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A transnational language teacher educator's autoethnographic pursuit of reflexivity in Hong Kong

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Abstract

Language teacher educators all around the world work in multiple countries and institutions throughout their careers across institutional, national, and academic cultures. As higher education becomes more transnational in some regions (including Hong Kong), it has also become more common for language teacher educators to construct transnational identities. This autoethnographic self-study shares the author's transnational identity as informed by professional tensions he experienced while transitioning to a new institutional and academic culture in Hong Kong as a language teacher educator. As he narrates his story, he unpacks how his philosophies and practices informed one another as he constructed his professional identities in different cultural contexts and contact zones and elaborates on his identity work while revising his practices in his new professional contact zone. As an early-career language teacher educator, he shows how engaging in autoethnographic narrative helped him to adopt a reflexive lens to critically examine his professional engagements across academic cultures and discourses.

1 | INTRODUCTION

The identity work of language teacher educators (LTEs) has only recently drawn attention, aiming to understand who LTEs are and what beliefs, agencies, and emotions drive their work (Barkhuizen, 2021; Song & Nejadghanbar, 2024; Trent, 2024; Yazan, 2022). In this autoethnography, which was inspired by a collegial exchange, I inquire about who I am as an LTE. As many teacher educators do, I engage in community service. To this end, I served in the TESOL International Association's Research Professional Council, and during my time on the council, I participated in a working group within the council commissioned to write up the *TESOL Research Directions* (Curtis et al., 2024). This document examined research priorities and directions for TESOL for which we engaged with TESOL members from diverse institutional and geographical contexts through focus group interviews. One particular interviewee's reflections, whose background was similar to mine (i.e., study abroad, going back to my home country to teach, and professional overseas experiences), made me think:

> I prioritize teacher development as a research priority. See, I returned to my home country after having some overseas experience. And there were ... ahm ... I would say conflicts. I mean I learned something elsewhere, and when I teach here, there are conflicting philosophies and practices. So how should I develop myself? Like, now based in my home country, I also need to go global. And with all these considerations, I would kind of put my personal development in one big umbrella term about teacher development ... not only in terms of methods but also the mindset.
>
> (Personal correspondence)

All these "conflict[ing]" issues, as my colleague put it, are probably relatable to many professionals in our field and their vivid stories. These stories are essential to bringing the connection between individual LTEs' practices and surrounding sociocultural/political discourses to light by situating the self, activity, experience, and interaction within the context.

I did experience such "conflicts" (I would also say *tensions*, acknowledging the potential of such tensions for teacher creativity and learning; see Akkerman & Meijer, 2011) intensely at my new institution in Hong Kong. I was assigned to teach a graduate course in a language teacher education program after having worked in various contexts as an LTE for a decade. Positioning myself as a transnational professional (Menard-Warwick, 2008), I had to transform my pedagogies and (re)negotiate my understanding of teacher learning in Hong Kong and find ways to navigate professional conflicts (Trent, 2024). Inspired by the communication I had with my colleague, I decided to use autoethnography as an analytical method of self-study that helps transnational professionals scrutinize the relationship between the self and the various professional cultures and discourses that the self contacts (Yazan, 2019).

I argue that autoethnographic self-studies intrinsically have a critical orientation because the method helps authors (and readers) discover their ideologies and the political discourses that surround them in light of their language histories and across personal and professional contexts. In this article, I examine my classroom practices using course artifacts (e.g., syllabi and course materials) and personal data (e.g., my teaching philosophy statement and personal correspondence with colleagues). While analyzing the data, I specifically investigate the discourse I built up in such artifacts and how it relates to the dominant discourse in my current academic context. I aim to understand

1. how my transnational LTE identity (e.g., studying and teaching in diverse academic cultures) influenced the way I perceive professional tensions in my new workplace,
2. how I situate my LTE practices within the wider pedagogical discourses and other academic cultures that I encountered, and
3. how my narrative, as a part of my LTE identity work, would inform my future practice.

In this article, following a brief description of autoethnography as a method of inquiry for LTE identity work, I first narrate the cultural encounters and transnational experiences that shaped my story as an emerging LTE. Then, I focus on my current professional context and a critical incident that was triggered by a graduate course I taught recently. After explaining my academic culture clash and the process of upcycling my pedagogical beliefs and practices, I discuss the implications of my autoethnographic narrative for language teacher education.

2 | AUTOETHNOGRAPHY AND (MY) LTE IDENTITY WORK

Autoethnography is a method of inquiry in which authors situate themselves in the broader society while narrating their stories (Keles, 2022). It is seen as a reflective practice drawing on the narrator's linguistic identities and language ideologies (Kessler, 2023). Since the narratives that center *self* in the story typically include the narrators' subjectivities, emotions, and agencies, Keles (2022) claims that it is a promising methodological framework in applied linguistics to examine "experiences in different contexts on various language-related topics" which may include "transnational identities, experiencing studying abroad, professional and/or academic development, [and] second language socialization" (p. 451).

