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# A Discursive Approach to Understanding the Role of Educators' Possible Selves in Widening Students' Participation in Classroom Interaction: Language Teachers' Sense Making as 'Acts of Imagination'

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## **Abstract**

This chapter takes a small-lens approach to widening participation by focusing on opportunities for student participation in classroom discourse and on the role of language educators' possible selves in creating such opportunities. Research into additional language (L2) learning motivation has firmly embraced the construct of possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986), that is, L2 learners' vivid and realistic images of their successful L2 speaking future selves, as one of the most powerful forces that shape their engagement in the language learning process and in intercultural interaction more generally (Dörnyei & Kubanyiova, 2014; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009). Parallel to this research, however, is a growing awareness of the crucial role that the possible selves of educators play in creating learning spaces in which meaningful intercultural encounters are facilitated (Kubanyiova, 2016; Ogawa, 2017). In this chapter, I examine empirical data from a grounded theory ethnographic study of language educators' lives as a basis for building a theoretical and methodological case for a new approach to conceptualizing and researching the concept of possible selves in language education research.

## **Introduction: The Centrality of Possible Selves in the Language Learning-Teaching Relationship**

The argument presented in this chapter is informed by my longstanding research agenda in educational linguistics located at a dynamic interface of additional language learning and teaching. At one side of this relationship, I have studied questions about what constitutes a meaningful language learning opportunity for those with diverse cultural, linguistic and socioeconomic backgrounds and equally diverse needs to learn and use languages in their lives. The theoretical as well as empirical inquiry I have conducted with colleagues and

doctoral researchers has led into research territories as wide-ranging as classroom climate, motivation, vision, group dynamics, willingness to communicate, intercultural communication, language ideologies, dialogic peer interaction, and teacher-led classroom discourse (e.g., Asker, 2012; Do, in progress; Kubanyiova, 2015; Nikolettou, 2017; Ogawa, 2018; Yue, 2014, 2016). At the other end of the language learning-teaching continuum, I have been intrigued by questions about how educators make sense of and transform such language learning opportunities into realities for their students in classrooms around the world and how they can be supported in doing so through teacher education and continuing professional development (Kubanyiova, 2014, 2016; Kubanyiova & Crookes, 2016). It is through probing into this interface and connecting the research concerns of two domains of educational linguistics – second language acquisition (SLA) and language teacher cognition – that my focus on language educators’ possible selves has emerged.

Drawing on a socially-oriented epistemological tradition represented by a participation metaphor (Sfard, 1998) and adopting a discursive orientation to studying cognition (Heritage, 2005), this chapter will discuss intellectual and ethical gains of re-interpreting teachers’ possible selves as ‘acts of imagination’, a conceptualization which highlights the prominent social, emotional and moral dimension of imagined selves in action and offers a productive link between how educators envision their futures and what difference this makes for students’ participation in classroom life, especially for those from linguistically, socio-politically, and socioeconomically marginalized backgrounds.

## **Language Learning Opportunities as Participation in Teacher-Student Interaction**

Research on whole-class teacher–student interaction has shown significant benefits of this type of classroom interaction for language learning opportunities and, by extension, for language learning (Hall, 2010), often exceeding those of peer interaction (Toth, 2008). It has been found, for instance, that one of the most ubiquitous, and traditionally dismissed as restrictive, patterns of teacher-student interaction, Initiation–Response–Feedback (IRF; Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975), in which the teacher initiates an exchange (I), the student responds (R), and the teacher gives feedback (F), can facilitate students’ meaningful participation, public or private (Batstone & Philp, 2013; Ohta, 2001), in classroom discourse.

Its effectiveness, however, depends on the purposes for which IRF is deployed and the way in which its three interactional moves are orchestrated by the teacher to encourage learner involvement in alignment with those purposes (Wells, 1993).

