



# Unifying cognition, emotion, and activity in language teacher professional development

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## HIGHLIGHTS

- Emotion is a functional component of language teachers' cognitive development.
- Emotional content indexes areas of further cognitive/conceptual development.
- We propose a SCOPA and heuristic identifying emotion, cognition, and activity.
- SCOPA offers resource for language teacher educators to mediate teachers responsively.

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## ABSTRACT

Emotions in the learning-to-teach experience are often ignored or downplayed by teacher educators. Using content and discourse analysis of a novice language teacher's journals, we demonstrate that the pervasive emotional content, reflecting individual teacher's *perezhivanie*, is a motivated, structural component of teachers' processes of cognitive development. Emotional content indexes dissonance between the ideal and reality, offering potential growth points. We apply a SCOPA of language teacher learning that unifies the dynamic, dialectical relationship among emotion, cognition, and activity, in order to orient teacher educators in mediating novice language teachers' professional development responsively.

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## 1. Introduction

Teacher educators may question whether and how to respond to the intense and often conflicting emotions expressed in the reflection journals of a novice teacher<sup>1</sup> who is overcome by the demands of early classroom teaching experiences. For language teacher educators, whether enduring a gnawing sense of unease, or empathizing in a knowing way, the response to an emotional teacher may be to provide an empty reassurance that "everything is going to be okay" or to shift focus to alleviate discomfort. This instinct to ignore or stifle emotional expression in a professional context is hardly surprising, given that emotion has been

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<sup>1</sup> For variety, we will use novice teacher, beginning teacher, and teacher learner interchangeably.

characterized historically as primitive, irrational, and feminine, and thus as an impediment to the development of higher level cognitive processes (Nussbaum, 2001). The message of our rationalist intellectual tradition is clear: Logical thinking is the path to professional development.

That rationalist intellectual tradition has been challenged, however, by a substantial body of literature that has emerged in the past three decades addressing the centrality of emotions in teachers' lives (Day & Leitch, 2001; Nias, 1996; Schutz & Pekrun, 2007; Schutz & Zembylas, 2009; Sutton & Wheatley, 2003; van Veen & Lasky, 2005). Much of this work has focused on the *emotional labor* of teaching (Hargreaves, 2000, 2001; Zembylas, 2005), which involves teachers' interactional work as managers of others' emotional states, including students and parents. Research has highlighted the ways in which teachers negotiate their own emotional states in professional settings, including the stresses of responding to administrative reforms, which can lead to teacher burn-out (Jackson, Schwab, & Schuler, 1986; Maslach, 1982). Studies

have noted ways in which positive affective relationships with students, in and out of the classroom, are an important source of psychic rewards for teachers, contributing to job satisfaction (Day, 2002; Hargreaves, 1998). Of considerable consequence for teacher educators, researchers have argued for the intrinsic interconnection between emotion and cognition in teacher development of professional identity (Bullough, 2009; Dang, 2013; Meyer, 2009; Zembylas, 2003a, 2003b, 2005), as well as conceptual change (Golombek & Johnson, 2004; Gregoire, 2003; Kubanyiova, 2012).

These studies have made a persuasive case for the multi-dimensional role of emotions in teachers' professional development and in their day-to-day teaching lives, though they have not necessarily suggested interventional responses to acknowledge, mitigate, or improve teachers' emotional stances systematically. The question persists: How does a language teacher educator make sense of the pervasive emotional content present in novice teacher reflection journals as they react to their initial teaching experiences in the language classroom?

We, as language teacher educators, have puzzled over addressing emotional content in reflection journals because of several ethical issues (Akbari, 2007; Bolin, 1990). Journal writing has been critiqued as a kind of "surveillance" of students (Fendler, 2003, p. 22), as a forced confessional or therapy (Gore, 1993), and as conservers of beliefs, especially liberal meritocratic notions of self and agency (Loughran, 2002; Smyth, 1992). Strand (2006) summarized a triad of dilemmas teacher educators face in requiring reflection journals: beginning teachers not knowing how to reflect, not wanting to reflect, and not all enhancing their practice through reflection. Novice teachers may not want to self-disclose and/or may present narratives to meet a teacher educator's expectations—both for legitimate reasons. Consequently, we maintain that reflection journals cannot be a graded requirement if a teacher educator is going to use those disclosures to mediate language teachers' emotions for professional development. This article thus aims to guide language teacher educators to address novice teacher emotion systematically in the learning-to-teach experience by detailing the *indexing* (Peirce, 1894/1998) role of emotions expressed in reflection journals within a *scheme of a complete orienting basis of the action* (SCOBA) highlighting the interrelationship among emotion, cognition, and activity. Within cultural historical activity theory, Galperin (1992) developed SCOBA as a cultural-cognitive tool to orient learners to their participation in pedagogical activities. In this case we intend the SCOBA to orient language teacher educators as they respond to novice teacher emotions in the activity of journal writing.

