

Fostering Foreign Language Teacher Identity Development

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Presentation Outline

- Introduction of Researcher / Presenter
- Background & Context
- The Study
 - Research questions
 - Participant(s)
 - Instrument(s)
 - Data Collection
 - Data & Analysis & Results
 - Findings & Interpretation
- Next Steps & Implications

Background

Prior research explored how FL teacher candidates addressed culture in their lesson plan assignments – with dismal findings.

- A lack of perspective-taking
- Glossing over the complexity of culture, leaving pre-service teachers and their (future) students with a superficial and artificial representation of culture

Implications suggested changes in methods courses to incorporate new assignments, designed to:

1. Foster Self-reflection & De-centering *
2. Advance Effective Teaching of Culture

This study reports preliminary findings related to candidate narrative writing assignments targeted at Implication #1. *

- how they foster self-reflection / de-centering
- how they may shed light on teacher identity development

Context

The MAT in FL education, a cohort-model program, includes a three-semester sequence of methods courses

- An optimal context to explore teacher identity development.

Seven MAT students in the cohort include:

- Early-career in-service teachers (non-certified) & pre-service teachers
- They are alike in their pursuit of state teacher certification in P-12 foreign language
 - Five in Spanish education
 - Two in Chinese education
- They are diverse in age, race, and ethno-cultural backgrounds.

The Study: Research Questions

- What do **social and emotional elements of teacher identity** look like in narrative journal writing?
- How does narrative writing evoke candidate awareness of and exploration into their own **cultural identities and assumptions** related to their beliefs about the teaching of foreign languages?
- What do candidates write related to their experiences as a cohort? And what does their writing say about the **dynamic of community** and cohesion?

The Study: Participant

- Although I may later examine the writing of all seven candidates and explore outcomes* of narrative writing beyond identity, the **focus of this study is on teacher identity and highlights a single participant.**
 - Mid forties female, career (context) changer, transitioning from undergraduate adjunct teaching to pursue state teacher certification in P-12 Spanish

* how recursive, instructor-mediated narrative writing stimulates the cognitive processes that are key to advancing pedagogical content knowledge

The Study: Instrument

Teacher Identity Journal

- Narrative writing assignments are designed to prompt teacher candidates to:
 - think through topics or issues
 - make connections to their current / future teaching practices
 - evoke experiences and beliefs in decision-making and puzzling through problems
 - make use of personal stories as a way of knowing and growing

The Study: Data Collected

- Teacher Identity Journal
 - Six entries in fall 2014
 - Seven entries in spring 2015

The Study: Data Collected (fall14)

➤ Teacher Identity Journal

#1: Response to in-class Mandala activity

#2: Response to a selected ACTFL Position Statements

#3: Self-exploration of ethno-cultural heritage

#4: Reaction to ethno-cultural interview of “other”

#5: Response to Ethno-Cultural Interview project

#6: Reaction to results of “Intercultural Competence” self-assessment

The Study: Data Collected (spring15)

➤ **Teacher Identity Journal**

#1: Pulse-taking at outset of 2nd semester of MAT / documentation of teacher journey at this point in time

#2: Personal experience as member of MAT “community of learners”

#3: Reflection on / personalization of characteristics of effective teachers

#4: Response to troubling experience with EDUC xxxx field experiences

#5: Reflection on a personal story and its influence on you as a teacher

#6: Response to “teacher-student recursive written interaction” on assignments

#7: Extended (with prompts) on help or hindrance of “teacher-student recursive written interaction”

The Study: Data Analysis

- Theme analysis related to three RQs:
 - Social & emotional elements of teacher identity
 - Exploration of cultural identities / assumptions
 - Impact on beliefs about (FL) teaching
 - Dynamic of community (MAT cohort)
 - Beliefs about (FL) Teaching
- Notation of personal stories shared

