Introduction: Identity, Transdisciplinarity, and the Good Language Teacher

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What constitutes a “good teacher” and “good teaching” has come under much scrutiny in an age of globalization, transnationalism, and increased demands for accountability. It is against this evolving landscape and the pathbreaking work of the Douglas Fir Group (DFG, 2016) that this special issue engages the following two broad questions: (a) In what ways is language teaching “identity work”? and (b) To what extent does a transdisciplinary approach to language learning and teaching offer insight into language teacher identity? We begin this Introduction with a discussion on identity research in second language acquisition and applied linguistics, and then address innovations in language teacher identity research, exploring how this work has been advanced methodologically through narratives, discourse analysis, and an ethical consideration of research practices. We then consider how the transdisciplinary framework of the DFG, and its focus on macro, meso, and micro dimensions of language learning at the ideological, institutional, and classroom levels, respectively, might contribute to our understanding of language teacher identity. In the final section, we argue that the host of complementary theories adopted by the six contributors supports the view that a transdisciplinary approach to language teacher identity is both productive and desirable. Further, the contributors advance the language teacher identity research agenda by taking into consideration (a) how teacher identity intersects with the multilingual (Higgins and Ponte) and translingual (Zheng) realities of contemporary classrooms, (b) the investment of teachers in developing the semiotic repertoires of learners (Stranger-Johannessen and Norton) and a socially inclusive learning environment (Barkhuizen), and (c) the emotions (Wolff and De Costa) and ethical practices (Miller, Morgan, and Medina) of teachers. Central to all articles in this special issue is the need to recognize the rich linguistic and personal histories that language teachers bring into the classroom in order to promote effective language learning.

Keywords: language teacher identity; language learning; transdisciplinarity; teacher education; the Douglas Fir Group

Until now, the job of the teacher has been comparatively neglected, with all the focus on structural changes. But disruptions to school systems are irrelevant if they do not change how and what children learn. For that, what matters is what teachers do and think.

("Teaching the Teachers," 2016)
Our findings compel us to claim that the central project in which novice L2 teachers are involved in their teacher learning is not so much the acquisition of the knowledge of language teaching as it is the development of a teacher identity.

(Kanno & Stuart, 2011, p. 249)

In the last decades, the world has changed to such an extent that language teachers are no longer sure of what they are supposed to teach nor what real world situations they are supposed to prepare their students for.

(Kramsch, 2014, p. 296)

IN JUNE 2016, A LEAD ARTICLE OF THE Economist grappled with the complex topic, “How to make a good teacher” (“Teaching the Teachers,” 2016). While the research did not provide definitive answers to this question, two observations are particularly relevant to the field of second and foreign language teaching: The first is that good teaching is not necessarily an innate skill, but can be greatly improved through effective teacher training. The second observation is that “good teaching helps poor kids the most” (“Teaching the Teachers,” 2016) by closing the achievement gap (Haycock, 2001), given that poor families don’t have the material resources used by wealthy parents to enhance the education of their children. The implications of such findings for language teacher education are profound: Teacher training is important for good language teaching, and good language teaching promotes social equality. The research of Kanno and Stuart (2011) in the field of language teacher education suggests, however, that knowledge about language teaching may not be as important as the development of a teacher identity. Further, Kramsch (2014) points out that the scale of change that has gripped foreign language teacher education has sometimes left teachers at a loss as they attempt to keep abreast of real world developments and demands outside their classrooms. In addition, while some language teachers have access to a wide range of resources to enhance language learning, both on and offline, the research of scholars such as Cummins (2011) and Norton (2014) demonstrates that many language teachers struggle to secure the most rudimentary resources that would “help poor kids the most.” In the wake of education budget cuts and mounting educational debt in many countries today, both within developed and developing countries, it is not uncommon to find teachers dipping into their own pockets to cover stationery costs, for example, because of a lack of financial support from the schools and education systems in which they work (Stockman, 2016).

