BOOK REVIEW

Review of *Language teacher development in digital contexts*
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**Language teacher development in digital contexts**
Kayi-Aydar, H., & Reinhardt, J. (Eds.)
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Online platforms are increasingly used as sites for language teacher education (Haukås et al., 2022) and for building and maintaining informal professional communities (Macià & García, 2016). Given the rise of these alternative forms of teacher education, Kayi-Aydar and Reinhardt’s (2022) edited volume explores the ways in which language teacher development occurs within various digital spaces. In the introduction to the volume, the editors recognize the open-ended nature of teacher professional development and the importance of teacher identity work. The introduction also provides an overview of the eight empirical studies included in the collection and the final deductive chapter, which offers five arguments in favor of reconceptualizing online language teacher education. With a focus on the development of language teachers’ identities, this text would be a welcome addition to courses on language teacher education and to seminars on qualitative research methods in applied linguistics.

In Chapter 1, Warren and Ward analyze data from asynchronous online discussions during an online language teacher education course in the United States. Specifically, the researchers use the students’ posts to the class discussion board to investigate the ways pre-service teachers co-construct knowledge of equitable language teaching practices. The authors apply discursive psychology and conversation analysis to their review of study data, finding that pre-service teachers draw upon three membership categories—learner, language user, and teacher—to display their stances toward equitable education for multilingual students. Perhaps the most relatable finding of the study is the disconnect expressed by pre-service teachers between their appreciation of pluralism as a language learner and their recognition of systemic constraints as a language teacher. Ultimately, the authors argue in favor of utilizing asynchronous discussion boards to engage participants in written exchanges around important equity issues.

In Chapter 2, Steadman draws on positioning theory to examine the evolution of two online MA TESOL students’ positions over the span of a 7.5-week course. The focal participants of this comparative case study are Fernando, a relatively experienced English teacher, and Kelly, a U.S. military veteran without classroom teaching experience. In this study, students’ discussion board posts are again the focus of analysis, with the addition of microteaching videos and peer- and teacher-feedback on students’ teaching demonstrations. Steadman also conducted semi-structured interviews with the participants at the beginning and the end of the course. Particularly novel findings center on the ways that Fernando and Kelly, together with their peers, positioned themselves as an experienced teacher (Fernando) and an inexperienced teacher (Kelly) through their moment-to-moment and repeated patterns of language use. Steadman recognizes the importance of
the first discussion board post and the timing of subsequent posts (well in advance of the due date vs. close to the due date) for establishing and building online course identities. Although not explored in depth, a crucial factor in this positioning work seems to have been the publicly provided teacher feedback on students’ microteaching demonstrations, a feature that we have not seen in the online courses that we have led or in which we have been enrolled as learners. A major implication of this study is for teacher educators and course designers to consider discussion board prompts or tasks that would enable teacher-learners to draw on their areas of expertise regardless of their prior teaching experience.

Chapter 3 turns out to be a bit of an anomaly for its focus on only one teacher in an in-person teaching context. Whereas the participants in the other seven chapters are all pre- or in-service teachers of English, the participant in this chapter is a teacher of Portuguese. The analysis examines the way in which a university professor of Portuguese constructs her teaching identity and agency through a vocabulary-based video game, the EndLess LEarner (ELLE). Vitanova et al. explain that through her use of ELLE, the Portuguese professor was able to position herself as a language teacher open to exploring new methodologies, even if she did not identify as a gamer. Not only did the professor’s content-area knowledge allow her to contribute to the game’s development, but also her teaching experience led her to suggest ways that the game could further student collaboration. Finally, the authors end with a call for additional empirical research on gaming and language teacher identity.

In Chapter 4, Dooly analyzes how a group of eight student-teachers negotiated their identities through telecollaboration, also referred to as Virtual Exchange (VE). For the exchange, MA students at a university in the U.S. and undergraduates at a university in Spain met weekly to complete a series of tasks. The data consisted of transcriptions of the synchronous meetings for one of the groups as well as members’ reflection logs. Then, through a micro-analytical approach to the analysis of student interactions during the first, fourth, seventh, and ninth meetings, Dooly found that the participants developed their telecollaborative competencies and tech savviness. Dooly reports that they also developed a sense of community, and starting from their fourth meeting, they positioned themselves as equals and co-learners engaged in the mutual purpose of becoming professional teachers. The author concludes that VE can be used to promote essential teaching skills and positive teacher identity.

In Chapter 5, Kulavuz-Onal analyzes the ways in which Webheads-in-Action (WiA) members construct their collective identity as Webheads via discursive means. WiA, which formed in 2002, is an online community of English language teachers who interact and share resources through an array of online platforms, including email, social media, blogs, and discussion forums. Kulavuz-Onal collected member emails from 2011 and 2019 to examine participants’ linguistic behaviors. In addition, the author conducted in-depth interviews with two long-term Webheads. Kulavuz-Onal draws on discourse analysis, corpus driven approaches, and positioning theory to present a clear picture of the way Webheads utilize particular discursive techniques to reinforce their collective identity. Particularly heartwarming is the author’s description of the volunteer work undertaken by members of this online community to mentor language teachers curious about technology or looking to expand their technical or pedagogical skills. Through the interview data, the author demonstrates how this commitment to sharing knowledge increased members’ self-confidence and their willingness to give back to the WiA community by serving as mentors and taking on leadership roles.

