

English teacher trainees' changing views concerning the effective language teacher: A self-reflective interview study

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This paper reports on the reflections of a group of fourth year EFL teacher trainees on the changes they and their peers have experienced concerning their views on what constitutes an effective language teacher. The data collection from semi-structured interviews supports previous findings according to which teachers' beliefs are continuously formed throughout their years of teacher training. Results suggest a mixture of influencing factors, including earlier school experiences, content delivered in methodology classes, their own student experiences at the university, their school visits and classroom observations and their early teaching experiences. These first-hand experiences shape both their student selves and emerging teacher selves. Trainees seem to be critical towards the negative models they see, but they also start viewing the positive examples as possible models to follow.

Keywords: effective language teacher, good language teacher, English language teacher education, language teacher identity

1. Introduction

Beliefs about the effective teaching and learning environment have long been the focus of attention for both researchers and policy makers. It has been widely documented that there are significant relations between teachers' beliefs, attitudes and practices (e.g., Birello, 2012; Glazier & Bean, 2018). What language teachers believe about their teaching and their roles and opportunities as teachers is constantly being shaped by a myriad of factors, including their training, professional knowledge, language proficiency level, teaching practice, work environment, language teaching and educational policies and student-teacher relationships. Through these experiences they are building a teacher identity, but this identity formation starts well before teachers or trainees enter their first classroom. When students arrive at teacher training MA programs, they already bring experiences and beliefs about teachers and teaching with them from their school years. As Yazan (2017) rightly pointed out,

ESOL [English as a second language] teachers' initial formal preparation for teaching is not only comprised of gaining necessary pedagogical knowledge and competences but also constructing teacher identities. They need to go through a process of transition from being a graduate student to being an ESOL practitioner in part through their experiences in teacher education coursework and the teaching internship. They need to learn to simultaneously juggle many different roles and

responsibilities depending on the implementation of ELL [English language learning] programs and policies, which makes this transition even more important. (p. 38)

Language teacher training has a significant role in supporting and building on students' academic and professional development. However, whilst the emergence of teachers' self-efficacy beliefs has received considerable attention from researchers (e.g., Birello, 2012; Kanno & Stuart, 2011), the question of how teacher trainees' beliefs and attitudes towards teaching transform during their early tertiary education has largely escaped scrutiny (see e.g., Yazan 2014, 2017, 2018). Also, studies that have analyzed students' and teachers' views on effective language teachers have rarely looked behind the average scores gained on questionnaires or tracked longitudinal changes (e.g., Borg, 2011; Chanmanee, 2018).

Understanding the experiences of students in English teacher training programs can greatly assist teacher educators and policy makers in finalizing curricula and shaping teaching content. In our role as both teacher trainers and researchers we have spent many years following students' academic careers inside and outside the classroom; therefore, we consider this research as a way of gaining an even deeper understanding of their language teacher identity formation. To this end, the focus of this article is on one section of a larger study examining the changing views of English teacher trainees regarding the good or effective language teacher. In an earlier section of this project (Doró & T. Balla, 2014), we found differences in the views of first-year BA students and first- and final-year teacher trainees. We concluded that first-year students were greatly influenced by their school experiences and probably compared the ideal teacher characteristics to what they had seen in their earlier years. They seemed to have a strong student identity, while final-year teacher trainees already had an emerging teacher identity parallel to their student selves, built on their course work, class observations and teaching practicum. Our data interpretation drew on questionnaire data, curriculum content, personal observation and informal discussion with students.

The present article examines the views of five students at the end of their fourth academic year, before starting formal teaching practice in elementary and secondary schools. Our aim was to hear about students' explanations concerning the changes in their own views and those of their classmates from year one to year four. For this reason, students filled in the same Effective Language Teacher questionnaire that they had completed in their first year (Doró & T. Balla, 2014), and we conducted structured focus-group interviews in which they could reflect on the longitudinal questionnaire data and on the reasons behind the changes.

2. Background

2.1 Language teacher identity formation and self-efficacy beliefs

In recent years there has been a strong and keen interest in language teacher identity (LTI) research marked by a growing number of books, edited volumes, journal special issues and conferences (DeCosta, 2019). Norton (2017) voiced that “language teacher identity indexes both social structure and human agency, which shift over historical time and social context. Also important are the language teacher's hopes and desires for the future, and their imagined identities” (p. 81). DeCosta and Norton (2017) highlighted the fact that teacher identity has recently been more markedly influenced by factors such as loss of teacher tenure, fear of losing jobs and feeling redundant, burn-out, emphasis on life-long learning, role of digitally mediated learning, growing number of foreign students and language proficiency issues for language teachers. Kanno and Stuart (2011) pointed out that the development of a teacher identity may be more important than knowledge about language teaching. Indeed, many researchers have voiced that identity formation should be an active part of teacher training (Yazan, 2019).

