


Teacher Identity in Language Teaching: Integrating Personal, Contextual, and Professional Factors

RELC Journal
2016, Vol. 47(1) 5–23
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sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav
DOI: 10.1177/0033688216631219
rel.sagepub.com


Martha C. Pennington

University of London, UK

Jack C. Richards

SEAMEO RELC, Singapore

Abstract

This article reviews notions of identity and teacher identity, how these relate to the specific characteristics of language teaching, and how teacher identity can evolve or be developed through experience and teacher education. The notion of teacher identity highlights the individual characteristics of the teacher and how these are integrated with the possibilities and potentials provided in the institutional identity of *teacher* and the content and methods of a specific field, as these are realized in specific contexts of teaching. The elements of a teacher identity in language teaching are derived from a review of literature on identity and described in terms of the foundational and advanced competences required for language teaching, as illustrated by excerpts from teacher narratives. The discussion concludes with recommendations for teacher education and professional development with a focus on identity.

Keywords

Language teaching, teacher identity, teacher learning, teacher education, language learning, second language

Introduction

While teacher cognition has been a central theme in discussions of teacher learning and in approaches to second-language teacher development, the last two decades have seen a

Corresponding author:

Martha C. Pennington, School for Oriental and African Studies and Birkbeck College, University of London, UK.
Email: mp64@soas.ac.uk

shift of focus in learning theory from cognitive to social perspectives that has highlighted the role of identity in our understanding of the nature of teaching and teacher learning. Concurrent with this shift of emphasis, ‘over the past 15 years, there has been an explosion of interest in identity and language learning, and “identity” now features in most encyclopedias and handbooks of language learning and teaching’ (Norton and Toohey, 2011: 413). This discussion has been aligned with orientations to social constructionism (see Berger and Luckmann, 1991; Burr, 1995/2003) and human agency in considering the creation of one’s identity from the identity facets or positions available within different cultures, social groups, and contexts for the use of language. In teaching, identity emerges as a dynamic construct that is shaped by the context in which the teacher works (e.g. a teacher of young learners or a teacher of adults) and that may have different features at different times.

When novices enter the field of language teaching they become engaged in many different dimensions of learning, from those related to mastery of the subject matter of language teaching to those involved in managing learning in the classroom, as well as issues involved in developing an understanding of themselves as teachers. In this process, identity represents a core component of teacher learning:

Teacher-learning involves not only discovering more about the skills and knowledge of language teaching but also *what it means* to be a language teacher. Identity seems to play a special role in teaching, as compared with other professions (Singh and Richards, 2006: 155).

In this article, the notion of teacher identity is explored, focusing on the competences required for language teaching and how language teachers integrate their own characteristics and experience into their developing professional knowledge and identity. We begin by reviewing concepts of identity and then turn to notions of teacher identity as a basis for considering teacher identity in language teaching, drawing from our own work in the field and reconsidering this prior work through the lens of teacher identity.

The Nature of Identity

As a starting point for our discussion, *identity* can be viewed first in terms of the unique set of characteristics associated with a particular individual relative to the perceptions and characteristics of others (Pennington, 2015: 16). Dimensions of identity on which these perceptions are based derive from differences among humans which have social value and meaning within human culture, including physical characteristics, abilities, and skills (e.g. personality characteristics, special abilities or talents); societal position (e.g. profession, socio-economic status); and what Gee (2001) has called ‘affinities’, that is, connections or affiliations with different groups (e.g. certain peer groups or communities of practice). Identity is however more than what can be described by a simple listing of specific physical and social characteristics and group classifications. It is also a reflection of the context or activity in which the individual is situated. For example, a person assumes the identity of a teacher on entering the classroom, adopts the identity of a colleague in the teacher’s common room, and perhaps takes on the identity of a parent or partner on returning home.

Identity is moreover the sense which a person has of the self as an individual, including the person's self-image and self-awareness as may be captured in the stories which the person tells about her/himself and also as this is projected to and understood by others (Richards, 2015b: 117–19). A person's self-image and sense of identity is based on values and beliefs about how people should conduct their lives and behave in front of others. This means that one's identity is set according to a concept of 'good' and 'proper' or 'appropriate' behaviour guiding actions. This value-construct then provides mental images for monitoring and assessing one's own performance.

The formation of identity is a major aspect of growing and maturing as a human being and of defining one's place in society. Negotiating one's position and identity in different contexts is an ongoing process which involves interaction and sometimes struggle in relation to the roles and positioning of others (Norton, 1997; Varghese et al., 2005), as people accept, reinforce, downplay, or challenge the classifications and categories that are available or ascribed to them. Identity, while reflecting individual characteristics, is not predetermined but is relative to social context. It incorporates personal values as well as contextual requirements that constrain certain types of behaviour while allowing others and so habituate those forms of behaviour which are allowed or possible. Recurrent types of interactions and those which reinforce existing patterns of thinking and behaving will create relatively stable features of identity, even as some aspects of a person's identity are open to change through new experiences and new interpretations of experience.