It is against this changing landscape, as well as the seminal work of the Douglas Fir Group (DFG, 2016), discussed in greater detail later, that this special issue frames and contributes to debates on the following two questions: (a) In what ways is language teaching “identity work”? and (b) To what extent does a transdisciplinary approach to language learning and teaching offer insight into language teacher identity (LTI)? Most of the contributors to this special issue participated in a well-received panel on language teacher identity at the annual conference of the American Association for Applied Linguistics (AAAL) in Toronto, Canada, in March 2015. The range of compelling issues raised in the colloquium encouraged us to pursue a special issue of The Modern Language Journal on “Transdisciplinarity and Language Teacher Identity.”

Before introducing the six articles in the special issue and their relationship to our two central questions, we will situate the articles within a broader framework on identity research and transdisciplinarity in language education. We begin with a discussion on identity research in second language acquisition (SLA) and applied linguistics, with particular reference to language teacher identity research, and then turn to a more focused discussion of theoretical and methodological innovations in this area. We then examine the recent work on transdisciplinarity in language education, with particular reference to the work of the Douglas Fir Group (DFG, 2016), in which Norton represented the identity perspective. We consider how the transdisciplinary framework of the DFG, and its focus on macro, meso, and micro dimensions of language learning at the ideological, institutional, and classroom levels, respectively, might contribute to our understanding of language teacher identity. In the final section of this Introduction, we introduce the six articles in this special issue, and then address central findings from contributors with respect to the two central questions that frame this special issue.

IDENTITY RESEARCH ON LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TEACHING

The articles in this special issue need to be read in relation to two decades of SLA identity research (e.g., Block, 2007; De Costa, 2016a; De Costa & Norton, 2016; Higgins, 2011; Kramsch,
2009; Mackey, 2015; Miller, 2014; Norton, 2000/2013; Ponte & Higgins, 2015), as well as more recent research on language teacher identity (e.g., Barkhuizen, 2017; Cheung, Sai, & Park, 2015; Duff & Uchida, 1997; Kanno & Stuart, 2011; Morgan & Clarke, 2011; Tsui, 2007; Varghese et al., 2005, 2016; Xu, 2012). The latter stream of research has gained much momentum, in part due to recent developments such as high-stakes testing (Menken & García, 2010), the loss of teacher tenure and fear of being rendered redundant (Bilgen & Richards, 2015), and the emphasis on life-long learning and marketplace utility (Corson, 2002; Morgan, 2015). Collectively, these developments call for new constructions of “good practice” in the field of language teacher education (Hawkins & Norton, 2009) as well as enhanced understandings of ideology and capital, and learner and teacher investment (Darvin & Norton, 2015).

A revisiting of what constitutes a “good teacher” and “good teaching” has become all the more pressing in light of advances in digitally mediated learning (Kern, 2015; Thorne, Sauro, & Smith, 2015) and the complexities associated with transnational learners who increasingly populate second and foreign language classrooms (Duff, 2015; Menard–Warwick, 2008; Menard–Warwick, Heredia–Herrera, & Palmer, 2013; Risager, 2007). While wide-ranging in its avenues of exploration, the research literature recognizes that language teacher identity is “a potential site of pedagogical intervention and an area of explicit focus in teacher preparation” (Morgan & Clarke, 2011, p. 825). At the same time, LTI research needs to be interpreted in relation to the ways second and foreign language teacher education research has evolved over time. While Schulz (2000), for example, focused on skills in her historical review of foreign language teacher development between 1916–1999, a decade later, the review of Allen and Negueruela–Azarola (2010) identified the importance of beliefs and identities with respect to FL teaching experiences, investigated in the context of increasingly sophisticated theoretical frameworks and research designs. In short, LTI research has witnessed much theoretical and methodological innovation in the last two decades, and it is to these two broad paths of innovation that we turn next.

THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL INNOVATIONS IN LTI RESEARCH

In this section we briefly identify three recent theoretical developments in LTI research: (a) the ecological turn, (b) teacher socialization and investment, and (c) teacher affect. As noted, we need a textured approach to understanding how language teacher identities develop within a complex ecology that straddles the macro, meso, and micro dimensions of learning and teaching (DFG, 2016). Importantly, this ecological turn in LTI research parallels similar theoretical developments within the broader field of SLA (e.g., Kramsch, 2002; van Lier, 2004) and second and foreign language teacher education (e.g., Burns, Freeman, & Edwards, 2015; Kubanyiova & Feryok, 2015; Morgan & Martin, 2014). In their recent special issue on teacher cognition (also published in The Modern Language Journal), Kubanyiova and Feryok (2015) called for a bottom-up approach to exploring the complexity of teachers’ inner lives in their ecologies of practice. In a similar vein, Burns et al. (2015) advocated for a more holistic, ecological, and situated position on teacher cognition. Working from a critical perspective, Morgan and Martin (2014) urged LTI researchers to adopt a classroom-as-ecosystem perspective in order to examine the dynamics of pedagogical practices.

Two complementary frameworks associated with language socialization that have been used widely are Lave and Wenger's (1991) situated learning perspective and Wenger’s (2000) notion of communities of practice. These frameworks have been applied to investigate how teacher identities develop over time (e.g., Kanno & Stuart, 2011; Tsui, 2007; Zhang & Zhang, 2015). In her work with an EFL teacher from China, Tsui (2007) drew on Wenger’s social theory of identity formation to examine how her focal teacher struggled with multiple identities including that of being an EFL learner. Working with two MA students, Kanno and Stuart (2011) demonstrate how, through engaging in communities of practice, these students developed expertise in managing the challenges that emerged with being university teaching assistants. Also coming out of a broader socialization perspective on teacher identity formation and drawing on Norton’s (2000/2013) work on investment has been the notion of teacher investment. Using the concept of investment and positioning theory, Reeves (2009) analyzed the case of a secondary English teacher who negotiated his teacher identity in relation to English language learners. Relatedly, but reframing teacher identity in terms of critical praxis, Waller, Wethers, and De Costa (2016) traced the investments of two novice teachers by examining their teaching philosophy statements and what they desired as pedagogical outcomes. By
underscoring the importance of teacher investment, they highlight that the ability to integrate theory and practice is vitally important in the development of a teacher’s professional identity. In alignment with recent teacher investment research has been a growing body of work that examines how teachers manage their emotions in the face of the challenges described by Kramsch (2014). One area that has garnered much interest is that of emotional labor and teacher burnout (Acheson, Taylor, & Luna, 2016; Loh & Liew, 2016; Zhang & Zhu, 2008). While Loh and Liew (2016) focused on the challenges of English teachers in Singapore, Acheson et al. (2016) traced the burnout experienced by five FL teachers in the United States who worked in rural schools. Given that emotional management is a key part of teacher identity development, we anticipate that the insights from emotion-inflected LTI research will continue to provide valuable insights for teacher education.

On the methodological front, substantive inroads have also been made in finding news ways in conducting LTI research (De Costa & Norton, 2016; Norton & De Costa, in press). One methodology that has gained much traction over the past decade is narratives, with teacher narratives becoming the primary focus of a burgeoning body of LTI work (Barkhuizen, 2017). Because narratives allow us to analyze spatial and temporal scenarios that go beyond the here and now, more LTI researchers have also used narratives creatively in conjunction with a range of theoretical constructs that include affect (e.g., De Costa, 2017), positioning theory (e.g., Barkhuizen, 2010), translingualism (e.g., Motha, Jain, & Tecle, 2012), and investment (e.g., Norton, 2017). Barkhuizen (2010), for example, examined how an immigrant teacher to New Zealand positioned herself in relation to her teaching surroundings, Motha et al. (2012) stressed the importance of considering the translingual histories of teachers beyond native/non-native speaking divides, and Norton (2017) examined the relationship between learner investment and language teacher identity.

