how things do not work as what I expected. I think **many things go wrong** but I am only a new teacher and I have no power. Even so, I do not give up because I feel that it is morally wrong if I give up and keep silent when I see something goes wrong. Moreover, it deals with students' learning process. Therefore, as a teacher, I **want to learn more and provide the best** learning experiences for the students." (P1)

Having a similar shocking moment, P2 also explained how she struggled to adapt with the new environment and how she is seeing herself right now.

"Now, I am teaching in a good school where the students have good English competencies. I even have students who have better English than mine. Sometimes, I **feel unconfident**. Thus, I really need to **learn more and upgrade** myself." (P2)

From the excerpt above, it can be seen that P2 sees herself in completely different way as when she was in pre-service stage. She explained how she felt unconfident towards her linguistic skill. P3 also experienced shocking moment and identity transformation during her initial years of teaching.

"Actually, when I was a pre-service teacher, I had experience with administrative works. However, the school I am working requires the teachers to **have more administrative works** to do. Moreover, I handle many classes so it increases my works. Thus, I often **spend so much time working on it** instead of thinking about innovation I should do. Besides, my colleagues also do it the same. They tend to do things minimally." (P3)

P3 explained how teachers' administrative works, besides teaching itself, influence how she acts and sees herself as a teacher. She also explained that she often spends her time focusing on those administrative works because they are so overwhelming. Related to their identity recognition when they are as novice teachers, P1, P2 and P3 were asked further about the most influential factors which contribute to their identity transformation.

P1: "I think the most influential factor which contributes to my transformation is **external factor**, specifically, my colleagues. **How I see who a teacher is and what a teacher should do is influenced by them**. It is not that they are completely bad or good. However, I learn to take the positive sides and avoid the negative sides of them to better myself as a teacher."

P2: "I think **internal factor** is the most influential factor which contributes to my transformation. Although, my **colleagues also play big roles** in the change in me, I realized that I need to learn more to be at least a good learning partner for my students who is able to provide meaningful learning experience."

P3: "The most influential factor which contributes to my transformation is **my students and my colleagues**. My students help me to figure out what I should do as teachers and my colleagues help me see who a teacher is."

The statements from P1, P2 and P3 showed that they realized that mostly external factors are the one contributing to their teacher identity transformation. Although P2 stated that her internal factor and how she deals with her reflection is the most influential one, she also acknowledged that her colleagues also have given crucial roles to her transformation.

The Influences of Community of Practice to Identity Transformation

Responding to P1, P2 and P3's claims on the influential roles of external factors to their identity development, further questions were directed to them to see how community of practice contributes to identity transformation.

P1: "Actually, there is a regular schedule for the subject meeting where we can discuss the curriculum, materials, learning activities and the problems we encounter. However, it is not done regularly and we **rarely have discussion**. I have ever asked my colleague regarding administrative works, instead of explaining, she **gave me her works and asked me to adapt it**."

P2: "My colleagues and I **often conduct a subject meeting**. It is to have the coordination and set the vision and mission of English teaching. They also **help me** whenever I find difficulties and check whether things go well. However, sometimes, **they also can make me down**. I ever made mistakes and one of my colleagues critiqued me when there were students looking at me. I felt so down."

P3: "My colleagues and I **rarely do the coordination**. We do the discussion only when I **come to them and ask them**. However, when I need them they are **willing to help**."

From P1, P2 and P3's statement above, it can be seen how mostly the activities were done in their community. P1 & P3 had similar condition which urges them to adapt with the environment themselves since coordination is rarely conducted. However, for P3, assistance will be given once they are asked to help. On the other hand, P2 had a community allowing P2 to understand better the environment. Even so, it was still claimed that discouragement from colleagues were inevitable. Further, P1, P2 and P3 were asked how impactful it is colleagues to their performance and identity transformation.

P1: "**My colleagues have big roles** in my adaptation period. Because they are the ones to whom I can ask. Specifically, I think it is important to have the same vision and mission to perform English teaching well. Due to the **gap age**, we often have different ideas. Because of that, we should have open mindedness and coordination. It is because I feel so lost and little when I **was not given chance to express myself**. Even though, they sometimes are strict to me, I also learn some things from them. I also learn how I have to deal with the students. Thus, **their roles are very important**."

P2: "**My colleagues are very helpful** during my adaptation period. They help me a lot although at some moments they also can be the ones who make me down. They are **very influential** in shaping me to be the teacher. Moreover, each of them has different characteristics. Thus, I try to take the goodness and avoid the bad things from each of them."

P3: "Although we rarely discuss, **their ways of thinking contribute to the formation of a teacher's image**. When I was as a pre-service teacher, I do not know much about the challenges and how to deal with them. However, when looking at them and when I am assigned to take part in the team, **I learn a lot and get the sense** of being a teacher."

From the excerpts above, it can be seen how P1, P2 and P3 saw their colleagues as important figures having crucial roles in shaping themselves and forming their identity as teachers. They realized that despite the bad experience they had with the colleagues, they did agree that they have learned a lot from their colleagues.