As people widen their social networks and the contexts in which they live and work, they continue to construct and to modify their identities over time in relation to the new individuals and groups with whom they interact and in relation to the new roles they take on in new contexts of action or communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Sometimes, contacts with new people and experiences may create what could be called 'identity stress' or even an 'identity crisis', in which a person feels unsure about her/his identity and questions who she/he is. Such identity stress or crisis can be precipitated by feedback from others who question or deny a person's own sense of identity or by extreme changes in context or constraints which require rethinking values and changing behaviours. Such times of identity stress or crisis are times when identity is open to change through self-reflection and examination.

The Construction of Identity in Teaching

Integrating Institutional and Individual Identity

The identity which a teacher projects in a classroom at a given moment or over time will be in part a projection of the teacher's view of the institutional role of *teacher* and in part a projection of a unique individual identity based on the teacher's autobiography. It will also be a reflection of the characteristics of the learners and the context of instruction at the level of the classroom, the school, the district, and higher levels of context as these impact on the teacher's aspirations and daily practice.

New teachers typically take on a 'situated identity' (Zimmerman, 1998: 90) in a traditional or formal pedagogical role as their classroom 'default identity' (K. Richards, 2006:

60), emphasizing an institutionally sanctioned and constructed identity of teacher as purveyor of lessons and leader of the class, with the learners in the default role of students. This sort of teacher identity typically reflects their apprenticeship of observation and participation when they were students. Such an institutionally defined and supported default teacher identity is natural for inexperienced teachers to assume, since it provides a degree of structure and hierarchy for making a class run well, such as by assuming front-of-class position, leading most interaction, and requiring students to be called on and/or to raise their hands to be recognized by the teacher before speaking.

A minority of new teachers do not begin from such a traditional teacher role as their default 'new teacher identity' but rather emphasize a more informal, personal, and authentic identity – one which K. Richards (2006: 60), following Zimmerman (1998: 91), refers to as 'transposable identity' – with their students. This sort of orientation reflects a more relationship-centred and learner-centred teacher identity. Such a teacher identity may be less effective for new teachers, who have not yet mastered instructional content and pedagogical skills, and may be more or less effective for other teachers depending on the age of the students. With young students, an informal teacher identity may not be recognized as appropriate or leaderly adult behaviour; without augmentation by specific structuring acts, the class may degenerate into (near-)chaos, as observed in a Hong Kong secondary class led by a first-year teacher whose informality with her students contributed to difficulties maintaining discipline and focus (Pennington and Richards, 1997). On the other hand, too strict adherence to a formal teacher role can prevent a good relationship from developing with students. The age and the expectations of the students for appropriate teacher behaviour and teacher-student relationship, based on their cultural and educational backgrounds, will be important considerations in developing a balance of formal and informal interaction when negotiating an effective teacher identity under different circumstances.

Under extreme pressure to cover content or prepare for upcoming examinations, a teacher may need to emphasize the formal teacher identity and de-emphasize her/his authentic or personal identity and those of the students for a time, or in most classroom interactions. In addition, where discipline is a problem, the focus may need to be on formal teacher identity. 'Similar considerations might apply with teachers who are unsure of their grasp of the target language, while in some situations the extent to which teachers are permitted to engage with broader issues might be formally circumscribed' (K. Richards, 2006: 72). Institutional expectations, policies, requirements, and constraints may also pressure teachers to keep to a relatively formal and impersonal role in front of the students.

As these examples and discussion suggest, finding a comfortable as well as a contextually appropriate and effective balance between a formal teacher persona and a more personal and relatable self in the role of teacher is not a one-size-fits-all affair, and decisions about what kind of identity to assume will depend on the particular teaching context.

Negotiating and Adapting Identity

As Sachs observes: 'teacher identity is not something that is fixed nor is it imposed; rather it is negotiated through experience and the sense that is made of that experience'

(2005: 15). Like teaching itself, which Johnson (1996: 24) characterizes as ‘a socially constructed activity that requires the interpretation and negotiation of meanings embedded within the context of the classroom’, a teacher identity is evolved through processes of interpretation and negotiation of meanings, as well as of social roles and positions, in the classroom. These classroom-internal identity-shaping processes are interactive with the classroom-external interpretive and negotiational processes in which teachers engage in their daily lives in other contexts. They are also interactive with the practices of the wider field, which are emphasized to different degrees and interpreted in different ways by individual teachers (Pennington, 1999; 2002; Varghese, 2006).

