

Utah State University

DigitalCommons@USU

World Languages and Cultures Faculty
Publications

World Languages and Cultures

7-21-2023

Exploring the Transformative Impact of Language Teachers' Autoethnographies in a Teacher Education Course

Ekaterina Arshavskaya

Utah State University, ekaterina.a@usu.edu

Nefi Reyes de la Paz

University of Notre Dame

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/wlc_facpub



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Arshavskaya, E., & Reyes de la Paz, N. (2023). Exploring the transformative impact of language teachers' autoethnographies in a teacher education course. *InSight: A Journal of Scholarly Teaching*, 18, 26-40. <https://doi.org/10.46504/18202302ar>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the World Languages and Cultures at DigitalCommons@USU. It has been accepted for inclusion in World Languages and Cultures Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@USU. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@usu.edu.



**Exploring the Transformative Impact of Language Teachers'
Autoethnographies in a Teacher Education Course**

Ekaterina Arshavskaya, PhD
Associate Professor, World Languages and Cultures Department
Utah State University

Nefi Reyes de la Paz, MA
Iberian and Latin American Studies
University of Notre Dame

Abstract. Benefits of teachers' autoethnographies are well-documented in current research. This study adds to the research literature by directly analyzing how the insights gained through writing autoethnographic essays may impact second language (L2) teachers' classrooms. To collect the data, the study incorporated autoethnographic essays into a graduate course for language teachers and asked the participating teachers to design lessons that reflected the insights they gained about themselves through this project. Adopting the transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1978, 1997) that scaffolds teachers' self-reflection, this paper explores the transformative potential of teachers' autoethnographies through tracking qualitative changes in the teachers' narratives and practice across one academic semester. The results show that as a learning tool, autoethnographies can facilitate teachers' developing more empowering teaching identities and have a potential for enhancing their teaching practices. The paper adds empirical evidence and a new perspective in the investigation of teacher learning. It concludes with pedagogical and research implications for L2 teacher education.

Autoethnography is viewed as an effective and valid research method and a pedagogical tool in teacher education by an increasing number of researchers (Hanci-Azizoğlu, 2018). Ellis et al. (2011) explain that "autoethnographers view research and writing as socially-just acts; rather than a preoccupation with accuracy, the goal is to produce analytical, accessible texts that change us and the world we live in for the better" (para. 40). Research studies showed insights into the impact of using autoethnographies on constructing teaching identities (Canagarajah, 2012; Solano-Campos, 2014; Yazan, 2019a), on promoting teachers' creative writing abilities (Hanci-Azizoğlu, 2018), and on increasing second language (L2) teacher educators' reflexivity (Park, 2014). However, to the best of our knowledge, no research investigated the impact of teachers' engagement with autoethnographies on their practice.

The study takes a case study approach (Yin, 2003) and focuses on the insights gained by three language teachers engaging with autoethnographic essays in a masters-level teacher education program. The study adopts the theory of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1978, 1997) to explore the transformative potential of teachers' autoethnographies. The theory explains how adult learning occurs and how to make it more effective in formal educational settings. Our purpose is not merely to report a case of successful teachers' learning through the lens of the adult learning theory, but to explore the mechanisms that make such experiences transformative (Whitney, 2008).

The study first overviews the transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1978, 1997) and the use of autoethnography in teacher education research and practice. Next, in presenting the analysis, special attention is paid to teachers' "authoring their own narratives ... articulating their identities to themselves, understanding the situatedness of their identities in sociocultural contexts, and exercising agency in the contours of their identity formation" (Yazan, 2019b, p. 4). Our analysis is grounded in not only tracing qualitative changes in teachers' narratives but also exploring the kinds of changes teachers choose to implement (or not) into their practice. In conclusion, implications for teacher educators and limitations concerning the length, scope of the study and its main sources are discussed.

Theoretical Background

Theory of Transformative Learning

The theory of transformative learning (first developed by Mezirow, 1978) posits that "a defining condition of being human is that we have to understand the meaning of our experience" and that "facilitating such understanding is the cardinal goal of adult education" (Mezirow, 1997, p. 5). Mezirow (1997) argues that transformative learning is essential to adult learners and defines it as "the process of effecting change in a frame of reference" (p. 5). By a frame of reference, Mezirow (1997, p. 5) means the assumptions, feelings, values, and concepts that we, as adults, develop over time and use in order to understand our experiences. Oftentimes, adults face situations that they may not resolve through simply learning more about such situations or through applying some copying skills. Some situations challenge us to re-examine our assumptions about self and the world and to develop a new frame of reference. In order for learning to become transformative, "learners move toward a frame of reference that is more inclusive, discriminating, self-reflective, and integrative of experience" (Mezirow, 1997, p. 5). Otherwise, an experience is ignored.