Consistent with the deepening interest in studying teacher narratives to gain insights into LTI development has been a more frequent adoption of discourse analytic tools to ensure more robust analyses of teacher data. Drawing on their work as teacher educators, Rex and Juzwik (2011) used Interactional Sociolinguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis to afford fine-grained analyses of teacher data to trace LTI development. From a complementary perspective, Lazaraton and Ishihara (2005) used Conversation Analysis (CA) to highlight the importance of studying the nonverbal behavior of teachers, as these behaviors could contribute to cultural misunderstandings and affect teaching competence.

Given the ethical turn in applied linguistics (De Costa, 2016b), the role of the researcher has also come into sharp focus in contemporary LTI work. Increasingly, LTI researchers have started to engage reflexively on their research collaborations with teachers. In their work with Ugandan teachers, Norton and Early (2011) emphasized the need for LTI researchers to examine their own researcher identities in relation to their participants and their research sites. In the same spirit, De Costa (2015) discussed how both he and his teacher collaborator engaged in acts of reflexivity in ways that subsequently influenced their pedagogy. In sum, because enacting researcher reflexivity is essential when working with a vulnerable population such as teachers, it is not surprising that LTI researchers have turned a stronger spotlight on the ethical dimensions of language teacher identity (Clarke, 2009). Indeed, the diverse approaches to research on language teacher identity amount to a rich transdisciplinary perspective, discussed more comprehensively in the next section.

A TRANSDISCIPLINARY APPROACH TO LANGUAGE TEACHER IDENTITY: THE DOUGLAS FIR GROUP FRAMEWORK

Language education researchers have consistently argued that conceptions of good language teaching are subject to changing pedagogical approaches and their attendant valuations over time (Larsen Freeman & Anderson, 2011; Schulz, 2000). Most recently, in an effort to capture the complexity of SLA, a range of scholars, from diverse disciplinary backgrounds, collaborated over a number of years to develop a transdisciplinary framework that indexes the influence of macro (societal), meso (school), and micro (classroom) pressures on language learning and teaching (DFG, 2016). The framework recognizes identity as a component at the meso level (see Figure 1), but the relationship between ideology at the macro level, institutional practices at the meso level, and social activity at the micro level, are all highly inter-related. It is the integration of macro, meso, and micro practices that ultimately determines which teacher identities are legitimated in relation to language proficiency, practices, and skills.
With reference to the scope and purpose of the special issue, the DFG’s (2016) transdisciplinary framework enables us to situate language teacher identity research against an increasingly multilingual and globalized backdrop. Equally important, the framework can provide guidance on how to respond to the real-world concerns of second and foreign language teachers and teacher educators as they attempt to navigate dominant ideologies, institutional constraints, and classroom possibilities (see also Byrd Clark, 2016). For example, it could be argued that it is only when the semiotic resources of learners at the level of classroom interaction (micro) are valued by the school (meso) and society (macro) that optimal language learning can take place. By focusing on these three levels in relation to LTI development, this special issue seeks to extend the DFG’s framework, which focuses more on the learner than the teacher. As the DFG (2016) concedes: “[w]e readily acknowledge that in this document we draw little on the extensive language teaching scholarship that exists (Borg, 2015; Burns, 2010; Johnson, 2009; Kubanyiova, 2014; Kubanyiova & Feryok, 2015) or say little about the teachers who do this work” (p. 8).