Different teaching methods or approaches assume particular roles for teachers, and these may at times conflict with a teacher’s sense of her/his own identity. For this reason, a teacher who is required to teach according to a set syllabus or course book may experience identity stress in attempting to adapt to the constraints imposed by using that syllabus or book. At the same time, imposed constraints offer opportunities to problem-solve and evolve new modes of teaching that respond to those constraints while also incorporating the teacher’s values and teaching ideals. Similarly, teaching in a new context – whether it be a new type or level of a course, a new school or district, or a new country – and with new student groups always requires adjustments and offers opportunities for identity negotiation in response to context. Such adjustments are in fact the normal case for evolution of a teacher identity over time, as:

the negotiation of teachers’ professional identities is...powerfully influenced by contextual factors outside of the teachers themselves and their preservice education.... [T]he identity resources of the teachers may be tested against conditions that challenge and conflict with their backgrounds, skills, social memberships, use of language, beliefs, values, knowledge, attitudes, and so on. Negotiating those challenges forms part of the dynamic of professional identity development (Miller, 2009: 175).

Through processes of negotiation and interpretation of their experiences and interactions with others, teachers’ personal, autobiographical identities and narratives become connected to their work-related, instructional and professional identities and narratives. Since teachers’ social and interactional contexts and experiences are varied and subject to change with new student populations and job requirements in different educational settings, some aspects of teacher identity will always be in flux. The fact that a teacher identity is, in the words of Beauchamp and Thomas, ‘dynamic rather than stable’ and ‘a constantly evolving phenomenon’ (2009: 177) means that it has a future-oriented trajectory open to learning and contextual modification in daily practice as well as in initial language teacher education and ongoing professional development activities.

Creating a Professional Teacher Identity

The subject and content of instruction, the methods and approaches to teaching, and the students and specific context in which one teaches are important factors influencing teacher identity. These are not however independent factors but rather help to create a

teacher's identity in interaction with the teacher's personal or autobiographical identity and specific educational and teaching experiences, including those in teacher education programmes where the teacher's knowledge is expanded through connection to the disciplinary knowledge of a specific field. Various facets of the teacher's identity are played out every day in the classroom as a set of attitudes and behaviours and also constitute an image which the teacher has of her/himself and wishes to project and realize through teaching acts. This image connects to aspects of the teacher's identity beyond any specific classroom or teaching situation, to the teacher's relationships with colleagues and the profession, and to the teacher's goals and aspirations over a longer period of time.

One's personal identity is the basis of teaching, which suggests that teaching is always relative to the person who stands in front of a class. This individual aspect of teacher identity has been called the 'art' or 'magic' of teaching and has been opposed to the collective aspects of teaching as 'craft', 'science', or 'profession' (Freeman and Richards, 1993; Pennington, 1989; 1999; Zahorik, 1986). As the teacher educator Marilyn Lewis has observed, good teaching is ultimately based on the teacher's individual qualities:

When people speak of "a born teacher", what do they mean?... Maybe there is such a thing as a born musician or a born painter, but we [have] difficulty saying the same thing about teachers. It seems as if one key is being oneself. Skills can be learned, but not those good qualities that are already part of one's personality (cited in Richards, 2015b: 107).

While a teacher's pedagogical art or magic draws on aspects of personal identity stemming from that person's unique nature and history – such as natural proclivities and traits, beliefs and knowledge about the world and other people, personal skills, and instinctual as well as long-practiced and automatized behaviours – these must also connect to the identity of the discipline or profession of language teaching – its specific stores of knowledge, beliefs, skills, and practices based on its distinctive character and history. Thus, a teacher creates a professional identity by connecting individual characteristics to the characteristics of the field as a whole (Pennington, 1999). A teacher is expected not only to know things and know how to do things, but also to be her/himself – that is, to adapt and personalize disciplinary or professional knowledge to her/his own individual identity and contexts of teaching. Ultimately, an individual teacher identity should link personal identity to the collective identity of a teaching field. An individual teacher's sense of what it means to be a teacher in a specific field is created interactively with the knowledge base and identity of the larger field, which impacts the teacher's knowledge base and identity even as it is itself continually redefined by the evolving identities and practices of individual educators.

The Construction of Teacher Identity in Language Teaching

Richards identifies ten areas as 'those dimensions of teacher knowledge and skill that seem to be at the core of expert teaching competence and performance in language teaching' (2012: 46). They are:

1. Language proficiency
2. Content knowledge
3. Teaching skills
4. Contextual knowledge
5. Language teacher identity
6. Learner-focused teaching
7. Pedagogical reasoning skills
8. Theorizing from practice
9. Membership in a community of practice
10. Professionalism

We start from the areas of competency identified by Richards as central to expertise in language teaching and reconsider these in relation to the review of literature above and other relevant work by the authors and others. Our reconceptualization and synthesis of ideas is sequenced to look first at Foundational Competences of Language Teacher Identity, including language-related identity, disciplinary identity, context-related identity, self-knowledge and awareness, and student-related identity (student knowledge and awareness). We then consider Advanced Competences of Language Teacher Identity that are the desired result of ongoing teacher learning and experience, including practiced and responsive teaching skills (knowledge into practice), theorizing from practice (practice into knowledge), and membership in communities of practice and profession. Throughout our discussion, we draw on teachers' narratives illustrating factors that impact development of these competences in creating an identity as a language teacher.