Mezirow (1978, 1991) proposes that the process of transformative learning includes the following stages:

1. *A disorienting internal dilemma caused by a significant external event that cannot be solved by past approaches and needs different solutions;*
2. *Self-examination of beliefs and a critical assessment of assumptions about self and the world;*
3. *Exploration of new roles, relations, and identities, i.e., re-framing the experience;*
4. *Re-integration, i.e., trying new roles, gaining confidence, and living in a new frame.*

As an illustration of these stages, consider an example of teacher learning. Whitney (2008) reports how a K-12 English teacher who does not have extensive experience as a writer starts to have a sense of being a hypocrite in the classroom as he begins to teach his students writing. As the teacher engages in a writing workshop for teachers, he starts to see himself as a writer. This new way of seeing himself (i.e., re-framing) also leads to a new way of being in the classroom. Moreover, it extends to his life outside the classroom as he experiments with creative writing by writing a poem to a friend. Whitney (2008) concludes that through the lens of transformative learning

theory, we shift "our focus from documenting what behaviors teachers display to understanding why those actions happen" (p. 179). In other words, we "gain insight both into how the learning occurs in the first place ... and into how the learning is then enacted in classroom practice" (Whitney, 2008, p. 179).

As an expansion of these findings, the current study also investigates teachers' learning experiences through the transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1978), but triangulates data from teachers' autoethnographies and other course projects, including classroom teaching, to explore the transformative potential of teachers' autoethnographic essays. The inclusion of classroom teaching is important since it allows us to see whether and to what extent re-integration, i.e., living in a new frame, occurs. While our study is limited in terms of analyzing one of the teachers' lessons, it can still demonstrate the potential of autoethnographies for impacting teachers' practice.

Autoethnography

Following the epistemological shift in the social sciences in the 1980s, the autoethnography has become one of the widely accepted research "approaches that acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher's influence on research, rather than hiding from these matters or assuming they don't exist" (Ellis et al., 2011, para. 3). Ellis and Bochner (2000) define autoethnographies as "autobiographies that self-consciously explore the interplay of the introspective, personally engaged self with cultural descriptions mediated through language, history, and ethnographic explanation" (p. 742, as cited in Park, 2014, p. 178). Canagarajah (2012) further explains:

There is agency in the fact that one can articulate one's own experiences, rather than letting others represent them. This is especially important for members of marginalized communities who lack the resources and publishing outlets to articulate their knowledge and interests. Their knowledge is often presented by outsiders according to those outsiders' perspectives. (p. 262)

Yazan (2019a) concurs that the act of writing an autoethnography is "a concentrated and profound experience of identity negotiation" (p. 41). While sharing one's personal story may expose certain vulnerabilities of the writer, self-authored accounts about one's lived experiences and significant events that impacted one's life trajectory can also engage readers in self-reflexive deliberations about self and relations with others in the backdrop of sociohistorical contexts (Spry, 2001; Yazan, 2019a). At the same time, Yazan (2019a) notes that while "engaging in the construction of autoethnography, authors experience tensions between their different identities, which may or may not be resolved during or after the writing process" (p. 41).

In the context of L2 teacher education, teacher-authored autoethnographies have become important tools for understanding, negotiating, and constructing teacher identities (Yazan, 2019a, p. 35). Drawing on these properties of autoethnographic narratives, Hancı-Azizoğlu (2018) investigated how her language learning experiences both hindered and enabled her in using her creative capacity in L2. While the nature of the L2 classes she took as a student in her home country was drill-based and robotic, an exercise in writing a creative narrative during her graduate studies allowed her to

employ her creative abilities in L2. Reflecting on both these experiences, the multilingual writer was able to construct a new identity of a more advanced and sophisticated writer.

Autoethnographies allow teachers to engage in important identity work (Kanno & Stuart, 2011; Varghese et al., 2005, 2016). Identity development is a key project learners engage in as they participate in a new practice (Lave, 1996). Identity development is a social process, and it cannot be equaled to the acquisition of a skill set or some knowledge (Kanno & Stuart, 2011; Lave, 1996). Similarly, pre-service and beginning teachers grapple with the necessity to define themselves professionally, and therefore, teacher identity formation and development have become viewed as some of the center concepts for L2 teacher education programs by an increasing number of scholars (Kanno & Stuart, 2011; Varghese et al., 2016; Yazan, 2019c). One of the goals of the current study is to explore the transformative potential of teachers' autoethnographies to understand, to negotiate and to construct more empowering teaching identities.