Expanding this argument, Walsh (2006) has proposed a context-sensitive framework to understanding classroom discourse, arguing that different microcontexts of teacher-student interaction (in his words, interactional modes) require different patterns of the teacher's use of language. To support this proposal, he has used classroom discourse data to demonstrate that a tightly controlled IRF pattern with the teacher's extensive use of display questions and evaluative feedback in the third move of the IRF exchange is highly effective in generating learning opportunities if the pedagogical aim is to enable students' language practice around a piece of material or to check and display correct answers. Such interactional microcontexts have been labelled by Walsh (2006) as materials and skills mode and systems mode respectively. In what he labels as classroom context mode, that is, teacher-student interaction with a pedagogical aim to encourage meaning-oriented communication, very different IRF strategies have been found effective. For instance, using the third move of the IRF exchange as an explicit positive evaluation (e.g., "very good") in a meaning-focused interaction has been found to function as conversation closure (Waring, 2008) and thus to hinder students' opportunities to participate in classroom discourse. In contrast, using the same part of IRF to invite students to expand, elaborate, or clarify their contributions, useful opportunities have been shown to arise for students' meaning-making even within the confines of IRF (Hall & Walsh, 2002). This and many other findings generated by a discursive approach to understanding students' language learning, conceptualised as participation in classroom interaction, have highlighted the need to adopt a context-sensitive approach to analysing classroom discourse in order to develop pedagogical principles for maximising students' participation in language learning.

Despite the critical insights that the previously mentioned strand of research has generated, studies from further afield within the broader domain of educational linguistics (Creese, Blackledge, & Takhi, 2014) and certainly within education research more generally (e.g., David, 2010) have shown that pedagogical goals are far from the sole concerns governing classroom interaction and a range of social, political, linguistic, psychological, identity-

relevant and normative dynamics play a significant role in shaping students' access to participation in classroom life. Bringing together insights from across these disciplinary domains is therefore an important research pursuit to understand how widening participation is 'done on the ground' and this chapter addresses one of its multiple facets: the role of educators within these dynamics.

### **Language Teacher Cognition and Possible Selves: From Cognitions to Sense Making**

Language teacher cognition has been referred to in educational linguistics as an umbrella term to encompass research with the broad aim to understand language teachers and teaching (Borg, 2006). Most of its core empirical activity has centred around two primary objectives: firstly, to identify the range and types of cognitions, usually beliefs or knowledge, that language teachers have about different aspects of their work and about different domains of language curriculum and language educational process (e.g., Gatlinton, 1999), and, secondly, to explain the relationship between language teachers' cognitions and practices (e.g., Basturkmen, 2012). Because in this tradition of inquiry teachers' "mental constructs" (Walberg, 1972) are assumed to be unavailable for direct observation (cf. Baker, 2014), they are typically accessed through various elicitation instruments, such as standardized questionnaires containing categorical belief/knowledge statements or carefully developed interview guides and stimulated recall protocols. The data gathered in this way are typically treated as reports of cognitions and often put in contrast with practice. This orientation to conceptualizing and researching cognition is akin to what Sfard (1998), discussing learning, has termed an acquisition metaphor, prompting an image of an educator's mind as a container to be filled with certain entities, that is, cognitions (such as beliefs, knowledge or images of future selves) and of an educator as an acquirer and subsequently a possessor of those cognitions.

In contrast, the epistemological stance that I am taking in this chapter and which has informed my theorising of both language teacher cognition in general and language educators' possible selves in particular, is broadly aligned with a participation-oriented perspective (Sfard, 1998) which shifts the focus from learning as acquisition of discrete units of knowledge to learning as participation in practice. Informed by the lens with a similar

orientation, teacher cognition has been represented by conceptual metaphors such as cognition as gestalt (Korthagen, 2001), situational representations (Clarà, 2014), and patterns of participation (Skott, 2015). All of these, while distinctive in their conceptual rendering of cognition, emphasize teachers' situated, dynamic, and embodied knowing in action and, accordingly, place the study of teacher cognition in settings in which it finds expression: the contexts of teachers' participation in practice. Practices, which include a range of activities of teaching, such as discursive behaviours in teacher-student talk, but also the social practice of a research interview, are understood not as spaces in which educators' reified mental constructs, such as beliefs, knowledge or possible selves, may or may not be applied. Rather, they are seen as "dynamic and evolving outcomes of individual and communal acts of meaning-making" (Skott, 2015, p. 24). This implies that the task of a researcher who intends to understand cognition as meaning making lies not in eliciting cognitions and separating them from practice, but rather in "disentangl[ing] patterns in the teacher's reengagement in other past and present practices in view of the ones that unfold at the instant" (Skott, 2015, p. 24).