Foundational Competences of Language Teacher Identity

Language-related Identity. A person's identity as a language teacher relates to the person's language background and language proficiency. Teaching language requires not only specific knowledge *about* the language being taught but also specific skills for communicating effectively with students who have limited proficiency in that language. Where the language being taught is also the medium of instruction, all teachers, whether they are themselves first- or second-language speakers, must develop specific communicative skills for teaching *through* that language. First-language ('native speaker') competence in a language does not automatically confer advantages in terms of these requirements for language teaching, although, as Richards (2012: 47) notes, there is a level of communicative competence or language proficiency at a certain '*threshold*' level needed for effective teaching.

Teaching entirely in a second or additional language requires a high level of automaticity and fluency in that language whereas in contexts where bilingual teaching is both possible (since the teacher and student share the same mother tongue) and allowed or encouraged by the school, the level of proficiency needed in the second language is not as high while knowledge of the students' first language must be high. In such contexts of bilingual teaching, the students' mother tongue can be relied on for explanatory back-up or expansion of the information presented in the second language or can replace use of the second language in cases of communication breakdown or difficult situations of

classroom management and student discipline (Pennington, 1995a; 1996). Teachers who wish to teach 100% in the second language, whether based on an internal value or external requirement, but who are unable to do so, have a different sense of their identity as language teachers than do teachers who intentionally teach in a bilingual mode. Teachers who compensate for their own less than full proficiency or their lack of confidence in the second language by bilingual teaching strategies may feel that their performance as a teacher does not match up to their ideal image of a language teacher, so that they may be judged – by themselves or others (e.g. school authorities and parents) – as ‘deficient’. In contrast, teachers who can make a reasoned decision to teach bilingually and do so with strategic goals in mind (Pennington, 1995a; 1996) are able to build a teacher identity on their personal history as second-language speakers and their knowledge and experience of education and communication in second-language contexts.

Teachers who speak the medium of instruction as a second or additional language might focus on their ‘non-native’ status and feel concerned about their language. These teachers often see improvement in their language proficiency as central to their professional development as language teachers and to their identity as knowledgeable professionals. However, a strong focus on the students and strong preparation for and involvement in lessons can override this factor so that the teacher can develop a confident classroom identity, as this teacher discovered:

As a non-native English speaker I was worried about my language skills at first when I started to teach English.... As the lessons progressed I became more confident in my teaching and I actually forgot that I was a non-native speaker of English while I was teaching because I became so engrossed (and interested) in delivering my lessons (Raul C; cited in Richards and Farrell, 2011: 18).

Experiences teaching help to create an ‘insider’ identity as a language teacher, including for second-language teachers such as this one:

Since I have been in teaching practice and inside teaching a real class with real ESL students I no longer feel an outsider in this profession even though I am a non-native speaker of English. Now that I have had a chance to prove myself as a teacher in front of these students and shown them that I know many different techniques as well as my skills using English (yes, and even if I still have a bit of an accent), they have begun to accept me as their teacher and I am beginning to feel more like a teacher of English (Momoko J; cited in Richards and Farrell, 2011: 17).

The above two cases suggest that second-language speakers might background their language status as incidental or irrelevant to their identity as a teacher of that language. However, this may not be the only way, or the most realistic or desirable way, to manage their language-related identity. The following is a reflection from a second-language teacher who integrated this aspect of his autobiographical identity with his classroom persona and overall teaching approach and philosophy:

I am a highly motivated teacher with a passion for the English language and culture. Having had to learn the language myself has always provided me with that extra inside knowledge of how best to help and encourage my students to master the intricacies of the language....

I used every opportunity to draw from my own experience as a learner, in order to make my students realize that if I had managed to reach a fairly acceptable level of proficiency in English, it was within their reach to do so, too (Maite San Juan, Barcelona, Spain; cited in Richards, 2015b: 128).

As he describes, this teacher built his teacher identity around and through his identity as a language learner, thereby connecting those aspects of his identity to the identities of his students. This teacher's integration of a central feature of his autobiographical identity in his teacher identity illustrates how instructional practice can be supported when teachers, including both first- and second-language speakers, shape their teacher identity in ways that give a central place to, rather than ignore or background, their autobiographical identity.

Although 'native speaker' status may seem to confer an advantage in teaching a language, it has the disadvantage that a key aspect of the teacher's identity is not shared with the students. Given that the majority of the world's language teachers, like their students, speak English as a second or additional language, it would seem both realistic and potentially advantageous for a 'non-native' language teacher to construct her/his identity as a 'transcultural' person who has acquired competence in the second language and has intercultural awareness and plurilingual (bilingual or multilingual) skills that confer specific advantages in today's highly interconnected world (Abendroth-Timmer and Hennig, 2015).

Disciplinary Identity. An identity as a language teacher is in the best case underpinned by specific knowledge of the content of the field gained not only through experience teaching but also through formal education. Formal education connected to language teaching, such as in applied linguistics or TESOL course work, not only builds relevant expertise, but also creates valuable disciplinary connections, affiliations, and qualifications that can provide economic security and support a career as a language teaching professional (Pennington, 2015).