By emphasizing the teaching implications of the DFG model, our special issue foregrounds teaching and teacher identity. It also builds on the 10 thematic implications identified by the DFG, which focus on the teaching–learning dialectic, with a particular focus on theme 7, “language learning is identity work.” In Table 1, we illustrate the ways in which the teaching focus of our special issue aligns with the learner focus of the DFG,
TABLE 1
10 Fundamental Themes and Their Implications for Language Learning and Teaching

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>10 Fundamental Themes Related To Learning (The Douglas Fir Group)</th>
<th>10 Fundamental Themes Related To Teaching (Special Issue)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Language competencies are complex, dynamic, and holistic</td>
<td>1. Language competencies are complex, dynamic, and holistic</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Language learning is semiotic learning</td>
<td>2. Language teaching is semiotic teaching</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Language learning is situated and attentionally and socially gated</td>
<td>3. Language teaching is situated and attentionally and socially gated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Language learning is multimodal, embodied, and mediated</td>
<td>4. Language teaching is multimodal, embodied, and mediated</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Variability and change are at the heart of language learning</td>
<td>5. Variability and change are at the heart of language teaching</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Literacy and instruction mediate language learning</td>
<td>6. Literacy and instruction mediate language teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Language learning is identity work</td>
<td>7. Language teaching is identity work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Agency and transformative power are means and goals for language learning</td>
<td>8. Agency and transformative power are means and goals for language teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Ideologies permeate all levels</td>
<td>9. Ideologies permeate all levels of language teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Emotion and affect matter at all levels</td>
<td>10. Emotion and affect matter at all levels of language teaching</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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particularly with respect to theme 7, “language teaching is identity work.”

On a (macro) societal level, teachers across the globe have to face mounting neoliberal demands that emphasize greater teacher accountability and test scores as measures of their ability to carry out instruction effectively in the classroom (Bernstein et al., 2015). Within the United States, for example, teachers recently have had to grapple with educational policies such as Race to the Top, the Common Core State Standards, and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). While these measures are well intentioned to reduce dropout rates and to better prepare all students for success in college and careers, the stress on teachers has been considerable. Foreign language education teachers, in particular, are not immune to top-down educational mandates that have fostered a testing culture and unleashed a trend that has yielded punitive implications for teachers who do not meet (often unrealistic) test score targets set by school districts. As demonstrated by Burke (2013), while recommendations made by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) aim to identify weak teachers based on their proficiency, the use of measurement tools such as the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) and the ACTFL Written Proficiency Test (WPT) can have detrimental effects on foreign language teachers. While Scarino (2014), for example, argued that overarching generic frameworks such as ACTFL are also not sufficiently sensitive to language diversity, learner backgrounds, and conditions of learning, Burke (2013) reported on the emotional distress (agony, anxiety, and self-doubt) encountered by student teachers. The plight of teachers like them, she added, is exacerbated by the absence of personalized feedback from the company that administered the exams, and inconsistent state requirements.

A denial of teachers’ linguistic capital—as measured by their proficiency—is a universal problem and not one that is limited to the United States. That FL proficiency matters is also underscored by Valmori and De Costa (2016), who describe the challenges faced by FL teachers in Italy. Both Burke (2013) and Valmori and De Costa (2016) emphasize how perceptions of a good language teacher are still influenced by an on-native speaker teacher bias. In addressing this bias, they call attention to how ideologies that exist on a macro level within society can impact language teachers who are also language learners. Building on these observations, we would contend that accent hierarchies, which value the native speaker (NS) over the non-native speaker (NNS), are ultimately issues of identity. More often than not, NS identities are validated at the expense of NNS identities, which are denigrated because they are not associated with the mythical standard variety of a given language (Lippi–Green, 2012).

Ideological and identity challenges with respect to teacher education do not only reside at the
macro societal level, however. Rather, they perco-
late into the school (meso) level, where discourses
on what counts as good teaching are often contra-
dictory and can also become entrenched among
school administrators, who are responsible for
making pivotal employment decisions. In a study
that sought to identify the best foreign language
teachers, Sullivan (2004) found a disjuncture in
the perspectives of department chairs and prin-
cipals, respectively, when it came to evaluating
a state’s teaching standards and the use of pro-
fessional teaching portfolios as part of the hiring
process. Specifically, while both groups reported
confidence that teaching portfolios were helpful
tools for assessing teacher candidates, the former
group valued creativity and innovation, while the
latter group preferred evidence of L2 proficiency
in a candidate’s portfolio. Seen in light of the
growing emphasis on teacher accountability dis-
cussed earlier, the findings of Sullivan’s study are
also a stark reminder of how teacher knowledge
and pedagogical practices are increasingly tech-
nicized today (Fenwick, 2003); creativity, innova-
tion, and proficiency thus take on a dollar value
and become yardsticks to sort and sieve teachers
whose identities are benchmarked in accordance
with a neoliberal agenda.

RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE
SPECIAL ISSUE

Given the vibrancy of LTI research, and rec-
ognizing the recent theoretical and methodolog-
ical developments within this area of work, our
collection of six empirical research articles seeks
to extend the conversation on language teacher
identity in an era that is characterized by multilin-
gualism, digital learning, and transnational-
ism. Using the globalized classroom of the 21st
century as a starting point, while also acknowl-
edging that learning takes place beyond a bricks
and mortar classroom, this anthology of articles
brings together LTI scholars from Canada, China,
New Zealand, and the United States. The lan-
guage teachers who participated in the respective
research studies are from a range of countries, in-
cluding Bangladesh, China, Egypt, New Zealand,
Uganda, and the United States, while the lan-
guage learner populations were highly multiling-
gual, ranging from K–12 contexts to college and
adult education.

In their article, Christina Higgins and Eva
Ponte explore how teacher identity at the meso
level of a school in Hawaii intersects with the mi-
cro level of classroom practices and the macro
level of policies and politics. Guided by Gee’s
(2001) and McGriff’s (2015) discourse-oriented
framework, they analyze how their focal teachers
made multilingualism a more central component
of their classrooms through multilingual peda-
gogies. The findings of their study revealed that
four types of teacher identities—ethnolinguistic,
institutionally aligned, interculturally aware, and
affinity-based—resulted in these teachers being
more open to multilingual pedagogies than other
teachers. In addition, and following professional
development seminars conducted by both au-
thors, Higgins and Ponte highlight how their col-
laborating teachers engaged in a range of nur-
turing pedagogical practices that included learning
about the languages and cultures of their multilin-
gual students, constructing multilingual and mul-
ticultural classroom spaces, empowering students
as language teachers, and recognizing their bilin-
gual writing practices.

Consistent with the asset-based pedagogical ap-
proach examined in Higgins and Ponte’s arti-
cle, Xuan Zheng, who draws on recent work on
translanguaging and translingualism (Canagaraj-
ah, 2011, 2013), and the notion of identity-as-
pedagogy (Morgan, 2004), investigates what it
means to be an effective translingual teacher, de-
fined as someone who is able to integrate a range
of linguistic resources to meet the needs of diverse
classrooms. Zheng situates her work in a univer-
sity setting, where she worked with International
Teaching Assistants (ITAs), and describes how an
English–Arabic bilingual, Sarah, was able to move
effectively between languages. Sarah’s application
of a translational approach to her teaching proved
beneficial for her students and herself. Based on
these findings, Zheng argues for the need to le-
gitimize the translational teacher identities of ITAs
rather than framing them in deficit non-native En-
lishe speaking teacher terms.

While the focus of Zheng’s article is the
university college composition classroom,
Espen Stranger–Johannessen and Bonny Norton
examine the investment of Ugandan primary
school teachers in a digital initiative (the African
Storybook) that promotes multilingual literacy
for African children. Drawing on Darvin and
Norton’s (2015) model of investment, which
incorporates constructs of identity, capital,
and ideology, they demonstrate how their teacher
participants were able to embrace a wide range of
identities as language teachers, which included
being guides in the classroom; digital cham-
pions in the school; peer instructors in teacher
education institutions; and global citizens in
the community. They focus in particular on one
teacher, Monica, who took on the identity of
an active and creative student-centered guide, mobilizing a range of multimodal strategies to enhance learning opportunities for her students.