LTI is strongly related to the self-efficacy beliefs teachers develop. They build the image of an ideal self and constantly compare this to how they see themselves in a given moment. Although it has been assumed that there are significant relations between teachers' beliefs, attitudes and practices, research has shown that this relationship is not universally strong. The TALIS research carried out in OECD countries on effective teaching and learning environments, for example, found a significant difference in the self-efficacy beliefs and job satisfaction measures among the 23 participant countries. Interestingly, teachers in Norway were found to have an exceptionally high rate for both, while Hungarian teachers indicated the lowest self-efficacy and job satisfaction (OECD 2009). The study concluded that, among other factors, positive teacher-student relations, positive classroom climate, social background of students, and cooperation between teachers are significant predictors of student achievement, and they greatly influence teachers' job satisfaction.

The literature on teacher identity and beliefs shows that teacher identity is not stable or predetermined, but is rather an identity in a continuous flux (Erkmen, 2010; Izidina, 2013; Mattheoudakis, 2007). A number of internal factors (such as motivation and emotions) and external variables (such as context, teacher training and prior experiences) influence the way teachers build their identity. In a review study on student teachers' identity development, Izidina (2013) discussed components of identity such as confidence, self-awareness, critical consciousness, teacher voice, cognitive knowledge and relationship with colleagues, parents and students. She concluded that the reviewed studies focus exclusively on positive experiences and desired outcomes, while overlooking negative ones. Nevertheless, the challenges students face during the process

of identity formation would provide educators and policy makers with a more realistic picture. She added that “failing to incorporate a realistic and sophisticated understanding of teacher identity construction into teacher education amounts to failure to fulfill the most fundamental aim of teacher education, which is helping teachers learn to teach” (p. 709). However, Bullock (2011) concluded that teacher education, especially course work, has little role in changing pre-service teachers' beliefs about teaching. The 12 years of schooling develop such strong and tacit beliefs and assumptions about teaching and teachers that they are hard to change. A similar conclusion on the weak influence of methodology courses on Turkish pre-service teachers' beliefs about language learning and teaching was drawn by Kunt and Özdemir (2010). In contrast, in another Turkish study using the same BALLI questionnaire, Kavanoz, Yüksel and Varol (2017) found visible changes in students' views. While first-year teacher trainees had a largely intuitive “learner” perspective, final-year students displayed evidence of more “teacher” type views, including specific terminology, methods and a larger awareness of language teaching and learning.

Practicum and other forms of real-life teaching experience may result in a dynamic change in teacher beliefs. In a study carried out with nine novice teachers in Cyprus, Erkmen (2010) documented the changing nature of beliefs over the period of their first year of teaching. He noted that although the changes were small, beliefs were restructured based on the mandatory syllabus, students' behavior and expectations and awareness of their own beliefs and practices. The mismatch between beliefs and practices was largely due to the fact that novice teachers were not able to do what they believed to be desirable or effective.

Mattheoudakis (2007) followed Greek students' changing beliefs during their three-year teacher education. What her longitudinal study found is that there was a gradual change in the view of students during their course work, while the practicum did not influence their views as much as expected. These seemingly contradictory results suggest that the degree of change trainees or young teachers experience in their views concerning language learning and teaching, and in particular the effective language teacher, may largely be influenced by their early school experience, what they hear about and see during their tertiary education and how many real-life teaching situations they encounter right before and after graduation.