In this chapter, I draw on data excerpts from my research with the aim to demonstrate the theoretical, methodological and ethical promise of conceiving of possible selves in a similar vein – that is, through the lens of language teachers' "emergent sense making in action" (Kubanyiova & Feryok, 2015, p. 436). In other words, this chapter's key concern lies less in eliciting self reported accounts of teachers' possible selves as propositions and more in studying how envisioned future selves may or may not be embodied in language educators' present practice and how, if at all, this may make a difference to students' access to learning opportunities in the classroom. There are two contexts of practice that I will pay attention to: the practice of teacher-led classroom discourse and the practice of the teacher's reflection on the classroom events, the latter being deliberately framed as practice rather than a report. In sum, the concept of educators' possible selves does not inform my analytical gaze from the outset, but is brought to the fore as my analytic inquiry into language learning opportunities in classroom discourse progresses.

### **The Research Participant: Iveta**

The example I will use in this chapter comes from a larger project investigating the development of eight English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in Slovakia who volunteered to participate in a yearlong teacher development (TD) programme focused on the principles for creating engaging learning environments in their language classrooms (Kubanyiova, 2016). Here I focus on Iveta (pseudonym), a qualified university-educated English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher at a state secondary school (11–18 year-old students) in Slovakia where EFL was one of the school subjects and was taught up to three times per week in 45-minute lessons. Iveta shared her mother tongue (Slovak) with her students and data, collected over the period of one school year, include: (a) transcripts of audiorecordings and ethnographic field notes from eight lesson observations; (b) five in-depth interviews exploring Iveta’s professional and personal history, her interpretations of the TD course material, and issues arising in lesson observations; (c) ethnographic field notes from five visits to Iveta’s *school* containing additional informal interviews with colleagues and students and descriptive records documenting activities in this setting, and (d) ethnographic field notes from the TD course sessions, capturing what transpired in each session and documenting her and other participants’ interactions, their contributions to the sessions and their engagement with the TD course material.

### **A Discursive Approach within a Grounded Theory Ethnographic Study**

Grounded theory ethnography (Charmaz, 2006; Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001) is a methodological and analytical approach guided by a flexible set of guidelines at the intersection of ethnography and grounded theory. Similar to ethnography, fieldnotes of grounded theory ethnographers record individual and collective actions in situ, contain anecdotes and observations of people, settings, and actions, and pay attention to participants’ perspectives and, particularly crucial for the purposes of this chapter, to their use of language. From the beginning of data collection, however, grounded theory ethnographers foreground the studied phenomenon or process and become progressively focused on significant analytical ideas which can offer a conceptual explanation of the ‘thick descriptions’. According to Charmaz (2006), a grounded theory approach to ethnography can be summarized as follows: “Seek data, describe observed events, answer fundamental questions about what is happening, then develop theoretical categories to understand it” (p.25) and it is this blueprint that has informed my overarching methodological and analytical approach in

the larger study. In addition to the extensive ethnographic field notes from visits to Iveta's school and from the professional development course in which she participated, the two types of data records that primarily inform the argument in this chapter come from two contexts of Iveta's practice: the practice of teacher-student interaction in her language classroom and the practice of her own reflection on both the classroom events and her professional and personal trajectories. The broad purpose of the analysis was to account for the nature of language learning opportunities that existed in Iveta's classroom interaction with her students and to develop a conceptual explanation for those accounts.

Although a substantial part of the grounded theory scholarship has argued for an approach to coding that treats empirical data as reports of phenomena and follows a prescribed set of analytical procedures, my approach is aligned with those, such as Charmaz (2006), who see coding data in grounded theory as a way of "grappl[ing] with what it means" (p. 46), allowing for the adoption of a variable and flexible set of analytical frameworks to account conceptually for those meanings. To this end, and in line with the previously described concerns inherent in the participation metaphor to both language learning and language teacher cognition, I drew on discursive approaches that are well established in my home domain of educational linguistics.

As an initial coding stage, I adopted Walsh's (2006) framework for analysing classroom interaction, which acknowledges the situated nature of classroom discourse and assumes that different interactional patterns are appropriate in different instructional microcontexts. I examined a range of interactional features in Iveta's classroom discourse, such as the previously mentioned IRF patterns, display vs. referential questions, extended teacher turns, feedback, clarification requests, and confirmation checks, and sought to establish the extent to which these adhered to the pedagogic goals of a given interactional microcontext and thus, as is assumed by Walsh, contributed to the construction of learning opportunities. Going deeper in the analysis of teacher-student interaction to understand people's meaning making in action, I adopted some of the principles of conversation analysis which has the "capacity to examine in detail how opportunities for L2 learning arise in interactional activities" (Kasper, 2006, p. 83). Pursuing this discursive approach to analysing language learning opportunities, I was further interested in establishing how participants, and the teacher in particular,



oriented to these interactional situations and what they themselves came to treat as learning opportunities (Kasper, 2004; Waring, 2008). This was achieved by examining how each turn was produced and received by all discourse participants and by paying attention to turn construction, word choice, or pause (ten Have, 2007).