Methods

Study Design

The study pursued the following research questions:

1. How do pre-service language teachers learn through their engagement in writing autoethnographies in a graduate course for L2 teachers?
2. What impact, if any, does the autoethnography have on the participating teachers' practice throughout the course?

Adopting qualitative methods most commonly accepted for case studies (Yin, 2003), the study aimed: 1. to "understand the nature or the meaning of the experience" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 11) of the participating language teachers and 2. "to offer insight, enhance understanding, and provide a meaningful guide for action" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 12). The case study approach was selected since "the case study approach allows in-depth, multi-faceted explorations of complex issues in their real-life settings" (Crowe et al., 2011, para. 1). The data were analyzed using content analysis techniques (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Data Collection and Analysis

The current study draws on the following data sources collected during a one-semester graduate course on teaching culture in L2 classes. These sources also constituted some of the required assignments in the same course:

- Teachers' autoethnographies. *The participating teachers wrote about a specific event or an experience that influenced who they are as teachers today. They could choose to focus on the sociocultural and/or linguistic aspects of their identities.*
- Researcher's interpretive memos. *One of the researchers who also served as the instructor of the course for language teachers made interpretive memos*

during the data collection process, and these memos served as a basis for interpreting the data.

- Teachers' reflections on the ethnographic interviews they conducted as part of the same course. *The participating teachers were instructed to interview either a second language teacher who came to teach in the U.S. or a U.S. teacher who had taught abroad and to focus on the cross-cultural experiences that impacted this teacher's professional identity. This assignment was offered in order to help teachers better understand others' and their own teaching identities.*
- Teachers' lesson plans. *The participating teachers were asked to develop and to teach a lesson that reflected their insights about themselves that they had gained through engaging with the autoethnographic narratives.*
- Post-lesson reflections and course reflections. *The teachers were asked to write post-lesson reflections and reflections on the course with a focus on autoethnographic essays.*

The multiple sources of data collected for this project helped establish triangulation and thus add to the credibility and the validity of the research analysis and findings.

The data were analyzed using content analysis techniques and the constant comparison method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Miles & Huberman, 1994). All the data sources were read and re-read multiple times in order to find recurrent themes by two co-researchers. The themes were based on participants' own words rather than researchers' a priori categories. The lead researcher discussed the themes with their explanations with the other co-researcher based on the first pass of the data. The other co-researcher coded all the data following this discussion. The interrater reliability of the two raters for the responses equaled 90%. The themes were then mapped on the theory of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1978, 1991). When mismatches occurred, alternative explanations were sought in the data. The theory of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1978, 1991) was selected on the basis of previous research into adult and teacher learning (e.g., Whitney, 2008). The themes and descriptions are presented in the Results section.

Settings and Participants

At the time of the data collection, all the participating teachers were enrolled in a masters-level program in L2 teaching in a U.S. public land-grant research university. The selection of the three designated participants for this study allowed us to show diversity in learning-to-teach experiences in a graduate program.

The course on teaching culture in L2 classes addressed various topics and projects, including teacher and student identities, ethnography and autoethnography, ethnographic interviews, and others. Some of the required readings included the autoethnographic works by Canagarajah (2012), Solano-Campos (2014), and Yazan (2019a). All the participating teachers agreed to participate in the study and were given pseudonyms to protect their privacy: Leah, Trevor, and Minah, respectively. All the participants were native speakers of English with various years of teaching experience. Leah was an experienced (over 20 years) K-12 teacher of the American Sign Language

(ASL). Trevor taught EFL in Europe and ESL in EAP contexts in the U.S. (over 10 years). Minah was a heritage speaker of Mandarin Chinese and a novice L2 college instructor.

Results

The following themes were identified in the collected data:

1. Participating teachers sought more empowering teaching identities after reporting to have overcome a certain disorienting dilemma.
2. Participating teachers enhanced their teaching practices or vocalized an intent to pursue changes (based on the lesson they designed as part of the course).

In what follows, the three teachers' developmental trajectories seen through the transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1978, 1991) are presented. Data from autoethnographies, ethnographic interviews, lesson plans, and post-lesson and course reflections are shown to illustrate the four stages of the transformative learning process: the dilemma, the re-examination of self and beliefs, the re-framing, and the re-integration.