Identity work is the natural content of writing and reading autoethnographic narratives. Identity is conceptualized as a fluid, dynamic, and context-bound construct that is negotiated through language and discourse (Varghese et al., 2005). Language learners and teachers engage in identity work when they make sense of "their experiences of learning, using, and teaching languages" and when they "explor[e] the complex relationship between circulating ideologies and their identities" (Yazan, 2022, p. 154). LTE identity is typically intersected and varied across cultures and educational contexts; therefore, it is quite difficult to provide a one-size-fits-all definition (Barkhuizen, 2021). For instance, Peercy and Sharkey (2020) foreground three professional *hats* of LTEs—as scholars, as practitioners, and as researchers. Yazan (2018) underscores the *researcher* hat and states that LTEs most of the time identify themselves as researchers due to the institutional expectations of research output from them even when they have teaching or clinical positions. This illustrates the complicated nature of LTEs' identity work. Autoethnography is a useful method for interrogating its sociocultural and sociopolitical situatedness (Yazan, 2022).

Writing autoethnographies is a critically oriented intellectual activity since autoethnographic narratives illustrate authors' critical reflexive analysis (Spry, 2001) while "constant[ly] questioning ... normative assumptions" (Pennycook, 2001, p. 10). Echoing Spry (2001), I define autoethnography as a method of critical inquiry that critiques the situatedness of the self with others in social contexts through narration. Even though I did not particularly aim to be critical when I first started drafting this article, the methodology itself urged me to adopt a critical lens; when I was making sense of myself as a transnational teacher educator, I iteratively addressed critical questions revealing power, disparity, and resistance while unraveling the historicity of my "social relations com[ing] to be the way they are" (Pennycook, 2001, p. 6). All in all, the *pursuit* of

reflexivity turned out to be a critically oriented action along the way, which informed the analysis of my self-study as well as its methodology.

I drew on three examples of autoethnography authored by fellow applied linguists. First, Canagarajah (2012) drew on his early practice as a migrant and refugee teacher. Narrating his cultural background, he remarked how the professional exchanges in his early career profoundly influenced his professional identity construction. His narrative also unearthed the systemic problems that created challenges for him, a peripheral teacher, such as attending conferences or publishing. Second, Yazan (2019) authored an autoethnography that helped him to discover language ideologies and to explore intersecting identities as a language user, teacher, and LTE. Oppressive and discriminative incidents in his workspace made him step into critically oriented work in language teacher education later in his career. Acknowledging his autoethnography as "never a finished work" (p. 51), he proposed that writing autoethnography was a liberating process that helped him situate his professional and linguistic tensions and made him a reflexive LTE. And third, Fairley's (2023) autoethnography highlighted her transnationality and alternative ways of knowing, being, and doing as she told her story. These three examples have one thing in common: the autoethnographic method afforded the authors a critical lens to unpack their subjectivities while questioning the asymmetrical power relations they encountered across their transnational professional experiences. More specifically, Canagarajah's autoethnography (2012) was useful in shaping my autoethnography because it demonstrates clear connections between his experiences as a language teacher with his critical stance as an applied linguist. Yazan's (2019) autoethnography is impactful in showing how narration can be a liberating process of identity work for an LTE. Moreover, considering my own similar cultural and academic background, Yazan's article was particularly relatable and encouraged me to reflect critically on my construction of self and language ideologies. Fairley's (2023) autoethnography drew vivid connections between her beliefs, agency, emotions, and transnational identity. Reading her autoethnography was beneficial for outlining my transnationality as a part of my professional practice. Accordingly, I narrated my story of becoming an LTE by focusing on how my experiences, philosophies, and pedagogies inform one another as I engage in my work across different academic cultures.

Autoethnography was a method of self-exploration for me; while giving an account of my identity work, I relied on my history as a language educator. This required me to review my identity with a retrospective lens, feeling like I was going through some old photographs. Also, it required me to take up an introspective lens, trying to understand how these memories may inform how I define myself as an LTE now. In that sense, the whole process of engaging in autoethnography was iterative and turned into a critical part of my own identity work. While analyzing the data (i.e., the previous and current course artifacts including syllabi and materials, teaching philosophy statement, and personal correspondence and emails with colleagues), I read these artifacts to develop a holistic view of my story. Simultaneously, I wrote up the cultural encounters that shaped my story as an LTE. While crafting my narratives, I sought permission from my colleagues (e.g., the program coordinator) and did not include any student work or their (official) evaluations or (unofficial) comment for ethical reasons. These steps were followed by a process in which I analyzed and interpreted my data in light of my transnational experiences. Based on my autoethnographic narrative, two main findings emerged: my academic culture clash in Hong Kong, and the process of upcycling my pedagogies in tandem with my professional tensions.