To understand more fully the reasons behind Iveta's acting in particular ways in her classroom interaction with students, I departed from the typical approaches to researching teacher cognitions as participants' reports (cf. Borg, 2012) and examined instead the way in which Iveta's 'cognitions', such as thoughts, interpretations of past experiences, emerging understandings, or future desires were "displayed and responded to (or not) in talk and embodied conduct" (Potter, 2012, p. 576), including in her descriptions of everyday experiences and events (Heritage, 2005), such as her reflections on specific lessons, general language teaching methods, students, relevant educational policies, past personal and professional experiences, and perceived future challenges and desires. Equally, I was interested in understanding how the different settings and power dynamics (e.g., interviews with the researcher, conversations with colleagues, or informal interactions with students) may have shaped what, how, and why Iveta chose to engage with particular ideas, descriptions, and reflections and what light these could shed on her "inherent theories-in-use" (ten Have, 2007, p. 31).

Through this complex but highly complementary set of discursive approaches to data analysis and a progressive focus on significant analytical ideas aided through extensive annotating, memoing, and conceptual borrowings across the fields of educational linguistics, teacher education, and psychology to generate theoretical explanations, the key theme discussed in this chapter was identified: *Iveta's sense making as emergent acts of imagination* involving her desired images of future selves as central to this process. In the next section, I offer a snapshot of one interactional moment in Iveta's classroom with the aim to demonstrate both the nature of this type of analytical inquiry and the conceptual significance of the findings that ensued from it.

## **Iveta's Practice of Creating Language Learning Opportunities in Classroom Interaction**

Excerpt 1 depicts an interactional moment in Iveta's class of fifteen 17-year-old students with an intermediate level of English proficiency. Although the recording does not capture the fullness of Iveta's interactional exchanges with her students and some of the private utterances made by students and responded to by Iveta in the public arena of teacher-student interaction remain inaccessible, this excerpt, nevertheless, represents a faithful account of the general participation patterns underlying classroom interaction in Iveta's lessons across her dataset. Excerpt 1 starts at the beginning of a lesson in which Iveta refers to and endeavours to recap a discussion that took place earlier in the week (not observed for the purposes of the project). Apart from the underlined utterances (which depict speech in the participants' mother tongue), the interaction was conducted in English, that is, the language the students were learning (see the Appendix for full transcription conventions). All names in the transcript are pseudonyms.

### **Excerpt 1: Sample Teacher-Student Interaction in Iveta's Class**

- (1) T: We talked about winning a lottery, winning a lot of money. What were we talking about?
- (2) S1: About people who won a lot of money.
- (3) T: Uhm? About the people who won a lot of money? And we were also talking about what we would do with the money. Right? For example, xxx, xxx, xxx, for example, Zuzana said, even if she's not here today ((T smiles)), she said she would give it to her parents. Do you remember? ((some noise, students comment, they seem to recall it)) You were so surprised, why would you give it to your parents? ((T laughs))
- (4) Xxx
- (5) T: And also ehm Adrian said he would xxx and Pavol would buy a house. Uhm? But what else can you do with a lot of money. Can you think of anything else you can do with a lot of money? (1) You can buy a house? OK? But what else? What else can you do with a lot of money.
- (6) S1: Charity.