2.2 Characteristics of the effective language teacher

One specific but fascinating set of beliefs concerning teaching is the ideas one has about “good” or “effective” teachers or effective teaching in general. A large body of research has been published which has contrasted views of students with teachers (e.g., Brosh 1996; Brown, 2009), native and non-native teachers (e.g., Borean & Incecay, 2018) and pre-service and in-service teachers (e.g., Borean & Incecay, 2018). Recent studies have also reflected on different countries and learning/teaching contexts and reported data

from Turkish (Çelik, Arikan, & Caner, 2013; Demiroz, H., & Yesilyurt, 2015; Göksel & Rakicioglu-Söylemez, 2018), Omani (Al-Mahrooqi, Denman, Al-Siyabi, & Al-Maamari, 2015), Yemeni and Saudi (Mahmoud & Thabet, 2013), American (Bell, 2005) and Thai (Chanmanee, 2018) participants, just to illustrate the diversity in the cumulated data. What these studies suggest is that the perception of the good teacher may be influenced by gender, language proficiency, age, educational and cultural contexts and teaching experience. Studies have investigated, among the many factors, views concerning teachers' instructional competences, subject knowledge, personality traits, classroom management skills and teacher-student relationships. While language teachers share many characteristics with teachers of other school subjects, there are some specific issues such as the native/non-native divide, the inclusion of the target-language culture in the curriculum, high language proficiency and good pronunciation.

3. Methods

3.1 Participants

The participants of the present study are teacher trainees at the end of their fourth year. We interviewed five students (a group of three and a group of two) on a voluntary basis a week after they filled in the questionnaire towards the end of their fourth year. By the time of the data collection, they had participated in a minimum of six methodology courses in English and another four in their other major, a minimum of 10 language pedagogy/applied linguistics courses in the English teacher training program and another 8–10 pedagogy courses in Hungarian. In each class they receive a 90 minutes of instruction per week for 14 weeks; they also read on teaching methods, engage in critical discussions, classroom observations and micro-teaching for their classmates. Our participants are planning to graduate as secondary school teachers, which means that they have one more year of instruction (including some more methodology-related, applied linguistics and pedagogy/psychology courses) and two types of practicum: a shorter one comprising lesson observations and 15 classes of teaching in both of their subjects in the fifth year, and a longer one including 10 weeks of teaching and lesson observations in both subjects in the sixth year.

3.2 Instruments

As mentioned above, our participants filled in our Effective Language Teacher questionnaire including a total of 56 Hungarian statements at the end of their first and fourth years. These refer to teachers' professional knowledge, personality traits and classroom management skills and ask participants to rate the statements on a four-item scale from not important and of little importance to very important and indispensable.

The questionnaire served as a starting point for the discussions. The two interviews were conducted by both authors and were digitally recorded.

The interviews had free discussion sections in which the participants were asked to describe a good language teacher using their own words, reflect on the questionnaire statements, discuss how class observations and methodology classes have shaped their views and discuss what factors may influence someone's views on the efficient teacher. The second part, which is in the focus of the present study, included guided reflection on some of the largest changes in the questionnaire data. For this purpose, items that on the four-point scale showed at least a 0.5 point increase or decrease between the year one and year four data were selected, and students were asked to give possible explanations for these changes. The scores on the questionnaire and the degree of change were not revealed to the participants, as we were interested in their reflection on the tendencies rather than on the specific results. Altogether 11 statements were selected, of which nine showed a stronger support and the other two a weaker support in the fourth year (see Table 1).

Table 1. Effective language teacher characteristics selected for the interview

A/ Teachers' professional knowledge	
	Knows and applies a variety of teaching methods (+)
	Has sound knowledge of the target language vocabulary (+)
	Has sound knowledge of the target language grammar (+)
	Has spent a long time in a target language country (-)
B/ Teachers' personality traits	
	Empathetic (+)
	Caring (+)
	Strict (-)
C/ Teachers' classroom management skills	
	Reduces students' language learning anxiety (+)
	Promotes pair and group work (+)
	Uses teaching aids (+)
	Uses modern technology in language classes (+)

In the interview the students were first asked about the statements which received stronger support in year four (marked with a + sign), followed by the statements with the weaker support (marked with a – sign). The two interviews (with the three and the two participating students) were carried out in Hungarian, the participants' native language, in May 2018 and used the same structure and questions, but they had a different overall length (48 and 63 minutes), as the student pair gave longer answers.

4. Results and discussion

The presentation and the discussion of the results follow the order of the three main questionnaire topics, namely teachers' professional knowledge, personality traits and classroom management skills. Each view concerning the 11 statements is illustrated with excerpts from the interviews, in their English translation.

4.1 Changing views on teachers' professional knowledge

4.1.1 Knows and applies a variety of teaching methods

The increase in the importance of this general statement about teaching methodology was unanimously attributed to the university courses taken. This is not surprising, given the fact that, as mentioned above, by the end of the fourth year of their instruction, students have had a large amount of language teaching related courses. Both students in Excerpts 1 and 2 reflected on this and also commented on the fact that they had only seen a few of the methods applied during their earlier studies; therefore, they were not aware of the variety of methods that exist before taking courses on these.