While narrating my story, I intended to negotiate my identity as an LTE. Peercy et al. (2019) argue that the reflexive self-exploration of teacher educators may help them scrutinize power discrepancies and discourses as they create explicit connections between their positionings and practices, and therefore, enables them to negotiate their professional identities. I shared my

experience as a transnational LTE by pondering questions raised while reflecting on my tensions and vulnerabilities. That said, I considered autoethnography to be a suitable methodology for the current study. Seeing narratives as a part of identity construction (Barkhuizen, 2016; Yazan, 2018), I reflected on my story to unpack the influence of my transnational experiences on my professional "philosophies" and "practices," as my colleague from the focus group put it.

3 | THE CULTURAL ENCOUNTERS THAT SHAPED MY STORY

3.1 | From a preservice language teacher to an LTE

My teacher identity work began when I became a high school student. I went to a vocational school that aimed to train teachers (they were called Anatolian Teacher Training High Schools) in Türkiye. These schools were typically situated in underdeveloped towns of the country or the suburban parts of cities (such as mine). As a part of the tradition of teacher education that goes back to the early 20th century, the teacher education discourse that was introduced in those institutions was heavily nostalgia-driven and centered on idealist philosophies of education, positioning teachers as the torchbearers of knowledge, modernism, and development. Accordingly, I engaged in various voluntary language teaching activities in rural areas, dazzled by that institutional nostalgia and idealism and without actually focusing too much on the pedagogical side of my practice.

I continued my studies at a public university's faculty of education in Ankara. The undergraduate courses mostly felt quite generic and irrelevant. For example, I could not see how the zone of proximal development in the Educational Psychology course worked while teaching English, or how I would implement communicative language teaching from the TESOL Methodology course in a public school context in Türkiye where the curriculum is packed with grammar topics. When I started teaching part-time at a language school and tutoring students along with my studies, I realized learners had material motivations (e.g., passing a proficiency or placement exam, reaching a particular proficiency level for employability), and I felt that my inventory of then-contemporary methods and motivations needed to converge; however, I was not content because I felt disempowered as a novice teacher, "teaching to the test" while trying to meet the expectations of my students, their parents, and my supervisors. This early experience was helpful for me to sense the gap between the (idealist) knowledge base of pedagogy that I learned and the (materialist) realities of being a frontline teacher. By the end of my initial teacher education, I co-possessed an idealized, and even romanticized, teaching philosophy, a realization of learners' material motivations, and the need for diverse practices. That was the first source of professional tension for me.

Meanwhile, I was personally interested in theatre and participated in workshops to develop myself as an actor. These workshops typically included somatic and experiential methods of learning that relied on bodily involvement in learning. This was the first time that I encountered drama-in-education, an approach that is based on the use of dramatic action and make-believe for pedagogical purposes (Uştuk, 2022, 2023). My encounters with drama-in-education influenced me to find a way to connect reality and my romanticized philosophy. When I adopted those methods in my language teaching, I found them professionally satisfactory for helping students develop personally while developing their linguistic skills. For example, dramatic methods were helpful for my students to feel more confident interacting in the target language while dealing

with their foreign language anxiety (Uştuk & Aydın, 2018). Also, I used dramatic methods that mimic proficiency exam situations, which developed learners' fluency and oracy. This way, I was able to use such methods even for exam-oriented motivations. In my case, this pragmatic approach was useful in merging my idealist (developing students' communication skills in the target language) and materialist (preparing students for the high-stakes exams) views as a language educator. Therefore, I continued to explore drama-in-education in TESOL academically in my postgraduate studies.

During my postgraduate studies, I started (co)teaching at workshops that were designed for teachers, which constituted my first experiences as a professional teacher educator. I taught drama pedagogies as a trainer in international professional development projects funded by the Erasmus Programme of the European Union. These experiences allowed me to learn with people from diverse cultures and various European countries or teach them drama in (language) education. This was a new experience because the multicultural characteristics of the educational contexts in which I had learned and taught had never been that evident. Soon after, I started working at a public university in Türkiye as a research assistant and had teaching responsibilities for undergraduate courses in the TESOL program. I taught drama-in-education courses in different settings, including university-based courses and professional endorsement programs.

Overall, my preservice teacher education until my first professional work as an LTE included tensions related to dichotomies such as rural/urban educational settings, idealist/materialist views of education, and national/international contexts, as well as tensions related to the mismatch between theory and practice in my work. These tensions functioned like a linchpin that shaped my practices in that I prioritized certain pedagogies (e.g., drama-in-education) over others, or I found certain methods of professional learning (e.g., somatic methods) more impactful than others.