- (7) T: Charity. Adrian, ((laughs)) I didn't expect YOU to=  
(8) S1: =xxx ((laughs))  
(9) T: Perfect! This is what I wanted to hear. ((smiles)) I just didn't expect you to say that. ((laughs)) So I'm quite surprised that you are the one to think about it also. (1) OK. What is charity. What do you describe as charity. What is it.  
(10) S1: Poor people.  
(11) T: Uhm? Poor people. What else xxx?  
(12) S1: Ehm xxx children.  
(13) T: Eh?  
(14) S1: xxx children.  
(15) T: Children who are alone? Uhm?  
(16) S1: Homeless.  
(17) T: Homeless people. Uhm? What else. And not just Adrian, OK? ((laughs, others join. Adrian-S1 protests in L1, T laughs)) OK. What else comes to your mind? What do you understand by this word? (3) By charity. What can you understand? What comes to your mind. What picture do you have in mind when you hear charity.  
(18) S2: xxx xxx xxx.  
(19) T: An addition. Uhm?  
(20) S2: xxx.  
(21) T: Uhm? Xxx? (1) ((laughs)) xxx. So who can you help? With your money? (2) Let's give examples. Who can you fund? So poor people? Orphan children? (3)  
(22) S1: xx, xxx.  
(23) T: Uhm, xxx.  
(24) S1: xxx.  
(25) T: So people who are needy? Uhm? So. (1) How can you help? To whom can you xxx and when. So the money can be used for what? (1) For a medical care, for example. For people xxx of what?  
(26) S1: xxx can buy clothes?  
(27) T: Uhm, to buy clothes. Or the charity will buy them some clothes. Uhm? (3) What else? (2) Have you ever thought of being xxx in charity. Has it ever come to your mind? (2)

- Uhm? Who would you give the money. ((it's inaudible, but there probably was a private reply from a student which T overheard because she seems to build on that) Orphan children, aha? (3) What do you think, let's say of xxx, an organisation for people with HIV (2). HIV AIDS. (1) What do you think about it? What is your opinion. (3) Hm? Is it good to help such people? Is it important to help them? Or we're not gonna do anything, because we're not going to help them. (1) I'm just asking about your opinion. It's OK if you think so. I just want to know
- (28) S2: It's important to help them.
- (29) T: Excuse me?
- (30) S2: It's important to help them.
- (31) T: Yes, it is important to help them. Why do you think so? What can we help them, what can we do for them?
- (32) S2: Ehm, we can buy them some pills or xxx to cure them.
- (33) T: Uhm? What else can we do. When talking about these illnesses, why is it important to give money? What else can be done? (1) Not just to help them, but also (2) to xxx. Isn't it, Veronika. ((a student who has not said anything so far))
- (34) S2: xxx.
- (35) T: Uhm? We know we can do this. Xxx. What is important to do.
- (36) S1: Many people around them. Many people who love them. Or. (1) Or (3)
- (37) T: Yes, he's right. They don't need just our money.
- (38) S1: xxx.
- (39) T: But not only our money, but also our attention. (1) Uhm? (1) But how can we also help? That so many people are uneducated.
- (40) S2: To teach some information.
- (41) T: Information. So it is very important for the people to know what can be done for each other. Do you xxx. Xxx. Are you informed (1) enough? Do you think you are informed enough? ((an exchange in Slovak between S1 and T follows, some laughter, some joking, mostly inaudible)) OK. So. Do

- you think that people in Slovakia are well informed about these things.
- (42) Ss: No.
- (43) T: No, you don't think so. And what about countries such as Ukraine? Are people well informed in Ukraine?
- (44) S: No.
- (45) T: What about the (1) medical ehm, is it sufficient? What is sufficient? (1) Sufficient. (3) Do you know that a lot of people suffer from HIV in Ukraine?
- (46) S: No.
- (47) T: We never think about it. There are a lot of people who are infected because of the needle, xxx. Because of xxx. So people really need to be informed. People need to know, xxx, it's very important. (1) Uhm? Ehm, what do you think about (1) ehm, what do you think is the most xxx of the other charities? Which one is the most important? (3)
- (48) S2: Red Cross.
- (49) T: Red Cross. Uhm? What does it do? (2) Everyone? Do you know what Red Cross does? What does this organisation do?
- (50) S1: They are in war, in Africa, xxx, (1) They are in many countries. They are everywhere. (1) If they can.
- (51) T: They are everywhere.
- (52) S1: If they can, they are everywhere.

Although it is beyond the scope of this chapter to offer a close analysis of the lengthy transcript in Excerpt 1 or indeed to explain the larger sociocultural and sociohistorical context in which it is embedded, my aim is to highlight some of the key tendencies in Iveta's discursive practices which triggered my inquiry into her possible selves. To start with, the stretch of discourse shown here appears to resemble a previously mentioned classroom discourse mode, an interactional microcontext whose pedagogical aims include enabling learners to express their opinions or share experiences, activating their mental schemata, establishing a context, or promoting oral fluency practice (cf. Walsh, 2006). Iveta asks numerous what appear to be genuine questions (e.g. turn 5, 21, 25), gives feedback on content rather than language forms (31), asks clarification questions (13, 29), and encourages further generation of students' ideas (13, 15, 17), all of which appear to match the pedagogic goals of

classroom discourse mode and could therefore be treated as evidence of meaningful language learning opportunities.