(1) *We got aware of the many methods that exist. We try to select from these during our courses and come up with new ones.*

(2) *Before our studies, we only encountered one or two examples of methods, what a class looks like, how we proceed with the course book, etc. We have been observing and have also learned during our classes about the different teaching methods. We received so much input that the pool from which we can select is larger.*

4.1.2 Has sound knowledge of the target language vocabulary and grammar

The two items related to the high language proficiency of teachers are the ones that received the largest positive change from year one to year four. Good knowledge of grammar was rated as indispensable by all fourth-year students. This degree of importance of language proficiency was explained from two different perspectives. The first one reflected on the crucial aspect of good target language proficiency for practicing teachers and the face-threatening aspect of mistakes or errors. This is illustrated by Excerpts 3 and 4. The second one pointed out that students may learn erroneous language forms from a teacher who has insufficient target language proficiency (Excerpt 5).

(3) *I'm surprised that it increased in importance, as I personally already found it fundamental in my first year. It reduces the degree of authority and respect if a teacher struggles with the target language. Then how would s/he teach the language? It is as if a maths teacher had constant problems solving math problems.*

It does not mean that s/he cannot make mistakes, because I will surely make mistakes myself, but it comes down to how much and what kind of mistakes they are. If someone has too many of these, I think, it has a really negative effect on the whole class.

(4) *S/he loses credibility.*

(5) *If s/he constantly uses bad grammar and erroneous vocabulary, it is possible that someone will learn the wrong form, thinking that that is the right form.*

It is also important to note here that some of the trainees in their answers were influenced by their worries about their own or their classmates' insufficient English proficiency. Although students receive a balanced program of both their majors, many of them tend to be stronger in one and weaker in the other one. For some, English is the weaker major chosen to be paired with other language or non-language subjects. Student in Excerpt 6 even noticed that students with weak language proficiency may be further away from building a language teacher self than a general teacher self in the other subject area. In earlier studies this insufficient English knowledge and the difficulties of following classes in English by first-year students have been documented (see e.g., Doró, 2011; Dupák, 2019; T. Balla & Bajnóczi, 2015)

(6) *There are students whose first subject is not English. And if English or another language is not someone's main subject, they may not think of themselves as language teachers. They overrate the importance of general teaching skills.*

4.1.3 *Has spent a longer time in a target language country*

This aspect received visibly less importance in the fourth year. Some students were even surprised by the fact that spending a longer time in a target language country had been rated important in their first year (see Excerpts 7 and 8).

(7) *I don't even know why we thought it would be important.*

(8) *If someone does not have the opportunity to live abroad, it's absolutely unimportant where s/he has learned the language, as long as s/he knows it.*

Some of them voiced the general belief that a longer stay in a target country positively influences pronunciation (Excerpt 19), while others do not find it crucial for teachers (Excerpt 10). One of the students mentioned an early hope for an international study abroad experience, but not many trainees do take part in the end (Excerpt 11).

(9) *Maybe earlier we thought that those people have better English, better pronunciation.*

(10) *It is definitely an important thing, but not indispensable from a teaching perspective.*

(11) *We were hoping for an Erasmus exchange.*

4.2 Changing views on teachers' personality traits

4.2.1 Empathetic and caring

Unlike teaching methods, the growing importance of personality traits was not highlighted during the course of students' various university classes. Empathy as a personality trait emerged in the interviews as something observed or, in some cases, missing from their instructors and school mentors. The participants referred to cases in which they would have expected more empathy from them (see Excerpt 12). This experienced or observed lack of empathy may also trigger a proactive reaction and encourage students to be more empathetic as future teachers (Excerpt 13). This is a very good example of what emerged in the interviews as a whole, namely that teacher trainees view teachers and instructors as good or bad role models and they are very critical of their instructors if they do not match the ideal teacher model that is described to them in their methodology courses (see also Excerpt 14).