The Study: Data Results

	Fall #1	Fall #2	Fall #3	Fall #4	Fall #5	Fall #6	Spr #1	Spr #2	Spr #3	Spr #4	Spr #5	Spr #6	Spr #7
Social & emotional elements	1					1	2	2	1	2	3	1	
Cultural identities / assumptions			4	1		3							1
Impact on beliefs about (FL) teaching	1			1		1							
Dynamic of community					2		1	2				3	1
Personal stories		1	3		other's story	2		1	1	1	3		
Beliefs about (FL) teaching		3	1	5	1	1		2	2	2	5		

The Study: Data Results

- Theme analysis related to three RQs:
 - Social & emotional elements of teacher identity = 13
 - Exploration of cultural identities / assumptions = 10
 - Impact on beliefs about (FL) teaching = 3
 - Dynamic of community (MAT cohort) = 9
 - Beliefs about (FL) teaching = 22
- Notation of personal stories shared = 12

The Study: Findings

- Topics (prompts) of journal assignments largely determined the content of written entries, and thus the identified themes.
- Greatest frequency of references to *beliefs about teaching* (across all entries and in numbers of mentions).
- Second greatest frequency (across all entries and in numbers of mentions) points to use of *personal stories*.
- Near equal frequency (numbers of mentions) in *social and emotional* references.
- Explicit references to cultural identity / assumptions primarily linked to prompt on that topic.

Themes: Social & Emotional Elements

“So, in an instant, without much prior thought, but with much purpose, I created my mandalas. I did three of them, and I used three colors, red, blue, and yellow. I used these colors because, to me, red represented my past as an educator that had come to a halt. I don’t really miss my career as a college instructor, but I do miss teaching. I want to be clear. I don’t miss being a teacher in the field I was in. I miss TEACHING. So, blue represented tranquility and peace for me. What I’m doing has brought me some degree of control and definitely peace, for many different reasons. The bright, neon yellow, represents happiness, hope, and how I see my future as an educator. I get to do what very few people do. I get to, with much sacrifice, I must admit, kind of start over, and create my own path, purposefully and deliberately. Understanding how my language learning has affected my language teaching, in both positive and negative ways, was really a helpful project that added more perspective to my teaching methodology.”

Themes: Cultural Identity & Impact on Beliefs about Teaching (Personal Story)

“I remember that the diversity of the school where my children attended was a big factor in our decision to move into a certain school zone. I want them to see people that look like them and to see people who don't look like them. It doesn't matter to me, I remember telling my mother and my husband, if they are the minority or the majority or right in the middle, but the school is the second center of ethno-cultural learning (after the home) and interaction, and I want my children, in their own black, brown and ivory colored skin (my kids are all different shades!), to know how to enjoy and interact with people of all races and ages and socio-cultural backgrounds. That makes the school one of the most important, if not THE most important, “space” in their young lives.”

Themes: Cultural Identity & Impact on Beliefs about Teaching

“Who am I, as a teacher, to judge the strangeness of a family unit, to decide who gets to be called a family and who doesn’t? Who am I to generalize or stereotype regarding the academic potential of a student based on their hard knocks background, incarcerated parents, how they are dressed when they sit in my classroom? Who am I? I am them. We are all the same value, in different outward packages. My education and opportunity does not make me better than my students. It makes me work harder as a teacher. And while I am not responsible for their learning or all the variables that can affect their academic success in my class or other classes, their experiences inside my classroom might, just maybe, become part of the education process for them that propels them into a series of learning and positive life successes. I want to be that teacher. I want to be the teacher whose classroom is full of life and learning and individual successes for a student, regardless of their race, religion, background.”

Themes: Cultural Identity & Impact on Beliefs about Teaching (Personal Story)

“Interesting that you can see someone weekly, have wonderful conversation and meals with them and never know that they were disabled or injured in such a horrific way. Funny how you think you know someone only to find out that you know nothing important about them. My students in my classes have experienced many horrors, and I probably only know about 10% of what they have gone through. My students in P-12 will come from a variety of backgrounds with a variety of parental experiences and life experiences. I can only begin to understand their world stances in a temporary academic setting. I cannot presume to know much about anything except, perhaps, the very content that I teach. I cannot treat them all the same. They are not. I should treat them all fairly, but I cannot treat them all the same with such varied experiences and learning styles.”