3.2 | My transnational identity as an LTE across academic cultures

My identity work as an educator has been a process of trying to find an equilibrium (I see now, more than ever, this is a "mission impossible") while building up my pedagogical inventory and experience as a practitioner. However, this process, albeit turbulent, happened in a particular academic macro-culture, Türkiye. My early work in Türkiye was followed by my (trainer) work in the European context, my graduate school exchange experience in the United States, and finally my teacher education work in Hong Kong.

3.2.1 | Türkiye

The academic culture in Türkiye was mostly driven by externally exposed authoritative discourses and centralized policies. As described by Mahalingappa and Polat (2013), English language teacher education programs at Turkish higher education institutes follow a homogenous and unified approach to training teachers that meet the descriptive criteria of teacher competencies framed by the Ministry of Education. They state that these competencies are based on the government's 2010 policy to regulate initial language teacher education programs and include domains of "language teaching subjects," "general culture," and "pedagogical formation" (2013, pp. 374–375). Furthermore, Tezgiden-Cakcak (2019) examined the Turkish policy and highlighted that the initial teacher education is designed

to train language teachers as technicians to apply so-called *best methods* with the centrally defined teacher competencies after graduation rather than as reflective practitioners. Tezgiden-Cakcak's conceptualization of training teachers in Türkiye as technicians resonated with me because I remembered that terms such as *reflection* and *reflective practitioner* were quite difficult to comprehend when I first studied them in graduate school due to my lack of background. Similarly, Özturk and Aydın (2019) underscored the deficit of the language teacher education system in Türkiye, stating that the centralized curriculum does not prepare language teacher candidates for the realities of language classrooms across the country.

In-service language teacher education also has its problems in the Turkish context. Özturk and Aydın (2019) examined in-service language teacher education activities in Türkiye and found that they aimed to transmit university-originated, theoretical knowledge where trainers drew on their theoretical expertise without explicitly considering actual teaching contexts. In sum, the academic culture of language teacher education, preservice or in-service, was mostly based on *training* teachers in light of an externally defined set of competencies and so-called *best methods* (best for whom and under what conditions?) relying on university-based knowledge. My initial LTE identity work, therefore, was influenced by that background, in that I was showcasing certain dramatic methods to teachers and advocating them as among the best methods due to their positive impact on language education. In this sense, my first practices as an LTE disregarded local realities and were disempowering in that I concentrated on helping teachers see why they must use dramatic methods in their classes and why it was a must-have teacher competency regardless of the wider context where their classrooms were situated.

3.2.2 | First transnational experiences in Europe and the United States

Türkiye is a signatory of the Bologna Process, which strives for the unification of educational policy across Europe. This provides Turkish citizens with privileges such as participating in Erasmus Programme projects funding long-term study abroad mobilities across universities of the program countries or short-term mobilities. In those short-term mobilities, non-governmental organizations (partnering with organizations from other European countries) organize thematic workshops and offer those to a diverse audience of educators who strive to develop their professional skills while working with youth. Turkish educators favor those programs due to the diverse forms of capital they provide (Uştuk & De Costa, 2022).

As a teacher candidate, I received financial support from the long-term (two semesters) mobility program, which made it possible for me to study at the University of Warsaw. This professional transnational experience was my first ever experience abroad. As a first-generation college student coming from a socioeconomically disadvantaged background, I was otherwise not able to self-fund such a study abroad experience. Being an Erasmus student in Poland was the first experience for me to compare and contrast my views of life and ways of living to other Erasmus students typically coming from different European countries and diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This mobility enabled me to develop my intercultural competence, a vital skill for language educators (Menard-Warwick, 2008). Similarly, I attended several workshops funded by the program until I finally created my network and started to participate in those programs as a trainer. These experiences also played an important role in my LTE identity work. My background in drama-in-education and high proficiency in English, which was typically the lingua franca of those workshops, allowed me to position myself as a drama expert. In the 2018–2019 academic year, I was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship, which allowed me to pursue a year of

graduate studies at a U.S. university. I taught drama-in-education to language teachers, who were also graduate students coming from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Even though I cannot deny how beneficial these cultural encounters were in my work as an LTE, it was quite challenging for me to make my expertise relevant to an audience from diverse academic backgrounds and cultures. These experiences forced me to explore drama as pedagogy more deeply and find its affordances beyond the prescriptive teacher competencies approach. Going beyond a prescriptive competencies approach to a more humanistic one was indeed a critically oriented paradigmatic shift because I started centering the *knower* instead of the externally defined *knowledge* in my pedagogical practice. Moreover, I needed to reflect on whether drama-in-education could be related to how I understand common values and humanistic approaches including

- fostering an asset-based understanding of multilingual/multicultural education,
- promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion with dramatic methods in diverse settings, and
- establishing a pedagogy of humanism and care perspective centering the language learner.