Leah: "The idea of negotiability has changed a lot of how I view my identity as a Hearing ASL teacher."

Our analysis shows that Leah encountered a *disorienting dilemma* after learning about other people's perceptions that a hearing person cannot teach ASL. These perceptions made her *question her own professional identity* and *re-examine her beliefs about herself and the world*. In her autoethnography, Leah recalled:

Excerpt 1. Leah's autoethnography.

After graduation, things began to change. I started interacting with more members of the Deaf community across the country and realized that I was not welcome in many circles within the community. I was told by other professionals that hearing people have no right to teach Deaf children or to teach ASL. ... I questioned whether I belonged in the community or if I needed to change my course.¹

As the semester unfolded, Leah was able to relate to a similar identity crisis described in one of the required course readings (Canagarajah, 2012). Remarkably, Leah adopted some of the concepts (negotiability) from the assigned reading into her own narrative in order to *re-frame her lived experience* and to *re-define who she was as a teacher*.

Excerpt 2. Leah's course reflection.

Canagarajah went on to describe his discovery of the idea of negotiability, which acknowledges that multiple identities and community memberships could be a benefit instead of a hindrance. The idea of negotiability has changed a lot of how I view my identity as a Hearing ASL teacher.

¹ Here and hereafter, the text in bold reflects the more important parts of the data.

Near the end of the semester, Leah writes about reconciling her two conflicting identities, i.e., that of a hearing person and that of the ASL teacher, and seeing herself as a bridge between these two worlds. In Leah's own words, "... teachers have to work as bridges from one culture to another and help students know how to build those bridges themselves so they can participate successfully in the Deaf community" (Leah's course reflection). Leah finds additional support for her new, more empowering teaching identity in the words and experiences of a language teacher from France whom she interviewed for the purposes of the assigned ethnographic interview. She notes that "when she [the teacher she interviewed] began using the new [American] strategies and combining them with some of her strategies from France, she found great success" (Leah's reflection on the ethnographic interview).

Leah's lesson developed as part of this project also addressed the issue of identity, especially relating to a hearing person's identity in a non-hearing world. As a rationale, Leah stressed the importance of teaching her students the value of embracing one's conflicting identities:

Excerpt 3. Leah's post-lesson reflection.

We also often feel the need to belong firmly in one camp or another; to apply a label of being Deaf or Hearing instead of being somewhere in the middle. The truth is that there are very few things in our lives that are fully black or white. Our lives are full of nuanced grays that fit anywhere along the spectrum. But identity labels are rarely in the form of "kind of Hearing" or "sort of a Christian" or "a semi-Democrat." Labels of identity are frequently complete and divisive from one group to another.

In this lesson, Leah used a poem discussing a person's conflicting identities. The poem said:

... the real power comes when I choose both worlds and accept myself even though others may not. With this acceptance I can express how I really feel and find my place within myself so when I go out into the world, I don't need [a] mask ... because I'm me. (Ence, 2018)

In Leah's case, we witness her both experiencing and overcoming a certain *disorienting dilemma* through searching for and constructing a more empowering professional identity. Moreover, we see how Leah did not only *re-frame her past experience*, but also *enacted her new perspective* by teaching her students the value of embracing one's multifaceted identity (*living in a new frame*). In her own words, "I want to be the teacher whose proverbial door to learning is always open. I always want to strive to improve and never shut the door on new ideas or new ways I can meet my students' needs more effectively" (Leah's reflection on the ethnographic interview). While our analysis of practice is based on one of the many lessons Leah taught throughout the semester, we see here the potential of an autoethnography and perhaps other projects offered as part of the course to impact her practice.

Trevor: "I have integrated this experience into my identity as a second language teacher..."

For Trevor, an ESL teacher, a *disorienting event* took place during his experience as a teaching assistant abroad. While the mentor teacher did not praise Trevor's use of a

game in his class, the students appreciated Trevor's infusing a more traditional test-oriented curriculum with a game-based approach. This event left Trevor feeling unsure about the use of a game-based approach in language teaching.

In his autoethnography, Trevor adopts *a new frame of seeing this experience*. Similar to the other participating teachers, Trevor uses the course readings (the work by Canagarajah, 2012) to *re-frame this past experience*, as the excerpt below illustrates.

Excerpt 4. Trevor's autoethnography.

I have integrated this experience into my identity as a second language teacher with the premise that I can establish a collective sense of belonging in the classroom by incorporating game-like activities. ... This goal requires that I pursue "a dialogical engagement with institutions and discourses as a path to a stronger professional identity, sensitive to [my] shaping in different communities" (Canagarajah, 2012, p. 277).