However, a closer scrutiny of the unfolding moment-by-moment interaction in this segment reveals intriguing insights into Iveta's orientation to students' participation, not only suggesting that her goals for this exchange may differ from the meaning-oriented pedagogical goals, but also demonstrating rather different consequences for the nature of students' language learning opportunities. The first feature worth noticing concerns the frequency and distribution of students' contributions. It is clear that with the exception of a couple of longer than usual teacher turns (27, 47), student turns constitute a frequent feature of this stretch of discourse. The transcript makes it equally obvious, however, that most of them come from S1 (Adrian) who typically offers brief, one-word responses to Iveta's questions and sometimes engages in playful and at times off-topic exchanges with Iveta (7-9, 17), indicating a warm personal rapport. After Iveta's brief intervention in turn 17, the second participant, S2 (Pavol), makes a string of interactional contributions (18, 20, 28, 30, 34, 40, 48), most of which appear linguistically and topically more complex than those of S1. Although in addition to these two male students' participation in classroom talk, Iveta also addresses a third female student (Veronika, turn 33), this appears to be a token reference rather than genuine invitation, as it is not followed up any further, and, consequently, does not translate into Veronika's public participation in the interactional exchange. In sum, Iveta's interactional attention seems to be focused solely on these two students, also signalled in one of her opening turns (5): She explicitly, albeit not exclusively (see turn 3), draws on these two students' previous lesson's contributions as a way of creating an interactional context for this lesson's discussion.

The second feature worth noting is the topic, driven by the coursebook material, which suggests potential for students' deep intellectual and emotional engagement in meaning making, one of the core features of interaction in classroom discourse mode. A closer examination of Iveta's discursive treatment of students' contributions shows some engagement with the ideas they generated (25, 31, 37, 39, 41) and her frequent acknowledgement tactics (Uhm?) sometimes work as a way of encouraging elaboration of students' ideas (15). Overall, however, the transcript gives an overwhelming sense that the

primary focus of the exchange rests on the generation of alternative ideas in a list-like format, possibly with a purpose to arrive at a specific final idea. This hunch is corroborated by Iveta's deployment of "Uhm?", which effectively works as an evaluation strategy, especially when followed by repetition of the student utterance and a subsequent invitation (e.g. "What else?") to contribute yet another idea (11, 17, 27). Coupled with Iveta's minimal engagement with the content of what the students say (though some effort to the contrary is obvious in turns 36-39) and an occasionally unexpected turn in the flow of interaction triggered by Iveta's own suggestions (27, 39, 43), the teacher's frequent invitation turns do not appear to be issued with the aim of enabling students to express their ideas but instead resemble opportunities to display knowledge and to arrive at some sort of a 'correct answer' ("Perfect! This is what I wanted to hear"; turn 9).

Without claiming to do justice to the richness of the interaction in Excerpt 1, this analysis suggests that the way in which Iveta deploys language in these interactional exchanges is not aimed at deepening and certainly not widening students' participation in meaning-making. It is true that some of the interactional features identified earlier may on surface correspond with those inherent in meaning-focused interaction. However, these goals seem to be in tension with what Iveta is actually doing, pointing to potentially significant pedagogical consequences as well as ethical ramifications for what kinds of linguistic practices are available to whom in Iveta's classroom.

### **Iveta's Practice of Sense Making in a Research Interview**

Excerpt 2 portrays a specific segment from a longer interview conducted after the observed lesson, in which Iveta reflects on the lesson shown in Excerpt 1. It was by putting Iveta's classroom observation data in a relationship with her own reflections on it that I, as a researcher, began to sense that the tensions in Iveta's pedagogical goals in her classroom interactions might reflect a more pervasive and conceptually significant tendency in her overall dataset and require a full analytical attention if I were to understand wider consequences of Iveta's practice on language learning opportunities for her students.

## Excerpt 2: *Iveta's* Interview Reflections on the Observed Lesson

And another aim I had was that apart from getting them interested in what they were about to listen to, and, basically introduce the topic, I wanted to know their opinions, wanted to know what they thought about it, so to make them think about it. And you could see it for yourself, they would do this, they would do that, but it occurred to no one that someone might actually need the money. Maybe it will force them to think about it a bit at home too – because it's not just about teaching them English. It's about getting them to understand, in that lesson, something human, natural things, so who knows, maybe they will start to be interested, they weren't aware of a single charity. When you think about it – it's awful – they don't know a single charity; yes, Markiza [name of commercial tv channel with a charity attached to it], that's it. They don't know, but I think it's important. At least they have these articles in the coursebook, they can talk about it a little, maybe they become interested in it.