Richards and Farrell identify the two broad types of content knowledge relevant to language teaching as follows:

Disciplinary knowledge refers to the body of knowledge that is considered by the language teaching profession to be essential to gaining membership of the profession. Possessing such knowledge leads to professional recognition and status and is part of professional education but does not translate into practical skills. For example courses in the history of language teaching methods, contemporary linguistic theories, psycholinguistics, critical pedagogy and sociolinguistics belong to the domain of disciplinary knowledge.... *Pedagogical content knowledge* on the other hand refers to knowledge that provides a basis for language teaching. It is knowledge which is drawn from the study of language teaching and language learning itself and which can be applied in different ways to the resolution of practical issues in language teaching. It could include course work in areas such as curriculum planning, assessment, reflective teaching, teaching children, teaching the four skills and so on (2011: 19).

The required forms of knowledge underpinning language teaching expertise and qualifications incorporate, at a minimum, knowledge of the language taught and of language

teaching approaches and methods. In addition, the language teaching expert will also have a knowledge of such areas as: language learning theory, testing and assessment, curriculum and classroom management, applied research methods, and critical pedagogy.

Ball refers to ‘the persistent divide between subject matter and pedagogy’ (2000: 242), noting that ‘usable content knowledge is not something teacher education, in the main provides effectively’ (2000: 243). At the same time, as noted above, disciplinary knowledge helps build confidence and a foundation for a specific identity as a teacher, as this teacher discovered over time:

As the years went by..., I have learned not just to appreciate the sound and broad-ranging knowledge base that studying [linguistic] subjects has given me, but I am also aware that such knowledge has contributed significantly to developing my confidence as a teacher – an unexpected and valuable outcome. As I became a teacher of teachers later on in my career, I have found myself drawing and building on that knowledge, and I am now thankful for the solid foundations that the disciplinary knowledge I was required to acquire during my initial teacher training have provided me with to build my professional identity (Silvana Richardson; cited in Richards, 2015b: 115).

Increasing types and depth of content knowledge provide a foundation on which to build a stable and secure identity as a language teaching professional that can be enriched over time, as the teacher is increasingly able to give back and share knowledge with others and in so doing to add to the knowledge base and disciplinary foundation and identity of the field.

Context-related Identity. ‘Different contexts for teaching create different potentials for learning that the teacher must come to understand’ (Richards, 2012: 48) and provide different kinds of constraints and opportunities for teachers’ practice. Teaching contexts can be described in terms of their:

- *Favouring conditions* – positive potentials or affordances that support teaching and learning (e.g. small class size; excellent facilities, resources, and equipment; skilled and supportive administrators; good compensation, benefits, and reward system for teaching); and
- *Disfavouring conditions* – negative influences or inhibiting factors that constrain teaching and learning (e.g. large class size; substandard and/or limited facilities, resources, and equipment; unskilled and unsupportive administrators; poor compensation, benefits, and reward system for teaching).

Such contextual factors have a strong impact on the evolution of a teacher identity.

Research has shown that language teachers tend to focus on disfavouring physical and administrative conditions at the level of the school (e.g. large classes; poor quality and insufficient facilities, materials, and equipment; highly directive supervision) and district- or state-level requirements (high-stakes tests) as causative factors overriding their knowledge of what they consider to be best practices and their teaching ideals in motivating their teaching performance (Pennington and Cheung, 1995; Pennington et al., 1996; 1997; Pennington and Richards, 1997). When disfavouring conditions prevail, teachers’

goals and ideals may become increasingly detached from their actual classroom behaviour, as they perceive that it is impossible to connect them or that there is no incentive for doing so. Under such conditions, teachers may lose motivation as they come to feel that they cannot realize a situated identity that is consistent with their values. When favouring conditions prevail, it is more likely for teachers to achieve a good match between their teaching ideals and their classroom identity and so easier for them to maintain high motivation in their work.

One's identity as a teacher is relative to a particular national or regional and school culture, reflecting the nature of the students, other teachers, and school leadership and administration. A teacher's classroom and professional identity develops within these cultural frames or cultures of learning, which are interactive with the teacher's background characteristics and experience, including educational experience within similar or different cultures. Differences in teacher identity related to culture can be seen in the very different teaching philosophies and approaches of two secondary school English teachers, one labelled a 'Chinese', called May Ling, and one labelled a 'Westerner', called George, whom Tsui (1995) observed in Hong Kong. May Ling had a strong focus on organization, discipline, covering course content, and achieving learning outcomes that Tsui attributes to the influence of Chinese culture:

May Ling had been brought up in the Chinese culture, which valued subservience to authority and emphasized observation of protocol [e.g. between higher and lower status individuals]. She had been educated in a system that viewed teachers as people with knowledge and wisdom, and in a society that held teachers in great respect. In this culture, the teacher's role was to impart knowledge, the students' role was to receive knowledge, and the relationship between students and teacher was formal... (1995: 357).