My encounter with such terms disrupted my equilibrium in terms of conceptualizing drama in language education as a pragmatic approach. My previous teaching experience had not been particularly helpful for me to make my expertise relevant to a more diverse audience of educators. This forced me to move away from the *teacher training* perspective, which meant positioning myself in the learning space as the source of professional knowledge and design activities to transmit my perspective of drama pedagogy. In this sense, I (thought I) held the power of "knowledging"; I was *training* teachers. Nevertheless, I felt that I was occupying too much of the learning space in my LTE work with that perspective and needed to learn how to take several steps back and leave the floor of learning to teachers. This way, the teachers can understand how the drama can work the best way (or not) for them in their professional contexts. But "this way" required a new positioning that made me abandon my *expert*-ism perspective (placing me as the expert in the room; i.e., drama expert) and adopt the facilitator role in the learning space, which created a new base for my emerging LTE role. In this role, I was a drama *teacher* sharing my experiences and reflecting on them together with other teachers.

3.3 | Becoming an LTE in Hong Kong in light of my transnational experience

My experience as a teacher candidate, teacher, and LTE, which included several positionings such as *trainer* and *facilitator/educator*, showed parallelism to the various discourses and academic cultures that I encountered throughout my professional life. Relatedly, my current LTE praxis combines teacher identity work and teacher education, which was advocated within my earlier TESOL circles (e.g., Fairley, 2023; Varghese et al., 2016). In recent years, I have focused on "pedagogizing" language teacher identity and attempted to incorporate identity work into my practice as an LTE (see Uştuk, 2022; Uştuk & Yazan, 2024a, 2024b).

It was in late 2022 that I was admitted to a postdoctoral research fellowship in Hong Kong, a completely different educational setting from my previous experience. The project that I would engage in was about language teacher education and included substantial classroom-based work with frontline teachers; therefore, I decided to take this opportunity and landed in Hong Kong in early 2023. As a part of my contract, I was expected to teach in the program that hosted my

project along with my research duties. Therefore, the position required me to take on several hats, such as those of a teacher and LTE, even though its title was *postdoctoral research fellow*. After all, my research was about teacher education, and it is not surprising that my responsibilities included teaching a graduate-level course. Navigating various roles as an LTE has been highlighted as the multilayered and complicated nature of the profession (Gerlach, 2024; Yuan & Lee, 2014). It is fair to say that my background as a teacher and my work in teacher education were helpful for me in obtaining this research-oriented position. Below is an excerpt from the teaching philosophy statement that I used when I applied for that position.

Excerpt 1: Teaching philosophy statement snippet.

> I encourage my learners to acknowledge their classrooms as the source of an authentic knowledge base for their practices and their roles as knowledge generators by supporting their learning trajectories with experiential learning activities. I have extensive experience in using microteaching in teacher education. Recently, I have been devising and working on identity-responsive teaching praxicum in TESOL teacher education.

Excerpt 1 demonstrates how my previous experiences have influenced my discourse. To illustrate:

- My conceptualization of teachers as "knowledge generators" is related to my doubt about the situatedness of university-based knowledge in language classrooms and my aim to leave the learning space to the teachers I work with.
- My utilization of "experiential learning activities" and "microteaching" is related to my previous tensions related to the gap between the theoretical knowledge and practice of language education.
- My remark on identity-responsive praxicum concerns my current attention to regard teacher identity work as central to teacher education and professional development.

3.4 | Drama for Language Learning Course: The source of tension in my new workplace

In Spring 2023, I was assigned as the subject leader to teach the *Drama for Language Learning* course, which was a part of the Master's program designed for language teachers. The course would be taught during the summer semester, which included 14 sessions over 7 weeks. Each session lasted 3 hours, and according to the syllabus comprised a lecture-style presentation (50% of the meeting time, during which I was required to cover specific topics) and a seminar (the other 50%, during which students engaged in certain tasks). The course started with 102 MA students, which was the highest number of graduate students I have taught in one course. The syllabus included the following topics:

Excerpt 2: The canvas for Drama for Language Learning

1. Introduction to drama and drama-in-education
2. A historical overview of drama-in-education
3. Modes of make-believe in the language classroom
4. Drama techniques 1
5. Drama techniques 2

6. Drama techniques 3
7. Drama and 21st Century learning
8. Introducing drama to a language curriculum
9. Process drama 1, engagement in the class
10. Process drama 2, oracy and literacy
11. Feedback session for final assignment plans
12. Process drama 3, deconstructing structures 1
13. Process drama 4, deconstructing structures 2
14. Reflections and course evaluation