It is, once again, impossible to do full justice to the many layers of *Iveta's* practice of sense making in this interview excerpt, so I will restrict this discussion to the key insight for the purposes of this chapter. In juxtaposition with the transcript of the lesson (Excerpt 1) to which *Iveta* explicitly refers in this account, her reflection lays bare critical discrepancies between what objectively transpired and her own rationalisation of it in this research interview. How she positions students in her account (“but it occurred to no one that someone might actually need the money”, “they don't know”, “they couldn't name a single charity”) is particularly intriguing in relation to what actually transpired in the observed lesson. As Excerpt 1 shows, the suggestion to give the winning money to a good cause (“charity” –turn 6) was offered by the student and those students with the chance to participate in the public classroom discourse not only demonstrated willingness to engage with the topic (even if, as discussed previously, such efforts may not have been fully followed up by *Iveta*), but there is evidence of their knowledge of at least one specific charity (the “Red Cross”, 48; interestingly, the charity that *Iveta* mentions, Markiza, was not captured in the actual transcript, even though the possibility that the students indeed offered it as part of a private contribution remains) and general awareness of what charities do in different parts of the world (32, 36, 40, 48-52). These tensions suggest that *Iveta's* practice of sense making in this



research interview may be done not from the perspective of actual classroom events, but rather from a vantage point of the imagined and desired; in other words, the two sets of data offer glimpses into how Iveta desires to be seen by the students, the researcher, and herself. It is here that the construct of possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986) as one's vision of their desired future selves, albeit not as separate from Iveta's present sense making but as embodied in it, began to emerge as conceptually relevant.

### **Iveta's Desired Future Selves as 'Emergent Acts of Imagination'**

The insight from the examination of transcripts and fieldnotes across the eight observed lessons and especially in conjunction with Iveta's reflections on them led to a deeper analytical appreciation of Iveta's practices which might have been puzzling when viewed in isolation, but which revealed the previously hidden meanings when examined in the view of the emerging theme of desired future selves. For instance, almost all narrative accounts of her past experiences, including memorable episodes from her language learning history, language teaching episodes or more general life experiences, foregrounded her position as someone who is "the best", "a star", "appreciated", someone who "made [people's] day" or who "changed [their] lives", as illustrated in the two excerpts below, one recounting her early language learning experience and the other referring to her university course.

#### *Excerpt 3: Iveta's Interview Reflection on Past Language Learning Experience*

...in year one in high school, they put me in the group of beginners, because I wanted it – but in fact, I wasn't of course a beginner, I was the best in the group. Oh, I was a star! I read the textbook ahead of lessons, so that I could be the best.

#### *Excerpt 4: Iveta's Interview Reflection on her University Course*

One of our classmates [in a university class] asked in the middle of the course, "Excuse me, what are those (inaudible; linguistic term)?" And you can imagine [the lecturer], she was absolutely horrified! And then she told him angrily, "Arrange private classes with Iveta!" So that was it. I have to thank her that I am good at English. That she... Maybe she doesn't even know how much she did for me.

While there is no doubt that these and similar accounts of past events capture Iveta's lived experiences, my fieldnotes and research journal entries also document evidence of frequent tensions, contradictions, implausibility and exaggeration that forced me to look beyond what Iveta was saying and try and understand what she was doing in her narratives (Holstein & Gubrium, 2008). Excerpt 5 illustrates this shift. It comes from the last interview in which I asked Iveta, sensing that teaching in her school was not something she had envisaged as her long-term career, what it was about her job that made her tick.

*EXCERPT 5: Iveta's Interview Reflection on What Makes Her Tick*

IVETA: It's this inner feeling that (2) I need to see it. The concrete outcome of my work.

INTERVIEWER: And do you see it here, in teaching?

IVETA: Hmm. (4) Difficult to say. Once I had that feeling when there was not much to do during the last classes of the school year with kids. And they said to me, "we're going to write what we think of you, would you like us to do that?" They said they'd done the same thing for their class teacher and they also wanted to do it for me. I said, "OK?" And they like "but we're not gonna sign our names or anything" and I like "OK?" Oh, can you imagine how I cried over those sheets of feedback! Like "Because of you I started to learn English." "Because of you I will study hard." And "I love you." Yes, you heard. "I love you."