In the first part of this article, we situate our work within the field of language teacher research and education by positioning ourselves with regard to key theoretical proposals concerning language teacher cognition. We then present the key constructs of the SCOBA and analysis, grounded in sociocultural theory and Peirce's semiotic theory, highlighting how teacher journals enable language teacher educators to build understanding of novice teachers' *perezhivanie* (Vygotsky, 1994), or lived emotional experience. We then illustrate the SCOBA by storying the case of a focal participant, Josie, as a paradigmatic example.

### 1.1. Reframing thinking, doing, and feeling in language teacher education

Language teacher cognition has been defined in Borg's (2003) synthesis of research on language teacher cognition, as "what language teachers think, know, believe, and do" (p. 81). Noticeably absent from this definition is what teachers feel about what they think, know, believe, and do. An emotional subtext can be implied in some of this research, such as the role of positive and negative prior language learning experiences on teaching thinking and instructional

decisions, in which teachers appraise their language learning experiences in order to identify beneficial and detrimental instructional practices (Freeman, 1991, 1993; Golombek, 1998; Johnson, 1992, 1994; Numrich, 1996). Researchers investigating novice language teachers have used various constructs that evoke emotional connotations for example, "tension" (Freeman, 1993; Golombek, 1998; Johnson, 1996; Moran, 1996; Phipps & Borg, 2009) and "concerns" (Richards, Ho, & Giblin, 1996). Recently, research based in sociocultural theory in language teacher education has addressed teacher emotion overtly through the concepts of *contradictions*, (Engeström, 1987; Vygotsky, 1978), and *emotional dissonance* as potential sources of novice teacher learning (Childs, 2011; DiPardo & Porter, 2003; Golombek & Johnson, 2004; Reis, 2011).

Borg's (2003) synthesis is noteworthy in its call for a unifying conceptual framework that would consolidate research and direct attention to outstanding issues in order to advance the field. Though others have argued for the value of Vygotskian sociocultural theory for examining and explaining language teacher development (Johnson, 2009; Johnson & Golombek, 2003), Cross (2010) argued for the explanatory power that Vygotskian sociocultural theory holds as a theoretical framework to explore Borg's proposed research agenda. By arguing for the genetic-analytical orientation underlying a Vygotskian sociocultural approach, Cross emphasizes that how a particular teacher thinks and what s/he does at a particular time should be analyzed in terms of the historical origins and development, or historicity, "that underpins that thought/practice relationship" (p. 439). The inclusion of *perezhivanie* in our theoretical framework, similar to Dang (2013), addresses each teacher's historicity in terms of his/her feeling, thinking, and doing of teaching. Whereas Cross's framework highlights the dialects between thinking and doing, albeit within social, contextual, historical, and political dimensions, our representation differs in that it explicitly addresses feeling as being on the same level and in interaction with the thinking and doing of teaching.

Rather than looking to unify the conceptual frameworks with which language teacher cognition is studied, Kubanyiova (2012) has argued, again in response to Borg (2003), that narrowing to a single theory may restrict our understanding of the complex process of teacher development. Borrowing from work largely within a social cognitive perspective in psychology, she designed and empirically supported a model of Language Teacher Conceptual Change (LTCC) based on Gregoire's (2003) model. Within social cognitive perspectives, triadic representations of feelings, thoughts, and actions have long been fundamental, as Zimmerman (2000) notes, to defining *self-regulation* (Bandura, 1986); and embedded using varied terminology in models of self-regulated learning (e.g., Zimmerman, 1994). Kubanyiova (2012) expanded on this tradition by connecting conceptual change with teacher identity through *possible selves theory* (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Kubanyiova's model clarifies the catalytic role of emotions in conceptual development that has been proposed (Galman, 2009; Golombek & Johnson, 2004), and introduces additional affective factors, such as motivation, that influence not only conceptual change but teacher identity. She underscores that feelings of dissonance do not always lead to conceptual change, describing emotional dissonance as an "essential but insufficient catalyst for conceptual change" (p. 124). Our work thus also aligns with social cognitive approaches, especially Kubanyiova's (2012) model, which richly details the role of emotion in promoting and failing to promote, language teachers' conceptual change. Our intention, however, is to interpret Vygotsky's initial theorizing on emotion and cognition, positioning emotion as on par and in dialectical relationship with cognition and activity, and represent his contention that conceptual change as development necessitates transformation of both thinking and activity (Valsiner & van der Veer, 2000).

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