(12) *I think 'empathetic' is based on our own experience... at university our relationship with our instructors. Many of us have experienced the following: if I had been the instructor I would have dealt with the case differently. I would have been a little more empathetic.*

(13) *Many times peers have complained that they lacked empathy or compassion from certain instructors. And if there is a strong negative example that caused them to feel bad or not sleep for weeks, then perhaps they say 'I cannot be like that'. Because if this has such a negative effect on a student, even on me as an adult, I must have a more positive attitude towards the 18-19 year olds.*

(14) *We are viewing them more critically, how they [instructors at the university] treat us.*

Students also start observing their instructors as future colleagues or mentors. However, one of the students in Excerpt 15 pointed out that a lot depends on the relationship with the given instructors or (the lack of) their teaching skills and positive personality traits.

(15) *If I don't like someone, I look at them more critically, but if I like someone, I look at them more like a colleague, a mentor. I would like to do things this way, this was good, I think it depends on the instructors' attitudes [towards us].*

4.2.2 *Strict*

One of the most unexpected and yet valuable findings from the interview was the explanation of what students meant by teachers being “strict” and why their interpretation has changed with time. What emerged from both interviews is that students have two main concepts attached to the word strict. This can be considered both as a positive and a negative personality trait. When viewed as something positive, they mentioned the following synonyms: “empathetic”, “tolerant”, “self-confident”, “decisive” and “consistent”. A positively strict teacher also “maintains discipline”, “has creative and enjoyable classes”, “has clear classroom roles” and “stresses students’ cooperation and work.”

“Strictness” as a negative trait was explained by the word “stiff”. A negatively strict teacher “keeps distance”, “has exaggerated rules” and “assumes negative things about their students.” Student in Excerpt 16 very precisely explained how the widely held stereotype of the relationship between strictness, discipline and effective teaching/learning has changed through observing teacher models who encourage students’ work via a positive and creative personality. Students also pointed out that teachers’ attitudes towards and relationship with their students and their speaking style may influence how students interpret the strictness of a teacher (see Excerpt 17).

(16) Prior to the university I experienced that there are teachers who are strict and there is discipline in their classes (and they don't like them), and there are teachers who are not strict, therefore students are not studying (and they can like them or not). But what's important is that I did not have the mental picture I have now of many of my instructors who are very compassionate, creative in their classes, and their classes are enjoyable, and are not extremely disciplined and threatening, and yet, students are behaving and like them. And I have also seen this during my school observations and this is cool.

(17) The way they treat their students may influence if strictness is a positive or a negative trait.

4.3 *Changing views on teachers' classroom management skills*

4.3.1 *Reduces students' classroom anxiety*

Dewaere and MacIntery (2018) point out that among the individual learner factors that may influence foreign language learning, the role of learners’ emotions have been “underestimated” (p. 1). In a highly influential study Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) defined foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA) as: “a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings and behaviours related to classroom learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process” (p. 128). Foreign language classroom anxiety has been shown to negatively influence language performance and increase the

likelihood of low performance, especially in oral communication, but also in other skills. For example, Dewaele and Dewaele (2018) found FLCA to be the strongest predictor of willingness to communicate (WTC) among British high-school students.

In a recent national report (Öveges & Csizér, 2018), Hungarian 7th and 11th graders were found to have a medium level of FLCA on average and only 20–30% of them suffer from strong anxiety, mainly while listening to someone speaking the target language, speaking up in front of their classmates and being constantly corrected by their teachers. This may suggest that anxiety is not a detrimental factor in the language classroom. However, the fourth-year students in our study rated this anxiety reduction as the second most important aspect of an effective language teacher. This implies that they have a strong view of the problems anxiety causes. This is in line with what Csepcsényi (2019) found about the level and types of anxiety among first, second and third year English majors at the same university. Students reported both teacher and peer induced anxiety, mainly related to oral communication, presentations and test taking. Some of our participants reported strong FLCA at lower school levels that may still have a negative effect on their relationship with the target language (see Excerpt 18). Anxiety reduction was not only interpreted as the first step to language learning and exam success, but also a key to success in life (Excerpt 19).

(18) *It's important probably because we haven't received it.*

(19) *Everything starts from it [reducing anxiety]. If you manage to step over this block, we have succeeded, that's very good, and everything comes after it, such as speaking and listening. It is the most important in life and also at proficiency exams.*

Earlier studies have also documented the role of teachers in influencing positive or negative emotions attached to language learning. In a recent study with Spanish learners of English, Dewaele, Magdalena, and Saito (2019) found that teacher variables influenced enjoyment more strongly than anxiety. The authors revealed that the participants experienced stronger anxiety with younger teachers, very strict teachers and teachers who used the target language less during class. Other studies have stressed the role of teachers in establishing a friendly classroom environment, facilitating enjoyment and reducing negative feelings. For example, Dewaele, Witney, Saito, & Dewaele (2018) concluded that an effective teacher has to help maintain learners' enthusiasm and enjoyment and in general create a friendly, low-anxiety environment. Although in a study conducted among Chinese university students Jin and Dewaele (2018) documented that the emotional support students get from their teachers has little influence on their FLCA and that peer support has a stronger role in reducing adult learners' anxiety, the Hungarian teacher trainees in this interview study still seem to be influenced by their perceived student-teacher relationships both at the university and the schools they visit.