Trevor's lesson designed as part of this project was developed around a series of game-based activities in the backdrop of cultural and intercultural contexts. In other words, Trevor *re-integrates his past experience into a new teaching identity and his classroom*:

Excerpt 5. Trevor's post-lesson reflection.

In conclusion, provided that students understand the relevance to their L2-related goals, game-based communicative activities can increase students' willingness to participate in class and engage their peers in conversation in the target language. Such activities should center on language and language use, and can serve as a means to teach culturally significant concepts that enhance intercultural communicative competence.

Trevor also used the assigned ethnographic interview as a way to investigate one of his students' perceptions of the lesson. This student, who was also an aspiring language teacher from a different country, expressed a positive evaluation of the game-based approach Trevor had used.

Overall, similarly to Leah, Trevor resolves *the disorienting dilemma* through adopting *a new frame of seeing* the same event and *re-integrates* this past experience into his new, more inclusive teaching identity. Trevor's engagement with the autoethnographic narrative facilitates his construction of a new, more empowering teaching identity.

Minah: "I still struggle with how I should teach them, and to what extent should I correct them?"

The analysis shows that for Minah, a beginning L2 college instructor, *a disorienting event* dates back to the time when she was learning Chinese as a heritage speaker. In particular, she was repeatedly told that she did not sound like a native speaker by her teachers, and this made her *question her identity as a learner and as an aspiring language teacher*.

Similar to the other participating teachers, Minah relates to the course literature in a personally meaningful way and externalizes a desire for a less conflicting identity. In Minah's own words:

Excerpt 6. Minah's autoethnography.

Like Solano-Campos (2014), my identity became deconstructed in three phases: contact, disintegration, and immersion. In my mind, I was excellent at Chinese. I wanted to connect with other native speakers, if only to signal that I was here, and I had a place in the community. The ostracization that I felt during those years was the most isolated I had ever felt, which led me to cling to my Taiwanese identity even further.

In Excerpt 6, Minah critically analyzes her previous understandings and assumptions about self through the work by Solano-Campos (2014) and finds additional support from another course reading (Yazan, 2019a), while questioning her own practices in the classroom:

Excerpt 7. Minah's autoethnography.

To paraphrase Yazan (2019a), English is socialized at every possible level (interpersonal and professional) to mirror colonial patterns; adopting an accent inducts people into a higher regard and standard of living. When I am speaking or teaching English with non-native speakers, I try to emphasize that they don't need to achieve "proper English" status. But it's a push—they want to sound "native" like the TV characters on the screen. The same goes for my endeavors with tutoring Chinese students. I still struggle with how I should teach them, and to what extent should I correct them?

Minah finds further support for her changing ideas in the words and the developmental trajectory of a teacher of Chinese whom she interviewed as part of the project: "In contrast, she [the other teacher of Chinese] has fallen away from the belief that emphasis on the right way to speak matters and drawn closer to the idea of language as communication" (Minah's reflection on the ethnographic interview).

In her autoethnography, Minah also expresses an intention to develop a less conflicting teaching identity and to be more accepting of the various aspects of her identity:

Excerpt 8. Minah's autoethnography.

*After all this time, I am starting to believe in a classroom that cultivates voice, rather than rote memorization and "proper accents." I have existed in two different spaces for so long—half American, half Taiwanese, a learner, and a teacher, a non-native but heritage speaker—that perhaps I can be a bridge in the classroom. **Perhaps I can create an environment that focuses less on being right, but more on dialogue.** And in that way, we all communicate, because that's ultimately what language learning is all about.*

In terms of the transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1978, 1991), we can say that Minah starts to explore alternative roles and understandings of herself and her students. Yet, she does not appear to be fully prepared to embrace these new understandings for herself and in the classroom. In her lesson assigned as part of the course, Minah chooses to focus on student socialization into L2 through teaching them the history of Chinese characters. At the same time, in her post-lesson reflection, she writes that "... by asking the students to create their own stories, they are attaching

their own references to the culture and making it their own. This fosters a connection to the language and all of its facets..."

Overall, while Minah does not explicitly externalize how she *re-frames her past experience* on the basis of new understandings and the course readings, she *expresses an intention to re-frame her identity and teaching* and designs a lesson that allows students to "create their own stories", thus shifting the focus from students' only using "correct" language to students' expressing one's own histories and identities in L2.