This teacher's behaviour is contrasted with the 'Western' teacher, George, who established a more informal classroom structure and relationship with students. Tsui attributes this to the influence of 'Western culture':

George had been brought up in the Western culture and had gone through a Western education system, in which more emphasis was placed on the individual, most classrooms had done away with the traditional protocol, and the relationship between students and teacher was much less formal. These differences in cultural and educational backgrounds seemed to permeate the practical theories underlying the two teachers' classroom practices (1995: 359).

Whether or not the differences observed by Tsui would be characteristic of all or most Chinese and all or most Westerners, the contrasts described represent quite different teaching cultures and teacher identities which may or may not be effective when transported to new contexts.

Self-Knowledge and Awareness. As Parker Palmer observed in *The Courage to Teach*, 'Good teaching requires self-knowledge: it is a secret hidden in plain sight' (Palmer, 2007: 3). Pennington (1989) noted the importance of self-knowledge as an element of the competence of a language teacher, that is, being aware of one's strengths and weaknesses and how to optimize teaching on the basis of this awareness. Thus, one's identity as a

language teacher should involve developing experience and an image of oneself that is built on self-awareness in relation to acts of teaching and that incorporates one's personal qualities, values, and ideals into effective teaching performance.

Teachers' self-knowledge can be revealed in their narratives of their experience and reflections on the principles they follow in teaching. For example, in the following excerpt a Hong Kong British Council teacher talks about how her personal characteristics influence her teaching:

I think it's important to be positive as a personality. I think the teacher has to be a positive person. I think you have to show a tremendous amount of patience. And I think that if you have a good attitude you can project this to the students and hopefully establish a relaxed atmosphere in your classroom so that they will not dread to come to class but have a good class (cited in Richards, 1996: 284–85).

This British Council teacher describes various features of her ideal teacher identity that connect to personal identity – personality, positive attitude, and patience. These views of characteristics that are essential to effective teaching suggest self-awareness in relation to this teacher's concept of her best teaching self and are no doubt generalized from her own experiences and characteristics as reflected through an idealized image of a good teacher. They also connect her self-knowledge and ideal teacher identity to the identity of the students.

A second British Council teacher in Hong Kong focuses in her narrative on her beliefs and values underlying her desired teacher identity as more of a facilitator than an expert:

My beliefs are very much humanitarian in that they will learn if they feel a warm cooperative atmosphere in the classroom, so I'm very concerned that they build up a trust amongst themselves, and with me, so I like them to do activities that are more student-centred rather than relying on the teacher all the time. I'd like to be more a guide, a motivator rather than the one-and-all person who knows it all (cited in Richards, 1996: 285).

As in the case of the first teacher's narrative, this second teacher's narrative reflects self-knowledge and an ideal teacher identity that links to a positive view of the students.

Student-related Identity (Student Knowledge and Awareness). Developing teaching expertise naturally involves becoming increasingly skilled in facilitating learning, and a focus on the learner is characteristic of skilled teacher behaviour as revealed in teacher research (Borg, 2006). Research in teacher learning in language teaching (e.g. Farrell, 2009; Pennington, 1995b) shows novice teachers moving over time from a focus on lesson material and procedures to a focus on their students and interaction in the classroom. Thus, knowledge of self is complemented by knowledge of students, both individuals and learner groups, as a central element of teaching competence (Pennington, 1989). In addition, teaching expertise includes a knowledge of how these two kinds of identity are linked in reciprocal acts of teaching and learning in a classroom, where teacher and student are in a mutually interactive relationship in which the thinking and the actions of one reflect the thinking and the actions of the other (Pennington, 1992). Cummins (2001, 2011) has written about the important linkage and negotiation of the identities of teachers

and students – in particular, second-language learners who are also members of ‘marginalized social groups’, for whom ‘identity negotiation between teachers and students emerges as a strong influence on [their] academic achievement’ and who, he maintains, ‘will engage actively with literacy only to the extent that such engagement is identity-affirming’ (Cummins, 2011: 190).

An identity as a language teacher evolves over time to incorporate collaborative aspects of performance that are linked to students’ identities and that show concern for their welfare. Both of the British Council teachers whose narratives were cited above, for example, show a linkage of their desired teacher identities with hoped-for positive responses from their students. Both seem focused on the students’ affective response, expressing a concern with the classroom atmosphere and students’ enjoyment of the class, and both suggest that the teacher has an important role in ensuring that the students’ affective responses are positive. Yet the second British Council teacher referred to above (cited in Richards, 1996: 285), who described her teaching beliefs as humanitarian, learner-centred, motivational, and guiding rather than coercive, also noted that many of her Hong Kong students were ‘reluctant to accept that’ and ‘to take on that responsibility’, and this made her sometimes feel frustrated and as if some students had ‘barriers’ to her way of teaching.