In Chapter 6, Green-Eneix and De Costa explore how language teacher cognition and language teacher emotion develop dialectically within a fully asynchronous online teacher education course. The authors label the research a *netnography*, or an ethnography of the digital artifacts created during the course. In addition to students’ assignments, discussion board prompts, and posts, the data sources included semi-structured interviews with the instructor and class observations. The authors utilize Barkhuizen’s (2016) short story analysis framework to explore the written narratives provided by the course instructor and two of the teacher-learners. In contrast to the setup of the asynchronous discussions described in Chapter 2, these discussions were student-led, with participants taking turns both posing and answering questions. Furthermore, the course instructor shared personal narratives and reflections, which seemed to prompt the
teacher-learners to share their stories and to support one another, and in turn, to grow professionally. Although Green-Eneix and De Costa suggest that online discussion forums can engage teacher-learners in exploring their “professional cognition and emotional experiences” (p. 132) as they learn content, perhaps more practical takeaways lie in the teacher-provided structure for the asynchronous discussions and the fact that the instructor was willing to be a model discussant and contributor.

In Chapter 7, Müller-Hartmann and Hauck investigate the impact of participation in a virtual exchange on student teachers’ digital-pedagogical competence. Specifically, the researchers were interested in the development of participants’ ability to work through a set of online collaborative tasks and to maintain social presence with their virtual counterparts. Eleven student teachers from an MA TESOL program at a Polish university and eight students enrolled in a similar MA program at a German university participated in the exchange; however, the chapter focused solely on the evolution of one four-person exchange. Data sources for this analysis included in-class reflections, instructor feedback via a Google Doc, and oral and text-based within-group chats. Noteworthy findings include participant use of WhatsApp to build rapport and instructor coaching around creating digital spaces that would allow participants to show their strengths. Perhaps the most important contribution of this study for language teachers is the clear directions for setting up a successful virtual exchange and for sequencing meaningful tasks.

In Chapter 8, Karimi and Asadnia examine the effects of an L2 digital writing teacher education course on 11 Iranian EFL teachers’ “technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge” (p. 158). Through the course, teachers explored different digital tools for supporting second language writing, and they selected a favorite tool around which to structure a writing lesson. Based on their analysis of semi-structured interviews and reflective journals, Karimi and Asadnia report that participants developed confidence in selecting digital tools and designing technology-mediated writing tasks. In addition, the teachers gained an awareness of the need to provide students with clear assignment guidelines and to engage with them throughout the writing process. The strength of the chapter likely rests in the authors’ description of how this professional development inspired the teachers to move beyond the confines of their institution (i.e., its limited resources and lack of support for innovation) to create materials and recruit private students.

In the final chapter of the book, Reinhardt calls for a socially-informed approach to online teacher education. The author also proposes five principles for designing online teacher education curricula: (a) recognize that digital language is different from in-person exchanges, (b) acknowledge the unique features of digital language, (c) support the exploration and development of teachers’ techno-identities, (d) encourage teachers to engage with online communities of practice, and (e) recognize that participation is integral to socio-collaborative learning. Reinhardt explains each of these suggestions in detail, and the reflection questions provided at the end of each section are a useful starting point for ongoing professional development.

Kayi-Aydar and Reinhardt’s (2022) edited volume is an excellent resource for graduate students, teachers, and researchers in fields connected to language education. Since the scope of the collection focuses on language teacher professional—and identity—development, this book would be particularly useful for a course on second language teacher education. The empirical studies included in this volume cover a variety of theoretical frameworks (e.g., community of practice, positioning theory, technological-pedagogical content knowledge) and analytic approaches (e.g., interaction analysis, corpus-driven discourse analysis) to the study of language teachers’ development at different stages of their professional careers. In addition, the text has an attractive, clear layout, supported by colorful visuals, which makes the volume particularly engaging. Unfortunately, teachers of languages other than English will not find a description of an online language teacher education program designed specifically for them, and scholars interested in L2 writing development may notice the lack of attention to supporting teacher-learners in writing a discussion board post. Nevertheless, these shortcomings should inspire future research on how digital contexts can support teachers of multiple languages in developing their target language proficiency. Given the connection between teachers’ second language proficiency and their identity (Pennington & Richards, 2016), we look forward to reading future studies on the role of virtual environments in promoting teachers’ linguistic
Kayi-Aydar and Reinhardt successfully argue that there is a need for more studies on how teachers develop their identities in various online contexts. The studies in this book examine a variety of digital contexts and tools (e.g., asynchronous discussion board posts, video games, online communities of practice, and telecollaboration), and we appreciate that the volume includes studies of learners from different parts of the globe. Given the increasing need for research exploring the intersection between language teacher development and online teacher education, we believe this book makes a valuable and timely contribution to the field of applied linguistics. Furthermore, language teachers may see their experiences reflected in the narratives of several of the participants. Qualitative researchers, teacher candidates, and teacher educators will find this text a useful resource in their professional toolbox.

References


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