It was not new to me that the students were puzzled about the content of the Drama for Language Learning course in the first weeks; I had taught this course in several other institutions before, and I knew that because the concept is usually novel to many teachers or teacher candidates, the approach might confuse those with traditional views of classroom teaching. Indeed, after the first week, the program coordinator informed me that three students wanted to withdraw, complaining about my teaching. Since I was new to the program and also to the country, the program coordinator, a senior colleague, offered mentoring and helped me look into my course critically to figure out what the problem was (if any). However, I initially positioned myself in a disempowered position, as an LTE who received complaints in his first week of teaching, and immediately sought to find remedial solutions, perhaps in panic, to replace my pedagogies. In this critical incident, my coordinator's feedback and my own reflections were useful in discovering that my pedagogies needed revision, rather than a remedy, to get better situated. Those pedagogies included seminar activities and assignments. In line with my teaching philosophy (Excerpt 1), the main assignment was microteaching, in which I asked groups of students to co-teach a drama activity in the class while others participated as their students and later gave peer feedback. Similarly, I aimed to streamline a constructivist learning environment through seminar activities. Below are the first versions of the two seminar activity descriptions as given in the course syllabus:

Excerpt 3: Seminar activities version 1.

- Reading Club: This is a group activity in which students work on two different peer-reviewed academic papers. Students form working groups and are randomly assigned to either one of the target articles. In groups, they prepare a presentation about the article. Later the groups present their work to each other and discuss/evaluate the paper. The process ends after the groups debrief their opinions with the whole class.
- Classroom Explorations: This is a hands-on activity in which students explore drama techniques in different group tasks. The groups analyze the classroom situation and develop solutions using dramatic methods of language teaching. The groups present their work to the whole class.

My program coordinator gave me feedback about my seminar activities and the microteaching assignment and told me that university students in Hong Kong are "more interested in learning from [the teacher] instead of learning from each other" (personal correspondence) because this is how they feel the classroom time is used most effectively. It was difficult to process this from my philosophical standpoint, given that my previous work as an LTE taught me that I needed to help teachers become "knowledge generators" (see Excerpt 1). Nonetheless, I was asked to show that I was the source of professional knowledge that the students were looking for. The coordinator also said that students in Hong Kong require a clearer framework for assignments

and tasks and are less tolerant of ambiguity. Obviously, the coordinator had a point since he knew the student complaints, had worked in my teaching context, and had an academic background similar to the students. Also, it was not only the small number of students who had withdrawn but also the general atmosphere of my classes that gave me the impression that my students were confused and uncomfortable. Finally, the plot thickened when I heard from many colleagues that course evaluations could be important for my standing at the university, which was not a big issue in Türkiye but was in Hong Kong. Thus, the situation brought in a brand-new understanding of power dynamics between the university lecturers and students. Therefore, I decided to act on this critical (and stressful) incident.

3.5 | My academic culture clash

Upon this incident, I started investigating the academic culture in Hong Kong and Mainland China. The main difference between the Chinese and Western academic cultures is often traced back to the individualism–collectivism dichotomy. According to Aguinis and Roth (2005), the Chinese usually tend to give priority to collective over personal goals, whereas people in individualistic societies are motivated more by their own preferences and needs. This is explained by another dichotomy in the academic culture scholarship: Chinese academic culture is often characterized as *Confucian*, which values academic success as a proof of learning, competition, societal use of knowledge, and family/collective effects (Brown & Wang, 2016), whereas in the *Socratic* tradition, associated with Western academic cultures, individuals' voices are amplified in a dialogic classroom discourse (Knezic et al., 2010). Also, Confucian education is said to rely on the transmission of knowledge rather than on co-construction of it (Wang, 2010).

As I reflected on these epistemological stances, I was worried about overgeneralizing and diluting my pedagogy with stereotypical approaches to understanding culture. However, the cultural scholarship was helpful in acknowledging certain differences and suggesting why my students may have been demotivated. Differences related to academic culture have traditionally been a major issue for Chinese students when they study at a university located in a Western academic culture such as the United States. These difficulties might be related to the different participation expectations in higher education contexts (De Costa et al., 2023) or the demonstration of knowledge through written examinations instead of oral performances (Yang, 2015), which may also be challenging for Chinese students due to perceived language proficiency. Crucially, my assessment approach, which included the assessment-for-learning (e.g., peer assessment, oral presentations) and the lack of clear guidelines for tasks (it seemed that clarity was also a context-dependent aspect) resulted in demotivation and confusion among the students.