Themes: Cultural Identity & Impact on Beliefs about Teaching (Personal Story)

“...but as a teacher, these are the issues and topics that my children/students will be discussing. I wonder how I could incorporate a little bit of current events topics into my Spanish II class. I am wondering if my assignment will be different depending on where I teach. What if I am at a majority Hispanic or Black student population school? What if I am teaching in a school with all or mostly Whites? What will parents say if I have students write a description, physical, of Michael Brown and the officer who killed him, I believe Darren Wilson, using the descriptive adjectives introduced in, say, chapter 3? Will that work? If my children are talking about certain things, war, shootings, new laws, immigration, am I destined to ignore these items and stick to the business of Spanish language and grammar lessons from the text or is it my duty, my right, my obligation as a teacher to incorporate SOME, not all of these things that are on the minds of students, into my lessons. I know this depends on age and grade level, but what is my role as a teacher of children in this society in which we live and the school in which I teach?”

Theme: Dynamic of Community

“I think that our smaller community of learners has made it possible for us to be in the same canoe together, and in order to keep it moving, and keep it from flipping over, we’ve all had to paddle together. I notice that when one or two are weak or frustrated, the others are the encouragers. When somebody is upset, there is always someone else to assuage the mood. If someone is struggling with the academics, somebody always is ready and available at that moment to help out. We have faxed, texted, taken pictures, mailed and wired information, offered to pay for books, loaned money, etc. If that’s not a family of good friends in a community, I don’t know what is!”

Theme: Beliefs about Teaching

“Having already gone through years of teaching in one environment, I am *developing* as the **emergent** teacher that I have always strived to be. As an emergent teacher, I want to, more often than not, to be that instructor who plans her curriculum with her students in mind. I want to be mindful of my students backgrounds, experiences and interests, be flexible enough that I write or adopt a curriculum that lends itself to changes and revisions based on unforeseen student interests and curiosity. I want to plan lessons that I am interested in and that my students are also interested in enough to be engaged throughout most or all of the lesson. [...] The difference between now and my past teaching practices is that I am currently in the process of obtaining the tools I need in order to be an informed language instructor who creates and instructs, facilitates and imparts based on the best interests of the learner, not just the integrity and impartation of the TL.”

Themes: Personal Stories & Impact on Beliefs about Teaching

“As an evolving educator, this incident taught me never to yell at or accuse a child of anything by calling them a name. As an evolving educator, I learned from this experience that students/learners sometimes engage in actions that not even they can explain. Sometimes teachers need to exercise patience or withhold judgment on the actions of a student. I wonder what I would have done if my students were younger and this incident had occurred in *my* classroom. [...] As a teacher, I want parents to know that I am in their corner. I am not out to get their kids. I don't care if the learner is black or white or gay or straight or Muslim or Christian or Buddhist or whatever. I don't want students to think that I'm out to get them.”

Themes: Personal Stories & Impact on Beliefs about Teaching

“What a small, small world we live in. I almost fell over. [...] As an educator who continues to evolve, this incident confirmed to me how exposed I am as a service professional working with thousands of students over the years and their parents. It is so important for us to be people of integrity, trustworthy, and respectful to our students. This does not mean that there will be no conflict. This does not mean that we will like all students or even get along with them, but I am so committed to maintaining healthy borders and limits with my students while at the same time ensuring that I am approachable and fair with them. It is my role to facilitate learning and to create an environment that is conducive to doing so. I am a conduit of cultural exploration and I believe that it is through this exposure to culture and differences among people that I can help my own young learners to not become some of the people that Ronny has encountered over the years. People that have affected his life negatively ...”

The Study: Findings (digging deeper)

The frequency in use of *personal stories* across all entries is notable. Only one journal assignment specifically prompted “Think about a personal story...”

