

Editorial

Identity, assessment, and competency:

On the intersections between language education and teacher education

Shawn Michael Bullock *
University of Cambridge, U.K.

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you, the reader, to this edition of *Teacher Learning and Professional Development*. As I mentioned in my inaugural editorial, the purpose of this journal is to provide a forum for increasing the scope with which we in the academy tend to talk about teacher learning, professional development, and teacher education. I also wish to extend sincere apologies to the authors of the articles in this issue. Although the bulk of their work was complete before this issue came online, changes in my professional life interrupted my usual way of doing things and thus resulted in a delayed publication. I thank them for their patience during a challenging transition and look forward to resuming a regular publication schedule.

Last year I decided that I wanted to devote a special issue of TLPD to exploring some of the intersections between language education and teacher education. A part of this decision came from the turn in my own work in teacher education toward understanding the role of language in learning to teach, first in how metaphors are used in learning to teach science, then technology, then history and, finally, the development of language teachers more generally. It has been a long, arc, over several years and a few publications, for me to realize just how central issues around language education have been to my scholarship and my work as a teacher educator, regardless of what curricular subject or discipline I might have been working in at a given time.

Perhaps one of the reasons I keep returning to language education in my own work is the field's emphasis on identity, both in learning to teach and in learning to teach teachers. Like many, I began exploring identity theory as a result of reading Goffman (1959) and Gee (2000), before fully thinking about this sort of work in relation to my developing interest in self-study of teaching and teacher education practices as a doctoral student. Bedrettin Yazan and Megan Madigan Percy extend research on language teacher identity (LTI) by focusing on what is, in my view the crucible of learning to teach: the practicum (field experience). As Dewey reminded us, though, simply having an experience is not equivalent to learning from an experience and Yazan and Percy shed light on how three new ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) teachers constructed their identities in relation to the practicum. I was particularly struck by the clarity with which their findings illustrate the intersections between emotion and identity and the degree to which the reader is reminded of the fundamental importance of how teacher candidates and their mentor (associate) teachers negotiate authority between them. The data reminded me of my own experience as a teacher candidate; specifically, how important it was that my mentor teacher included my name on her syllabus on the first day of school (and, concurrently, my first day of practicum). The article concludes, in part, with the assertion that language teacher educators need to focus on "how [teacher candidates'] identities serve as a lens and resource when understanding and shaping their practice as well as further learning to teach" (p. 14). Such a focus requires a

* Email: smb215@cam.ac.uk

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collective effort in teacher education to interrogate the dominance of “subject matter knowledge” as knowledge for teaching here in the U.K. or more generalized approaches to professional knowledge often seen in North America. Teacher educators, collectively, need to explore the ways in which any sort of professional knowledge is mediated by the identities of those learning to teach.

Johanna Tigert, Tabitha Kidwell, Christine Budde, Natalia Guzman, Megan Lawyer, and Megan Madigan Peercy contribute an article provocatively titled “It took my knowledge to the limits.” I find that there is much to think about with respect to the idea of “limits” in preservice teacher education, particularly as it seems to me that programs are continually framed with the idea that teachers need to be fully prepared for their roles upon graduation. This idea is manifested most clearly in various standards and accreditations movements—most of which seem to miss out on the fact that teaching is one of the few professions that requires novice practitioners to perform exactly the same duties as experienced members right from the beginning.

It would be a mistake, however, to argue that performance assessments within the standards movements cannot function as learning opportunities for new teachers. Right from the outset, Tigert et al. remind us of the potential of the edTPA (Educative Teacher Performance Assessment, United States of America) while cautioning that their study, as well as others, finds that the edTPA falls short of its stated goals. I particularly appreciated the ways in which Tigert et al. focussed on the experiences of the teacher candidates who were required to undergo edTPA as a part of an M.Ed. certification program (a choice made by leaders at their College of Education). Among several noteworthy findings, I was interested in the ways in which participants reported that even something as seemingly “straightforward” as knowing when to make a video recording of their teaching practice was complicated. The ensuing disconnect between writing the required commentary on the video, and the video itself, seemed to motivate a particular set of learning experiences—though, crucially, not necessarily those articulated by edTPA. On the other hand, participants did articulate that the process of edTPA helped them to link theory and practice in more meaningful ways.

The power of Tigert et al.’s work lies in their deconstruction of the ways edTPA does and does not meet established criteria for performance-based assessment. The nuances of their findings allow them to challenge the assertions that edTPA clearly addresses particular criteria; they point out, for example, that edTPA does not take into account the complexities of video recording a classroom. Most importantly, from my perspective, Tigert et al. argue that there is something important missing from edTPA’s status as an authentic manner of assessing teachers: “The TCs’ comments in our study about the difficulties they experienced unpacking the language in the assessment prompts, rubrics, and resources point to the need to make the language of the EAL edTPA clearer and more aligned with central terminology and concepts used in the field” (p. 31).

Finally, I am pleased to present the first article in TLPD to be published in French. Cécile Sabatier’s article sets a high standard for future articles in French and in English as she takes on the concept of developing “competencies” in French teacher education programs. As we have pointed out in some of our other work, there are significant academic challenges associated with moving between Francophone and Anglophone scholarly traditions. Seemingly straightforward translations of words such as didactics, pedagogy, curriculum, reflection, and, yes, competency open up spaces for significant misunderstandings, as the nuances of how, say, *la didactique* is understood by Anglophones and *curriculum* is understood by Francophones.

Sabatier’s work explores this linguistic and cultural tension within the framework of those learning to teach French within a pre-dominantly English-speaking sociolinguistic environment. At once, she highlights the dual challenge of teaching both the professional knowledge required of future

French teachers and the language of French itself. Upon reading the article, I was reminded that my former supervisor, Tom Russell, taught me early on that teaching future teachers always requires one to attend to *what* was being taught (e.g., the overt curriculum for the lesson) and *how* it was being taught (e.g., the ways in which one teaches future teachers – a lecture on the importance of group learning, for example, does little). Russell also taught me that *how* we teach teachers seems to send more powerful signals than *what* we teach them. Sabatier’s article made me wonder whether the addition of teaching in a non-dominant language to future teachers of said language added yet another layer to the puzzle.

Sabatier grounds her work in the movement towards the professionalization of teachers and said movements’ requirements around the development of professional competencies. I urge those readers unfamiliar with the use of “competency” in Francophone scholarship to not simply use their existing schemas of competency whilst reading the article, but rather to spend the time considering Sabatier’s unpacking of the term. One of the strengths in the article is that provides what most ethnographers would call a rich description of the program in question through use of published documents (articles and web artefacts) about the program. It has always been quite surprising to me that there is quite a paucity of description of teacher education programs even in article presuming to analyse a particular program. Sabatier’s work does not fall into this trap and, instead, works carefully to consider the implications of the explicitly defined objectives of the program (including but not limited to a published list of “dispositions”) both generally and, crucially for this special issue, specifically for the future French teachers in the program. She notes that it took at least 20 years for French teacher education programs to merit particular mention within the stated dispositions, although those working in the program had long thought about the importance of effective communication in French. She concludes that the next major step forward in the program will be to explicitly provide space for developing a professional identity not only as a French teacher but as a speaker of French. The complexities of learning to teach an additional language in said additional language are well-obfuscated by rather empty terms such as “effective communication.” Such terms bely the hard work required to negotiate professional identity as a language teacher.

I hope you enjoy reading this issue of *Teacher Learning and Professional Development*.

Respectfully yours,

Shawn Michael Bullock, Editor, TLPD
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