Such negative reflections on students’ attitudes and behaviours as running counter to the teacher’s goals and values can be a reason for disengaging from them and their learning and an excuse for ineffective teaching. However, the same observations are open to interpretation in identity terms as individual or cultural differences that might spur the teacher’s positive action to ‘bridge the gap’ between her and her students. Such bridging usually means starting from student characteristics and needs, and then making adjustments in teaching goals and methods to meet them at least half way. An example is the case of a teacher called ‘Gail Summers’ (case study 5.4, Pennington and Hoekje, 2010: 164–66), who renegotiated her teaching approach and permanently altered her teacher identity when she taught overseas, first in Japan and then in China, based on the students’ expectations of their own and the teacher’s roles and responsibilities.

Advanced Competences of Language Teacher Identity

Practiced and Responsive Teaching Skills (Knowledge into Practice). Teaching skills can be seen as operationalizing disciplinary and pedagogical knowledge, integrated with personal and contextual characteristics and knowledge, in the performance of acts of teaching. The types of skills required for performing acts of language teaching are both general teaching skills and teaching skills specific to language teaching which, with time, become increasingly practiced and responsive. This means that the teacher will have a ready set of skills and responses to apply in different circumstances of teaching and learning, and will also have a degree of flexibility in being able to customize as needed. Pedagogical reasoning skills are needed to integrate the various kinds of knowledge required for teaching and to implement that integrated knowledge in all phases of instruction – from planning to performing and then assessing teaching acts. Over time, language teachers should become more confident in their sense of identity as a teacher and in their ability to apply the integrated and automatized reasoning that underlies skilled performance.

Internalizing what has been learned in course work and teaching practice builds confidence in new teachers and a bank of techniques that can be applied during language teaching:

Teaching practice enlightened me with the fact that one skill (reading, writing, grammar) can be taught in so many varied ways. I think I feel a little more secure knowing that I will have some ideas to refer to or modify when the need arises when I become a full-time teacher (David L; cited in Richards and Farrell, 2011: 19).

Beyond building teachers' confidence that they know what they need to know for teaching, observations during practice teaching and early classroom experiences help to construct their sense of what is possible in language teaching and hence their ideal model for their own teacher identity. For example, teaching in a second language, as noted above, requires learning ways to communicate with and instruct people who are not fully competent in the language of instruction, such as development of clear and simple, but not patronizing, language. As one practice teacher remarked:

One of the first things I noticed about my co-operating teacher was how easily she was able to communicate with the class of low-level adult learners. She kept her language clear and simple without sounding patronizing, and when a student had trouble expressing herself the teacher would gradually help the student say what she was trying to say by gently guiding her and giving her feedback (Richard L; cited in Richards and Farrell, 2011: 16).

Such an observation during practice teaching can set an aspirational goal which the teacher will work to operationalize in performance. A language teacher then works to construct an identity that incorporates an increasingly rich and diversified repertoire of general and specific teaching skills operationalized in performance in relation to the teacher's values and goals.

Aspects of teacher identity are built on learning in course work and then adapted in context, often in highly innovative and unpredictable ways:

When I did factual writing with my class during teaching practice, I remembered the way my instructor taught us during my B.ED. course because she had small story charts to help students generate ideas for the topic such as on teenage crime. I modified her idea a bit by adding several boxes on a worksheet, each box asked a question about the topic (in this case Bus Drivers), which the students were to write on.... I also thought my instructor's use of visual organizers were very helpful for me during teaching practice when it came to assisting students in getting down their ideas in an orderly and systematic manner, which would aid their understanding and increase the speed of internalization... I even transferred this idea to my reading course and had students do a plot sequencing on the board using the labels again. This time, the labels were for the major sections of the novel, and the class is split into groups and told to do a summary for each major part and then to stick their summary under the respective labels. The groups then took turns to go up to the board to read the summary of the entire novel (Emily W; cited in Richards and Farrell, 2011: 20).

The excerpt from this teacher's reflection shows how language teachers may creatively adapt what they have learned in course work to their own teaching practice (Richards,

2015a) and in so doing evolve a unique teacher identity as a personal construction of knowledge and individualized performance in their own sites of practice.

Theorizing from Practice (Practice into Knowledge). Teachers develop a personal understanding of teaching that incorporates beliefs, concepts, theories, and principles of teaching (Borg, 2006). This understanding of teaching will be different for every teacher, based on their differing background characteristics and experiences, the specific people they interact with and the specific interactions they have with them, the differing ways they perceive themselves and others, their values and beliefs, and the specific ways they interpret their experience and translate past experience into future actions. This personal conception of teaching which guides the practice of individual teachers can be captured in Richards' notion of *teachers' maxims* for language teaching, as the 'personal working principles which reflect teachers' individual philosophies of teaching, developed from their experience of teaching and learning, their teacher education experiences, and from their own personal beliefs and value systems' (1996: 293). Teachers' maxims are a reflection of how one's identity as a teacher has evolved and influences teacher thinking and classroom behaviour in relation to a growing abstract system of knowledge and values against which to measure teaching performance. This takes language teacher identity beyond training (Richards, 1998), to a higher level of reflection that seeks to relate individual classroom actions and decision-making to each other and to higher principles.