Discussion and Limitations

Our study sought to illustrate what language teachers' learning may look like through their engagement with autoethnographic narratives and to explore the transformative potential of these narratives and their potential impact on teachers' practice. The theory of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1978, 1991) used in this study allowed us to analyze the nature and the mechanisms of teachers' transformative experiences. This study has a range of implications for future research and practice, particularly in the context of pre-service L2 teacher learning.

First, the study confirms an earlier research finding according to which teachers' written narratives constitute a significant tool in facilitating teachers' transformative learning (Johnson & Golombek, 2011; Verity, 2001; Whitney, 2008, 2009). The participating teachers' autoethnographies allowed the teachers to narrate their experiences of a certain disorienting event (Mezirow, 1978, 1991) that challenged their perceptions of self. As a consequence, the teachers started to question the identities and the views that they were given by others and to search for other, more empowering identities and perspectives that were better aligned with who they were. The course readings and assignments allowed the participants to find additional support and language they could use to negotiate and to re-define their identities. Through a dialogue with course readings, the teachers in this study were able to see themselves, their roles, and their students in a new light. It is interesting to note that each of the participating teachers chose different theoretical concepts to connect to their understandings of themselves. In addition, the participating teachers were able to translate some of the newly stated beliefs into practice and to externalize an intention to support and to develop these new teaching identities in the future.

Next, previous research shows that teachers' narratives about their practice allow more experienced teachers to self-mediate towards the development of greater expertise (Johnson & Golombek, 2011; Verity, 2001), although this may not generally hold true for pre-service teachers who lack the knowledge and skills to find better instructional solutions (Nolan & Hoover, 2007). In this study, we saw that possibly teachers with greater instructional experience (Leah and Trevor) were able to create more empowering teaching identities and to try these new identities in their classrooms, while the other, less experienced instructor (Minah) only expressed an intention to embrace her conflicting identities. Minah's lesson plan also less directly reflected her new, more empowering identity as a teacher. This finding also agrees with the claim that not all tensions can be resolved as a result of engagement with autoethnographies (Yazan, 2019a).

The study thus raises the important question of how to better promote teachers' identity formation and development, with a particular focus on less

experienced teachers, in L2 teacher education programs. In this case, the lead researcher (who also served as the instructor of the same course) can use the analysis presented in this study to improve the course in the future through offering more support to more novice instructors. A more carefully designed course can also help both groups of teachers (with various years of experience, etc.) collaborate with each other and learn from each other's experiences, which can be particularly helpful for new teachers. In other words, participating teachers' sharing of self-authored teaching accounts also initiated a certain self-reflective deliberation (Spry, 2001; Yazan, 2019a) on the part of the teacher educator (also, the lead researcher) about the need to re-design the course. In particular, the course may involve teachers' writing and discussing several drafts of autoethnographies in groups and with the teacher educator in order to better facilitate and scaffold this assignment.

The inclusion of the teacher educator's (also, the lead researcher's) voice in this study responds to the call "for a shift from employing reflective practices in teacher education programs to reflexivity, which emphasizes the mutuality of both structures" (Park, 2014, p. 173). It further recognizes "that it is important to recognize that most researchers are individuals who share a high level of concern and interest in the research context" and that researchers (who are also often teacher educators, in this context) "have the potential as well as the responsibility of creating change and influence within the field" (Park, 2014, p. 174). In this way, this paper adds to the growing number of research studies that acknowledge the important role of the researcher as a stakeholder in a research study and the mutual and dialectical relationships between the researcher and the study participants (Canagarajah, 1996; Norton & Early, 2011; Park, 2014). While the data presented in this study concerns only one course, Park (2014) suggests that "taking a reflexive approach and endorsing an autoethnographic method to language teacher education may also lead to conducting a retrospective program evaluation or action research ... to evaluate and reflect upon their programs on a regular basis" (p. 194). Yazan (2019a) concurs that teacher educators "can utilize autoethnography to become more self-reflexive of their practices and identities" (p. 50).

Further, the theory of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1978, 1991) used in this study allows us to see the uniqueness of each teacher's experience with articulating and negotiating one's identity. Each participating teacher took a different transformative journey, and it is our hope that their journey does not end there. While the two more experienced teachers (Leah and Trevor) were able to fully re-integrate their past disorienting experiences into their new, more empowering identities, a newer teacher (Minah) only expressed an intention to do so in her autoethnographic narrative. Her lesson plan also reflected only some of her changing beliefs about how she saw herself in the classroom. As Canagarajah (2012) notes, "there is agency in the fact that one can articulate one's own experiences, rather than letting others represent them" (p. 262). And this is particularly important for teachers embarking on their teaching journeys as they engage with masters-level course work. These participating teachers' autoethnographies have found their way into a publishing venue, such as the present journal, and this gives voice to the L2

Each participating teacher took a different transformative journey, and it is our hope that their journey does not end there.

professionals whose voices might not have otherwise been heard. The study thus adds to the emerging body of literature that seeks to include authentic teachers' voices and their unique transformative experiences.