In line with the theme of creating inclusive pedagogies, which is explicated in the first three articles, Gary Barkhuizen foregrounds the narrative as a methodology in his contribution. Specifically, he applies the methodological tool of short stories to illustrate how a home tutor who worked with refugees in New Zealand was able to successfully navigate her multiple identities as mother, former nurse trainer, cancer patient, retiree, and English teacher. Emphasizing the importance of understanding the lived sociolinguistic histories of both tutors and students, Barkhuizen underscores how language teacher identities are constructed and negotiated over time and space as teachers shuttle between classrooms and imagined communities, and between those communities and macro levels of society.

Also acknowledging the value of narratives in LTI research, Dominik Wolff and Peter De Costa turn their focus on an MATESOL student called Puja, from Bangladesh, and investigate how she developed her teacher identity over the course of an academic year by learning to manage her emotions. Tapping the expanding interest in teacher emotions (e.g., Acheson et al., 2016; Reis, 2015), their study marks a departure from earlier LTI research that focused on negative emotions. Instead, they highlight how Puja was able to move between two educational systems within Bangladesh and the United States, customizing teaching strategies that were helpful to her students. In using reflexivity as a lens to trace Puja’s identity development, Wolff and De Costa also underline the importance of conducting ethical research by having researchers reflect on their identities, and commenting on how their own relationship with Puja may have influenced their findings.

In line with the call to engage in ethical teacher identity research, Elizabeth Miller, Brian Morgan, and Adriana Medina invoke Foucault’s (1997) notion of ethical self-formation and its adoption in teacher education research by Clarke (2009) to foster understanding of the development of teacher agency and critical identity work. In their case study of an elementary Reading and Language Arts teacher called JC, who worked with both learning disabled and mainstream students within the same classroom, they track the development of JC’s identity over 9 years. They argue that their findings have relevance for enhancing language teachers’ self-awareness as ethical subjects. The development of such reflective, action-oriented identity practices, they add, is imperative in helping language teachers negotiate power relations that arise from policies, institutions, educational discourses, and ideologies. In emphasizing that identity work involves practicing, rather than mastering, ethical self-formation, Miller et al. interrogate narrowly defined notions of “success” and call for an incorporation of critically reflective action projects into language teacher education programs.

**LANGUAGE TEACHER IDENTITY, TRANSDISCIPLINARITY, AND SOCIAL CHANGE**

Viewing teacher identity as dynamic, relational, and constructed (Kayi–Aydar, 2015; Phan, 2008; Miller, 2009), the special issue focuses on the way language teachers engage in meaning-making practices as they harness their own and their students’ multilingual and multimodal repertoires, while negotiating sociocultural institutions and prevailing ideologies. In addressing the micro, meso, and macro dimensions of language learning and teaching, the six contributions provide much insight into the two questions of particular interest to the special issue: In what ways is language teaching “identity work”? and To what extent can a transdisciplinary approach to language learning and teaching offer insight into language teacher identity?

In response to our first question, it is clear from the six contributions that the researchers drew on a range of different theorists in conceptualizing language teacher identity, and this, in turn, influenced what they considered “identity work” on the part of the language teachers they investigated in their diverse studies. Higgins and Ponte, for example, drew on the work of Gee (2001) and McGriff (2015) to illustrate how teacher identities were formed through validating the diverse multilingual repertoires of their students, while Zheng extended Morgan’s (2004) notion of identity-as-pedagogy to demonstrate how a teacher’s translilingual identity can be used strategically to enhance international student learning outcomes. Building on Darvin and Norton’s (2015) model of identity and investment, Stranger–Johannessen and Norton demonstrated how Ugandan primary school teachers were able to reframe what it means to be a reading teacher, while Barkhuizen invoked what he called “Norton’s (2013) classic definition of identity” to underscore how a tutor working with refugee learners was able to successfully create a respectful and constructive pedagogical space. Wolff and De Costa drew on Benesch’s (2012) notion of teacher emotions to examine the
identity development of a Bangladeshi teacher as she dealt with the emotional challenges of attending graduate school in the United States, while Miller et al. applied Foucault's (1997) notion of "ethical self-formation" to emphasize the need for teachers to develop ethical self-awareness as they negotiate the education system.