Language teachers, like other teachers, should not only be familiar with the theoretical orientations of the field of language teaching and learning but also be involved in constructing theory themselves. In the words of Sharkey, they should be 'active readers, users, and producers of theory' (2004: 281). In the same vein, Johnson maintains that 'L2 [second-language] teachers are users and creators of knowledge and theorizers in their own right' (2006: 241). As Johnson points out, 'teacher research positions teachers as investigators of and interveners in their own practice while making their investigations and interventions, in essence their learning, visible to others' (2006: 242), through such activities as teacher inquiry seminars, peer coaching, cooperative development, teacher study groups, narrative inquiry, lesson study groups, or critical friends groups (Johnson, 2006: 243).

These varied approaches to teacher research legitimate teaching practice and the classroom as a crucial site for teacher learning (Johnson, 2006: 244) and identity construction. Such situated or 'located L2 teacher education' (Johnson, 2006: 246) can also function as a site for critical pedagogy, which is central to language teaching practice, as teachers 'scrutinize and navigate the consequences that broader macrostructures, such as educational policies and curricular mandates, have on their daily classroom practices' (Johnson, 2006: 246). Thus, an identity as a language teacher is built cumulatively in sites of practice as not only a user but also a producer of both the practical (pedagogical content) knowledge and the theoretical (disciplinary content) knowledge of the field.

Membership in Communities of Practice and Profession. An aspect of a language teacher's identity is the teacher's connection to one or more of the communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) that define work in the field, such as teachers at the school where one teaches, teachers in other schools and communities in other

parts of the country or the world, or other professionals in any of these contexts. Communities of practice are also defined by informal or institutional organizations which a teacher may belong to, such as an online discussion group or professional body (e.g. the international TESOL, IATEFL, or MLA organizations, or the various national and local affiliates of these). Teachers participate in such communities of practice through sharing knowledge, perspectives, and values; reflecting on those of others; and acquiring new knowledge and then shifting perspectives and values accordingly. Through such participation, teachers' connections to communities of practice develop their identity as language teaching professionals in collaboration with those of other practitioners and of the wider field.

As summarized by Richards:

English language teaching is a profession, which means that it is seen as a career in a field of educational specialization, it requires a specialized knowledge base obtained through both academic study and practical experience, and it is a field of work where membership is based on entry requirements and standards. Becoming an English language teacher means becoming part of a worldwide community of professionals with shared goals, values, discourse, and practices (2012: 52).

Thus, identity as a language teacher includes a sense of having specialized knowledge and expertise and of being part of a larger profession and what this represents, such as certain standards, ethics, and accountability for performance in teaching.

Implications for Teacher Education and Professional Development in Language Teaching

Miller suggests four areas of focus related to teacher identity that can be addressed in teacher education and professional development for language teaching:

- a. *A focus on the nature of identity* 'as a complex and multiple individual and social phenomenon, which has critical links to power and legitimacy'.
- b. *Understanding the complexity and importance of context* as 'critical elements that affect what teachers can do and how they negotiate and construct identity moment to moment'.
- c. *The need for critical reflection*, especially 'critical social reflection, which takes account of identity and related issues, of individuals in specific contexts, and of the role of discourse in shaping experience...., how change is effected, and how knowledge, pedagogy, and identity intersect'.
- d. *Identity and pedagogy*, in particular, in relation to the identities of the students: 'We need teachers whose starting point is the learners' identities, who begin where students are at, and who treat the students' lives as primary resources for learning' (2009: 178).

Teacher education in language teaching and related fields such as applied linguistics can beneficially address the area of teacher identity in pre-service courses with a methods or

professional focus, ensuring attention to the above key aspects of teacher identity within the areas of foundational and advanced competence reviewed in this article.

In addition, Abendroth-Timmer and Hennig note the need 'to find an answer to the multifarious question of how reflection based on both theory and classroom reality can be initiated and guided in order to enable teachers (at every stage of their career) to overcome individual/subjective patterns of thinking and acting, and thus to tackle in a flexible manner the complexity of teaching situations in a pluralistic society' (2015: 32). The answer to this 'multifarious question' relates directly to a language teacher's identity in both autobiographical and professional aspects. With a goal of raising teachers' awareness of theory and classroom reality in relation to their goals and practices, language teachers at any stage of their career can engage in reflective activity and practice-centred research that begins with discussion or individual reflection on identity as the basis for professional development or action research to examine practice and implement changes, possibly together with others (Pennington, 2015). Through such identity-focused attention and actions, language teachers continue to develop their knowledge and skill as language teaching professionals as they also continue to evolve an identity which they seek to both consistently perform in the classroom and connect to the wider field of language teaching.

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