4.3.2 Promotes pair and group work

Hungarian classrooms are still dominated by teacher-centered, frontal teaching, although less so in language classes than in some other subjects. It is therefore very much the case that our participants have experienced the downside of frontal teaching, but they have also seen the pros and cons of small group work. Pair and group work are essential in language classes, and they are highly promoted in methodology classes. Students can also observe these forms of teaching in schools. However, students in this case referred less to their own school experiences or observations than the influence of methodology classes during which they do not only talk about pair and group work, but also practice administering it themselves. Students, in this sense, mentioned their own microteaching, which is a simulated classroom activity they do during which they “teach” their peers, i.e. explain tasks to their own classmates. One of the participants even voiced the fact that she did not even know at first why pair work would be important, but now she misses it if it is not used (see Excerpts 20 and 21).

(20) It's connected to microteaching. If there is no pair work, it is usually a problem. It's a general expectation.

(21) First I did not understand why this is needed, but then I see microteaching in which these are applied and then another one in which they are missing, I miss them, I find the task less interesting than the other put in front of me. So I understood that there is logic behind using them.

4.3.3 Uses teaching aids and modern technology in the language classes

Similarly to the socially interactive forms of pair and group work discussed above, students mentioned their methodology classes as the main factor influencing their views (see Excerpt 22). On top of this, they also referred to the school observations made and to their earlier language classes in schools.

(22) These [using teaching aids and modern technology, encouraging pair and group work] have been extremely stressed in methodology classes, even in history...and they also worked. So it wasn't like they [university instructors] stressed it, we did it and it didn't work. It really had a result.

Conclusion

This paper reported on the reflections of a group of fourth year Hungarian EFL teacher trainees on the changes they and their peers had experienced concerning their views on a good language teacher. We found a mixture of influencing factors, including earlier school experiences (often the negative ones such as exaggerated strictness and lack of

variety of methods), content delivered in methodology classes, their own student experiences at the university, their school visits and classroom observations and their early teaching experiences, in most cases limited to microteaching and some private mentoring.

Our interview data support previous findings according to which teachers' beliefs are formed during their education as students. This student identity continues to shape their view on effective teaching and teachers during their tertiary education and has a more important role than what we thought and what some earlier studies have suggested (e.g., Bullock, 2011). Students can immediately contrast the information given and discussed on teacher efficacy during their classes with what they see from their instructors. They are critical towards the negative models they see, but they also start viewing the positive examples as possible models to follow. Contrary to some other studies that looked at shorter teacher training programs in other countries, students who receive four years of teacher education before starting their practicum do report on the influence of their tertiary education on their views. Although class content was explicitly stated only for some of the changes, their first-hand experiences shape both their student selves and emerging teacher selves. Trainees are more ready to notice not only the content but also its delivery. This puts a great responsibility on instructors in all classes (not just methodology) to offer positive teacher models and is in line with what Sachs (2005) stated, namely that teacher educators are constant role models to teacher trainees. It was also suggested that those who feel uncomfortable or uncertain in their emerging language teacher self (e.g., due to target language problems, negative school experiences or a stronger student self) may be even more sensitive to what they observe and experience during their tertiary education.

This paper also presented a way of using students' own shared reflections to help them confront their assumptions and beliefs about teaching and learning. Our study is also unique in the sense that students did not only comment on their own perceptions, but also on those of their entire group. This challenged them to look at the questions from different perspectives. Although our study has some limitations (including the small participant number, the single local context and the fact that the interviewers' were among the participants instructors), the combination of questionnaire and interview methods ensured that we gained information that single questionnaires or informal discussions with students would not capture. These can be informative to instructors and teachers in other teaching contexts. As these students participate in various formats of practicum during their fifth and sixth years at the university, it will be extremely valuable to continue data collection towards the end of their studies and even after they start real-life teaching upon graduation.

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