3.6 | A self-study to upcycle my pedagogies

As I read and talked with colleagues about the academic culture and expectations in Hong Kong, I made amendments to the descriptions of the tasks, assignments, and rubrics. Below are the final versions of the two seminar activities that I utilized:

Excerpt 4: Seminar activities version 2

- Reading Club: This is a group activity in which students work on two peer-reviewed academic papers. The whole activity is planned to take 40 minutes. (1) For the first five minutes, students

form working groups and are randomly assigned to either one of the target articles. (2) For the next 15 minutes, they prepare a 5-minute presentation about the article using the exploratory questions below. (3) For the next 15 minutes, each group presents their work and discusses and evaluates the article amongst themselves. (4) For the last five minutes, the groups write down their key takeaway(s) using an online form.

- Classroom Explorations: This is a hands-on activity in which students explore drama activities that are presented in the coursebooks. Each group analyzes the classroom situation (10 minutes) and develops solutions using dramatic methods of language teaching (30 minutes). Finally, the group posts their activity sheet to the class Padlet, which is reviewed by the instructor and the whole class at the end of the process (10 minutes).

Excerpt 4 shows how I focused on giving clearer instructions and rubrics or frames (e.g., activity sheets) so that students could still work in groups and construct knowledge but receive my feedback later. The main dilemma for me was to develop a pragmatic classroom discourse where I needed to switch between authoritative and dialogic discourses. That is, throughout the seminar activities, I delayed my judgment to promote dialogic thinking; however, I made sure that I gave feedback about the students' work with an authoritative tone. Furthermore, I wanted them to feel more comfortable in sharing their opinions, so I developed nonverbal means that allow them to participate with their authentic ideas and opinions in the collective process of knowledge construction.

As I was teaching the syllabus with modified activities, I constantly collected feedback from the students. I realized that my students avoided confrontations and directness when I asked for their input about the instructional choices, which is a typical characteristic of the academic culture and discourse in China (Aguinis & Roth, 2005). Accordingly, I created mechanisms for students that allow them to give feedback throughout the semester. I saw that the modified activities helped the students to focus on the content of articles in the reading list (i.e., Reading Club) and the real-life connection of the simulative situations (i.e., Classroom Explorations). Now that they were less worried about losing face in group and class sharings and clearer about the success criteria, they were able to see the societal benefit and situatedness of the course content. For instance, many of them underlined in their position papers that drama-in-education could be used effectively in foreign language education contexts even in crowded classrooms, which was a common concern at the beginning of the course.

Likewise, I retained microteaching as the main assignment of the course but made modifications to the pedagogy. Initially, I changed the format of the assignment and required the working groups to record the videos of their microteachings and upload their videos rather than live microteachings in the class. I aimed to reduce the anxiety around teaching live while being observed by colleagues and thus risking loss of face. This did not fundamentally conflict with my teaching philosophy. The main challenge was to de-prioritize the experiential learning aspect of it by giving a more explicit frame for the assignment. I did not expect the students to submit a *perfect* product in the end; however, the students were not comfortable with the learning-by-doing approach where I utilized mistakes as points to reflect and thus learn more effectively. Accordingly, I changed my holistic rubric for the microteaching assignment. It occurred to me (and also was given to me as feedback) that the students needed a set of criteria that is clear, weighted, and useful for them to distinguish their work from others. Even though that sounded competitive (and thus not in alignment with my teaching philosophy), I created a detailed analytical rubric and used this rubric as the only source for providing feedback. This was an attempt to accommodate students' expectations and concerns while staying true to my professional philosophies.

Building up a discourse in the classroom around the value of feedback, I provided feedback for every working group as they reached milestones of their assignment where they asked for help. Understandably, my input was what they were most interested in, because very few of them had experience using dramatic methods in a language class before. Nevertheless, I also wanted to promote peer feedback, and I was mindful of openly stressing that in the class. My analytical rubric helped students provide peer feedback more easily, and this was also helpful in promoting a constructivist culture in my LTE practice in Hong Kong.

4 | THE IMPLICATIONS OF MY STORY FOR LANGUAGE TEACHER EDUCATION

Today's internationalized higher education has led to higher mobility of students, staff, and resources (De Costa et al., 2020), which results in more opportunities for LTEs to have experiences that cross national boundaries and thus to become transnational professionals and to increase the intercultural competencies vital for language education (Menard-Warwick, 2008). Furthermore, as LTEs cross national boundaries, they encounter different academic cultures and need to work with teachers who come from diverse backgrounds. In more and more cases, such as mine, classrooms often become what Pratt (1998) calls *contact zones*, defined as "the social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other" (p. 173). According to Pratt, autoethnography is "a contemporary creation of the contact zone, the *testimonio*" (p. 175, original emphasis). My autoethnography foregrounded my identity work as an LTE, situated within wider professional, cultural, and social discourses.