Discussion

The results of the data analysis showed that the three English novice teachers transformed their identity from imagined to practiced identity. P1 is categorized to have learning facilitator identity, P2 is categorized to have a language expert identity while P3 formed a language facilitator identity in their imagined identity (Xu, 2013). Pillen et al. (2013) explain that when entering the teaching profession, novice teachers carry their own principles of teaching and learning based on their past experiences. This is in line with the results of the interview in which the participants explained their beliefs and principles of who a teacher is and what a teacher should do. However, although identity is something personal, it cannot be neglected that identity can also be a response towards external inquiry from other individuals or a group. Hence, it is suggested that identity develops as individuals take part in social life, or as members of a group (Castaneda, 2011). Thus, once the pre-service teachers become novice teachers, they belong to a part of community. It is also inevitable that the new social context can influence them to transform their identity.

Entering new social context urges P1, P2, P3 to adapt with the environment. As a result they transformed their imagined identity into practiced identity. P1 was indicated that she transformed herself from imagined identity to practiced identity to be a problem analyzer. In line with Pillen et al. (2013), she has brought principles she has formed based on her experiences. Therefore, when she encountered unsuitable environment, she analyzed problems. Meanwhile, P2 transformed herself into a language attrition sufferer as she explained how she struggled on delivering English materials. P3 was also found to transform her identity to be routine performer as she explained the administrative loads hinder her to be more innovative in teaching.

Regarding the identity transformation, the three English novice teachers explained how external and internal factors are very influential. P1 & P3 agreed that external factor such as colleagues play crucial roles in their identity transformation. Although P2 stated that internal factor is the most influential one, she did not deny the fact that colleagues did have crucial roles in her identity transformation. Thus, from this result, it can be seen that it is in line with De Ruyter and Conroy (2002) who state that identity is socially constructed. Identity is not lived and identified in isolation. However, it is actually a relational, on-going, and negotiated process of understanding oneself as a person and being acknowledged person in a given context.

Concerning on the significance of external factor in the three English novice teachers, it is questionable how they and their colleagues collaborate within the Community of Practice. Referring to the category belonging to Wenger (1998) on activities of CoP, it showed that P1's CoP do reusing assets, P2's CoP do problem solving, coordination and synergy and discussing developments, and P3's CoP do requests for information and seeking experience. Unfortunately, based on the categories, the CoP's activities of the participants have not been done maximally. The minimum effort of community in helping the novice teachers to participate in the CoP will not result better performance. Further, as what have been explained in Trust and Horrocks (2017), CoP should provide situated learning experiences where teachers work together to tackle authentic challenges in the classroom. If

good communication is not well built, the community will not function well.

P1's statement explained the importance of collaborative learning in situated interactions and negotiations of meaning-making within CoP (Wenger, 1998). Further, P3 is in line with Wenger (1998) who also explains that participation in community of practice allows teachers to experience learning as a process of becoming. This process of becoming is very important for novice teachers to really understand themselves as teachers. Moreover, P2 showed that the idea that CoP works because each participant has a unique identity, where their contributions are essential to other participants (mutual involvement), meaning all of members of the community have essential roles to one another (Wenger, 1998).

The CoP experiences from the English novice teachers above have demonstrated the high significance of social aspect in teacher identity transformation. As Day and Gu (2007) have shown, teacher identity develops over time and is influenced by external factors, mainly the school context in which they work. In the same vein, Mockler (2011) corroborates that teacher identity is located at the intersection of three domains: personal experience, professional context, and the external political environment.

The identity construction, as experienced by the English novice teachers above, encompasses the process of meaning-making that surrounds the people and their experience as a member of a social group. The English novice teachers above (P1, P2, P3) have shown that identity is not only something personal reflected in a reflective question "who am I?", but is also a response towards external inquiry from other individuals or a group asking "who are we?" Having these CoP experiences, those English novice teachers indicated that identity develops as individuals take part in social life, or as members of a group (Castaneda, 2011). Thus, as Obenchain, Balkute, Vaughn, and White (2016) have argued, teacher professional identity is always contextualized, constructed, ever-evolving, and transformed through social interactions. To sum up, teacher identity formation requires not only personal aspect but also social aspect; it is on-going and ever-evolving which allow teachers to keep transforming their identity, as the novice teachers have authentically demonstrated.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, they suggested that English novice teachers have formed and carried identity they made when they experienced teaching practicum in pre-service stage. They have formed imagined identity in which they were exposed to limited experience of becoming teachers. P1 was found to have learning facilitator identity, P2 was learning expert and P3 was also learning facilitator. When they entered a new social context as English novice teachers and become the parts of a community, they started encountering culture shock and challenges. Thus, they started transforming their imagined identity to practiced identity. P1 became problems analyzer. P2 was language attrition sufferer. Meanwhile, P3 was a routine performer. This identity transformation was said to be mostly influenced by external factors such as students and colleagues. Then, it was further investigated to find the contribution of CoP to identity transformation. It was found that the CoP in which they are in do little effort to conduct CoP activities. Even so, the participants claim that colleagues and the activities done in CoP are very

impactful for them in their initial years.

From the findings and discussions above, it can be seen how challenging it is for novice teachers to be in their initial years of teaching. Thus, future research direction can focus on how teacher education program can expose student teachers to the real context of CoP so that they can be more familiar to its practices. Further, for the school, it is critical to assist novice teachers to understand the school culture in order to help them to enter and appropriately adapt themselves with the new social context.

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