The study findings also agree with Mezirow's (1978, 1991) ideas about the nature of transformative experiences in the context of adult education. Mezirow (1991, p. 167) defines transformation as a change that involves "sense of self", which also agrees with the recent research findings in the context of L2 teacher identity (Kanno & Stuart, 2011; Varghese et al., 2016). In addition, the process of transformation involves becoming "critically aware of the cultural and psychological assumptions that have influenced the way we see ourselves and our relationships and the way we pattern our lives" (Mezirow, 1978, p. 101). In this study, all the teachers were able to question the identities and the views assigned to them by others and sought more empowering teaching identities. The theory of transformative learning, thus, can serve as a useful theoretical lens through which we can see the mechanisms of teacher learning.

Finally, the study confirms an earlier finding that teachers' engagement with autoethnographies can indeed lead to more empowering teaching identities and more enriching educational experiences for students (Hancı-Azizoğlu, 2018; Yazan, 2019a). They allow pre-service teachers to engage in important identity work (Kanno & Stuart, 2011; Varghese et al., 2016), a necessary element for successful learning. Yet, the findings of this study have to be seen in light of some limitations, including number of participants, student participation, and study focus (e.g., only one lesson was analyzed as part of the teachers' practice data). A follow-up study to this one might look into the impact of these transformative journeys on the teachers' long-term teaching (i.e., how long lasting are these re-framing experiences?). Also, a follow-up study might look into the possible impact of the changes in teachers' identities on their students' identities in L2.

Conclusion

This study responds to the call to shift L2 teacher education programs towards more identity-oriented directions (Kanno & Stuart, 2011; Varghese et al., 2016; Yazan, 2019c). As evidenced in this study, autoethnographies can serve as meaningful learning tools for both teachers and teacher educators. For teachers, the use of autoethnographies allowed to create a space for identity negotiation and construction. For teacher educators, it served as a tool to engage in reflective practice. Seen through the prism of the transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1978, 1997), the study also uncovers the transformative mechanisms of teachers' autoethnographic narratives. Lastly, the current study discusses useful opportunities about teacher development and about how to better promote novice L2 teachers' identity development.

Practical Implications and Suggestions to Teacher Educators

- Teachers benefit from being able to engage in identity work formation and negotiation. It seems that providing samples of autoethnographies and making the process of writing more collaborative may help both teachers and teacher educators.
- This study can also be informative for novice teachers who find themselves struggling with similar professional identity issues and invite

more voices for the discussion, especially those that may not have been heard otherwise.

- It may be interesting to use autoethnographies with teachers in other disciplines and investigate both the similarities and differences of professional identity formation in various contexts.
- As a teacher educator, it seems that re-designing the assignment by incorporating opportunities for student-teachers to collectively draft, discuss, and re-write their autoethnographies can be a more effective way to present it to student-teachers.

References

- Canagarajah, S. (1996). From critical research practice to critical research reporting. *TESOL Quarterly*, 30(2), 321-331. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3588146>
- Canagarajah, S. (2012). Teacher development in a global profession: An autoethnography. *TESOL Quarterly*, 46(2), 258-279. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.18>
- Crowe, S., Cresswell, K., Robertson, A., Huby, G., Avery, A., & Sheikh, A. (2011). The case study approach. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, 11(100). <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2288-11-100>
- Ellis, C., & Bochner, A. (2000). Autoethnography, personal narrative, reflexivity: Research as subject. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 733-68). Sage.
- Ellis, C., Adams, T., & Bochner, A. (2011). Autoethnography: An overview. *Historical Social Research*, 36(4). <https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.36.2011.4.273-290>
- Ence, H. (2018, May 01). "Not deaf enough" [Video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/jhawWehu23o>
- Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Aldine.
- Hancı-Azizoğlu, B. E. (2018). Creative writing as a second language: What is creativity for second language writers. *TESOL Journal*, 9(4), 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesj.424>
- Johnson, K. E., & Golombek, P. R. (2011). The transformative power of narrative in second language teacher education. *TESOL Quarterly*, 45(3), 486-509. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41307698>
- Kanno, Y., & Stuart, C. (2011). Learning to become a second language teacher: Identities-in practice. *Modern Language Journal*, 95(2), 236-252. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2011.01178.x>
- Lave, J. (1996). Teaching, as learning, in practice. *Mind, Culture, and Activity*, 3(3), 149-164. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327884mca0303_2
- Mezirow, J. (1978). Perspective transformation. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 28, 100-110. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/074171367802800202>
- Mezirow, J. (1991). *Transformative dimensions of adult learning*. Jossey-Bass.
- Mezirow, J. (1997). Transformative learning: Theory to practice. *New directions for adult and continuing education*, 74, 5-12. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ace.7401>
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A.M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook* (2nd ed.). Sage.