I have no way of ascertaining whether the account she offers describes a past or as-yet-unrealized event and the shift in my analytical gaze does not ask of me to make this distinction. Instead, understanding that what Iveta is doing, be it in her classroom or in conversations with the researcher, is part of her engagement in emerging acts of imagination allows a significant conceptual, methodological and ethical insight: These acts are not imaginary in the sense of fabricated, untrue, and therefore somehow unreliable; instead they give us glimpses into Iveta's imaginative accounts of her deeply desired future self as someone who is valued, appreciated and loved. They may be as-yet-unrealized, but this does

not mean they are separate from the here-and-now of Iveta's sense making; they are always embodied in it. And finally, and crucially, these acts of imagination have factual consequences for students' language learning opportunities. Iveta's data show that who gets to participate, when and how may be linked more strongly to the teacher's goal to fulfil her deeply held desire to be appreciated than to the pedagogical goals of facilitating language learning opportunities in classroom discourse.

### **Conclusion: Intellectual gains of studying possible selves as participation in practice**

Locating the study of possible selves in practice through the participation metaphor offers a number of opportunities for studying HE contexts: First, taking an explicitly discursive approach helps us to reaffirm the power of the construct in aiding our understanding of people's actual investment in moment-to-moment practices in classrooms and communities. The empirical focus on one language educator's practice in this chapter has pointed to a significant role of educators' possible selves as emergent acts of imagination in shaping the patterns of students' participation in classroom interaction. Pursuing research on possible selves from this epistemological vantage point offers a significant mileage for advancing broader educational agendas, such as widening participation, for it can shed light on how access to learning is enabled (or not) in the actual moment of educational action and what role educators' acts of imagination play in it.

Secondly, adopting an ethnographic lens to researching possible selves fosters a closer appreciation of connections between the psychological construct of possible selves and the sociological realities which place significant constraints on what individuals are able to envisage as possible. Iveta's desired image of herself as language educator did not appear in a vacuum, even if a full account of those realities was beyond the scope of this chapter (but see Kubanyiova, 2016). Indeed the models of practice in the wider educational and socio-political context that Iveta had been exposed to as a learner, a student teacher, and an educator offered limited alternatives to the images that fuelled her educational action. Acknowledging this is crucial. At the same time, however, the approach adopted in this study compels us to ponder ways in which Iveta's acts of imagination may have been constraining her own students'

sense of what future images were available and to whom. Understanding the interface of psychological, sociological and political dimensions of possible selves by adopting an ethnographic approach may therefore be a critical next step in advancing research on this construct.

And finally, pursuing the methodological and analytical principles of grounded theory has the capacity to open up the construct of possible selves to new theoretical insights. This study has shown that educators' possible selves may well have an inherent moral dimension; that is, they are likely to be inextricably linked with teachers' (and society's) broader values concerning the roles and tasks of language educators and education in general. A significant implication here is that if the desire to facilitate meaningful participation of students from marginalized backgrounds is not at the core of how educators envision themselves in their teaching worlds, they are unlikely to attune to and act upon such opportunities when they arise in the classroom and beyond. How teacher education programmes and wider cultural practices can foster educators' development of possible selves that are conducive to all students' learning remains central to ongoing research inquiry.



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## Appendix: Transcription Conventions

T	teacher
S1, S2	identified student
Ss	several students at once
xxx	unintelligible speech
<u>even if she's not here today</u>	utterance in Slovak (the teacher's and students' mother tongue)
.	falling intonation
?	rising intonation
!	exclamation
(.)	pause, less than a second
(3)	pause in seconds
(( ))	field notes, transcriber's comments
=	no gap between turns
YOU	especially loud and emphatic
Adrian, Pavol, Veronika	named students (pseudonyms)

Word count (incl. abstract, references and appendix) 7,765

### Words for index:

Participation metaphor of learning

Acquisition metaphor of learning

Language teacher cognition

SLA (second language acquisition)

Teacher cognition vs. cognitions

Educators' possible selves

Grounded theory ethnography

Teacher-student interaction

IRF (Interaction-Response-Feedback)

L2 (additional language)

EFL (English as a Foreign Language)

Slovakia

**Word count: 7,479**