My initial work in Hong Kong gave me opportunities to reflect on my LTE identity. My identity work was a contact zone where academic cultures met and clashed. The most daunting pitfall for me was the necessary convergence into new institutional expectations even at the cost of ignoring the educational philosophy and related pedagogies that were the trophies of many tensions that I had experienced before. In this sense, my identity work resembled to the Hong Kong–based LTEs reported in Trent's (2024) study in that I have recognized the inevitability of trade-offs and compromises from my beliefs and practices while developing adaptability. On the other hand, I realized I had many allies to be grateful for while narrating my story, which is a part of my own identity work (Barkhuizen, 2016; Yazan, 2018); my supervisor and program coordinator were highly supportive, and I had colleagues who were not foreign to my trade-offs and gave constructive feedback and guidance. Nevertheless, more and more LTEs may find themselves in situations where they feel confused, intimidated, and powerless (e.g., Gerlach, 2024). I had the agency (and support; I am not sure if I could get agentive without the collegial support I had) to transform my pedagogies in a way that did not contradict my beliefs, but I still worked efficiently with teachers with different academic backgrounds than mine.

As transnational and translingual higher education becomes a norm, more LTEs will experience tensions related to institutional discourses that might cause them to feel disadvantaged and render them vulnerable to criticism from institutional evaluators or students. Higher education professionals are familiar with the problems with the existing performance evaluation systems (Yazan, 2022) that may boost sexism, racism, prejudice, and bias (Heffernan. 2022). In language teacher education, transnational professionals may also be marginalized due to their linguistic identities since they may come from diverse racio-linguistic backgrounds (Jain, 2023). In line with the metric-based competitiveness among universities that is pushed by neoliberalism (as manifested by global university ranking indices), transnational mobility is encouraged

(Peters, 2019). Nevertheless, we need to ask if transnational professionals are supported in terms of how to integrate their existing teaching philosophies, practices, and methods into their new environment, or if they are encouraged to merely converge into the new system to meet institutional standards and expectations. In my case, the challenge I experienced (as far as I was aware) was not particularly related to my racial or linguistic background but rather to my pedagogical orientation—unlike many colleagues who may be discriminated due to their race, faith, or accent. I was lucky I had informal support while making sense of the cultural, institutional, and academic discourses in my new workplace; I believe not every LTE is lucky enough to have the support from which I have greatly benefitted.

My autoethnography included the facet of ideological and philosophical becoming. In this sense, I was inspired by Yazan's (2019) and Fairley's (2023) autoethnographies. Moreover, I also included samples from my practice (i.e., doing) that I devised along with my identity work and tensions. I do not propose my practices or pedagogies as panaceas for any LTE who carries an exclusively Socratic background into a Confucian culture of higher education. On the contrary, I believe LTEs need to be wary of using such terms to avoid the comfortable (and conformist) path of overgeneralization and stereotyping, even though these conceptualizations were helpful in my case at the beginning of my self-study. My experience demonstrated that developing a constantly reflexive stance is critical for the professional survival of LTEs in the age of transnationality where student and staff mobilities have become the norm and where language education programs have become contact zones (Pratt, 1998). With such a reflexive lens, I would like to encourage transnational LTEs to scrutinize the situatedness of their practices within sociocultural contexts rather than merely reflecting on those practices in a non-situated way at the classroom level. For further studies, I would like to challenge myself (and colleagues) to adopt a sociohistorical lens as well as a sociocultural one to unravel how the history of colonialism in certain educational contexts, for example in Hong Kong, influences LTE practices.

Autoethnography is certainly not the only way for LTEs to pursue reflexivity in their identity work; however, it is useful for LTEs to take up a critical stance and draw on reflexive connections between their practices and ideologies (Yazan, 2019). As a narrative method of qualitative inquiry, it is an important one for emancipating the diverse voices of LTEs. In this polyphonic landscape, my practices and experiences may help other LTEs—an object which is, in my opinion, the secondary output of such research. Engaging in such inquiry, however, should be seen as the primary implication of my story, because writing up the current autoethnographic narrative, rather than the particular content of it, was in and of itself an LTE identity work for me.

5 | CONCLUSION

I can honestly say that this has been the most challenging article that I have written so far. Tracing the tensions that recently kept my mind busy back to the earliest professional experiences and trying to understand them in wider contexts while being vulnerable was not an easy task as an early career LTE. I am grateful that I have had the opportunity to engage in this task so early in my career. The comments of my colleague I met during the focus group interview I mentioned earlier gave me the direction to juxtapose my philosophies and practices as sources of identity tensions. This was, in essence, emancipatory; I examined how my practices rooted (or failed to root) in my teaching philosophy, and thus the *pursuit* enabled me to grow a critical stance for my practices. I know neither my practices nor my philosophy will be static; I know I will need to keep transforming them dynamically as I engage in new contact zones in my professional

life. This will be the follow-up task for me, and autoethnography will be a tool to maintain such reflexivity in the contact zones to come.

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