- Nolan, J., & Hoover, L. (2007). *Teacher supervision and evaluation: Theory into practice* (2nd ed.). Wiley.
- Norton, B., & Early, M. (2011). Researcher identity, narrative inquiry, and language teaching research. *TESOL Quarterly*, 45(3), 415-439. <https://doi.org/10.5054/tq.2011.261161>
- Park, L. E. (2014). Shifting from reflective practices to reflexivity: An autoethnography of an L2 teacher educator. *English Teaching*, 69(1), 173-198. <http://dx.doi.org/10.15858/engtea.69.1.201403.173>
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications, Inc.
- Solano-Campos, A. (2014). The making of an international educator: Transnationalism and nonnativeness in English teaching and learning. *TESOL Journal*, 5(3), 412-443. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesj.156>
- Spry, T. (2001). Performing autoethnography: An embodied methodological praxis. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 7, 706-732. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077>
- Varghese, M., Morgan, B., Johnston, B., & Johnson, K. A. (2005). Theorizing language teacher identity: Three perspectives and beyond. *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education*, 4(1), 21-44. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327701jlie0401_2
- Varghese, M. M., Motha, S., Trent, J., Park, G., & Reeves, J. (2016). Language teacher identity in multilingual settings. *TESOL Quarterly*, 50(3), 545-571. <https://doi.org/10.1002>
- Verity, D. P. (2001). Side effects: The strategic development of professional satisfaction. In J. P. Lantolf (Ed.), *Sociocultural theory and second language learning* (pp. 179-197). OUP.
- Whitney, A. E. (2008). Teacher transformation in the national writing project. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 43(2), 144-187. https://lead.nwp.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Whitney_teachertransformation.pdf
- Whitney, A. E. (2009). Writer, teacher, person: Tensions between personal and professional writing in a National Writing Project summer institute. *English Education*, 41(3), 236-259. <https://library.ncte.org/journals/ee/issues/v41-3>
- Yazan, B. (2019a). An autoethnography of a language teacher educator: Wrestling with ideologies and identity positions. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 46(3), 34-56. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26746049>
- Yazan, B. (2019b). Identities and ideologies in a language teacher candidate's autoethnography: Making meaning of storied experience. *TESOL Journal*, 10(4), e500. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesj.500>
- Yazan, B. (2019c). Toward identity-oriented teacher education: Critical autoethnographic narrative. *TESOL Journal*, 10(1), 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesj.388>
- Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case study research: Design and methods* (3rd ed.). Sage.

Dr. Ekaterina Arshavskya is an associate professor in the intensive English program (IELI) at Utah State University. She is also in charge of the international teaching assistants' training and is involved with pre-service language teachers' education at USU (MSLT). Her research and teaching interests include intercultural learning, multilingual literature, computer-assisted language learning, critical pedagogy, and L2 teacher education. She is actively engaged with Intermountain TESOL and International TESOL (ITA- and CALL-IS). She has published in System, TESOL Journal, and the Teaching Education Journal.

Nefi Reyes is an avid researcher, fiction writer, and aspiring college professor. Born in Azua de Compostela, Dominican Republic. As a researcher, Nefi has received two summer grants to conduct research on intercultural communication. He has received the "A" pin award, Student of the Semester, and Student of the Year award at Utah State University. As a fiction writer, he published his first book, Dimitri y el Anillo de Poder, in 2018 and his first children's book, The Adventures of Koki and Chochi, in 2021.

“Being an inclusive instructor is an ongoing process that involves learning, mistakes, persistence, reflection, and a willingness to adapt teaching practices to a diverse student population” (p. 152).

Addy, T. M., Dube, D., Mitchell, K. A., & SoRelle, M. E. (2021). What inclusive instructors do: Principles and practices for excellence in college teaching. Stylus Publishing.