Simon Borg (2009) reminds us that “It is important [...] to acknowledge that **teaching has a powerful affective dimension** and that this plays a part in shaping what teachers think, believe, know, and do. The relationship between affect and cognition in becoming, being, and continuing to grow as a language teacher deserves greater attention” (p. 169).

The Study: Data Interpretation

Characterized by Limitations:

- A case study of one
 - A ‘show-off’ preliminary case study for the topic of this inquiry
 - Her approach to narrative resonates with my own style
 - The narrative writing was filled with the sought-after content
 - Potential in examining data of other cohort members to suggest more robust findings / consider meaningful comparisons
- “On-topic” writing performance when journal entries are class assignments.

The Study: Data Interpretation

Limitations viewed from another perspective point to evidence of teacher learning.

- A case study of one

- A spectrum of journal entries indicate a kind of evidence. “Evidence that this teacher can articulate the layering of issues. Evidence of her knowingness. Evidence indicates that this teacher is reflective and reflexive.” (A. Scarino, yesterday in PM workshop)
- “The storying and restorying of knowledge through reflection and writing ...” (Johnson & Golombek, 2002; Golombek & Johnson, 2004)

The Study: Data Interpretation

- Fostering FL teacher identity is presumptuous, or ambitious at best.
 - It is within the domain of the teacher to quantify or qualify her/his identity development.
 - Self-critical inquiry (Stenhouse, 1981)
 - Process of meaning-making is key to human learning (Halliday, 1993)
 - It is the responsibility of the teacher educator to be mindful of the “various ways in which [s/he] can intervene in, support, and enhance” teacher candidates’ cognitive growth and identity development (Johnson & Golombek, 2011, p. 11-12)

The Study: Data Interpretation

Puzzling questions remain:

- Does narrative writing evoke consciousness-raising?
 - “...narrative accounts of experience connect phenomena and infuse them with interpretation and thus invoke our interpretations of the activities we engage in” (Johnson, 2009, p. 96).
 - Johnson and Golombek’s 2011 volume, *Research on second language teacher education: A sociocultural perspective on professional development*, highlights multiple ways that discursive practices shape teachers’ knowing, thinking, and doing.

The Study: Data Interpretation

Puzzling questions remain:

- Does heightened consciousness beget identity development?
 - “...encouraging teachers to verbalize their current understandings of whatever concept, skill, or disposition is the focus of study. [...] what Vygotsky (1987) called imitation, exemplify how **teachers’ verbalizations can help to push the boundaries of their current state of cognitive development.** Once teachers’ current state of cognitive development becomes explicit, it becomes open to dialogic mediation that can promote reorganization, refinement, and reconceptualization (Johnson & Golombek, 2011, p. 8).

The Study: Next Steps

- Expand the data analysis to include other candidates' writing
- Determine other reflective assignments for fall 2015 methods course with this cohort that may elucidate findings
 - Differentiate journal-writing assignments according to L1 of teacher candidates
- Design further data collection that extends into candidates' internship experiences

The Study: Implications

My own evolving teacher identity:

I call upon the teacher candidates in my methods courses to consider their students' unique identities, to understand and account for the funds of knowledge that the learners bring to the P-12 classroom.

As I challenge them to begin with this concept in lesson planning and instructional delivery, I am struck by the degree to which I am similarly programmed.

I am compelled to consider their identities, to understand and account for the funds of knowledge that they bring to the MAT methods courses. No doubt, I am significantly influenced by them, these MAT teacher candidates. I cannot ignore who they are and what they bring to the courses I teach.

My Teacher Identity Journal

Prompts for my narrative journaling:

- What characterizes the ways in which I have been responsively revising my course curricula, altering my instructional delivery, and expanding my repertoire of feedback practices – as a rejoinder to my students?
- How do I describe the tension I've experienced as I struggle to curb my emotional reactions and moral responses to my students' challenges?
- And beyond outward response and practice, how has my identity as a teacher educator been impacted by by students, by who they are, by their situatedness?

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