Collectively, the host of complementary theories adopted by the contributors support the view that a transdisciplinary approach to language teacher identity is both productive and desirable. In particular, the contributors advance the LTI research agenda by taking into consideration (a) how teacher identity intersects with the multilingual (Higgins and Ponte) and translilingual (Zheng) realities of contemporary classrooms, (b) the investment of teachers in developing the semiotic repertoires of learners (Stranger–Johannessen and Norton) and a socially inclusive learning environment (Barkhuizen), and (c) the emotions (Wolff and De Costa) and ethical practices (Miller et al.) of teachers. Central to all articles in this collection is the need to recognize the rich linguistic and personal histories that teachers bring into their interactions with their students in order to achieve good and effective teaching.

While the contributors drew on different theorists, it was intriguing to find, with respect to our first question, that the themes in common across the research projects aligned well with many of the themes extrapolated from the DFG transdisciplinary framework. All contributors, for example, viewed language competencies as dynamic and holistic, and language teaching as both semiotic and situated, characterized by variability and change. For example, Miller et al. track the dramatic changes of their focal teacher, JC, over the span of 9 years, while Stranger–Johannessen and Norton trace how teachers who participated in the African Storybook initiative began to imagine themselves as writers, readers, and teachers of stories. Also subject to change, as examined in Wolff and De Costa’s article, was the conceptualization of a good English teacher as observed by their participant, Puja, as she moved from Bangladesh to the United States. Further, consistent with the dynamic nature of language teaching is the need to develop multimodal and embodied teaching repertoires, as exemplified in the contribution by Higgins and Ponte and the article by Stranger–Johannessen and Norton.

With reference to theme 8, contributors to the special issue join other applied linguists such as Menken and García (2010), who view teachers as agentive professionals, especially in relation to implementing language policies within classrooms. The articles by Wolff and De Costa, and Miller et al., for example, illustrate that teachers can be effective language policy makers in their own right, and it is through exercising their agency that they enact their professional identities in meaningful ways to enhance the learning outcomes of their students. More often than not, these resourceful teachers align their practices with structural pressures as they attempt to bring their imagined identities in line with their practiced identities (Xu, 2012), while also reconciling themselves to societal and cultural demands placed on teachers.

The implication of this finding is that a transdisciplinary approach to language learning and teaching offers much insight into language teacher identity. Of particular significance is the complex relationship between the macro, meso, and micro aspects of language learning and teaching as seen in Miller et al., who highlight how teachers often have to struggle with power relations that press upon educational practices and discourses. Hence, while teacher identity benefits from external sponsorship through professional development opportunities (Higgins and Ponte, Stranger–Johannessen and Norton), equally important is teacher agency (Miller et al., Wolff and De Costa, Zheng) as mediated through innovative pedagogical practices.

Readers of this special issue will undoubtedly find many other synergies between the DFG framework, the MLJ contributions, and their own work. What we hope to accomplish in this special issue is to extend an important ongoing conversation about language teacher identity, transdisciplinarity, and social change. There is much evidence to support the view that language teaching is indeed “identity work,” and that language teaching is enhanced by effective teacher training, both inservice and preservice. But how is success defined? As Miller et al. and Wolff and De Costa remind us, in addition to addressing the cognitive dimensions of learning, language teachers also need to attend to the ethical aspects of learning in order to become successful professionals. In this special issue, we hope to have offered a nuanced analysis of how resourceful language teachers navigate complex identities in classrooms, schools, and communities, with a view to enhancing language learning and teaching.

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REFERENCES


