

On the Relationship Between Identities, Beliefs, and Emotions of Language Learners, Teachers and Researchers

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In 2015 I wrote an article talking about the relationship between beliefs, emotions and identities (Barcelos, 2015). Although implicitly we all know these are interrelated co-constructed concepts, at that time, no studies had been written about the interrelationship between these three concepts in Applied Linguistics (except in Social Psychology). Our thoughts trigger emotions in us which color the different identities we perform in our diverse contexts. Yet, somehow, at least up to now, these concepts have tended to be investigated separately with a few exceptions (see Barcelos & Aragao, 2018; Barcelos & Ruhotie-Lyhty, 2018; Kalaja, Barcelos, Aro, & Ruhotie-Lyhty, 2016, for a review of these).

This special issue of the *Learner Development Journal* on **Learner Identities and Transitions** showcases several studies on identities, but also the importance of the interrelationship of these concepts. Making use of intricate data and research design, these studies show how identities are closely interconnected to emotions and beliefs. In addition, they suggest that investigating learners' emotions and identities, depending on the research design and questions, may bring to the surface researchers' and teachers' own identities, emotions, and beliefs. In what follows I comment on how I saw the convergence of the interrelationships of these concepts in the nine papers that make up this issue.

Ryo Moriya and Ami Ishizuka investigated the self-esteem of 43 non-English-major university students, through close and open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Their study shows us the importance of investigating students' self-esteem, emotions and identities through narratives. We learn that self-esteem is at the intersection of emotions and identities, and that students feel emotions of discomfort but also joy. Low self-esteem may influence them in either completing or averting a task altogether. This study (as all others in this issue) also suggests how teachers and researchers can learn from students when they take time to listen to their histories and understand their perspectives.

The study by Daniel Hooper, Jo Mynard, Ross Sampson and Phillip Taw set at a Self-Access Centre (SAC) in Japan with six learners of English investigates how their identities shift in this social learning space. The SAC is seen by the authors as a social learning community and a community of practice raising different students' beliefs about what it is to learn English in that space. Over the course of 18 months, the instructors listened to the learners through interviews, observations and written language learning histories and found out that the SAC, for some, represented the target country and was viewed as a place that brought them "confidence, practical benefits, social interactions, posture and group identification". In addition, students' identities shifted as their views (or beliefs) about the SAC changed: "We were able to identify changes in their perspectives of the English Lounge and changes in their perceived

identities as English language learners and users. It was crucial to investigate participants' shifting views of the English Lounge as these views directly relate to identity constructions."

Caroline Hutchinson investigated the very interesting topic of how to help students' transition through different phases in their academic lives. In this case, how can instructors (and institutions) help students move to a university setting? Although the study does not mention beliefs, it is clear to me how both the professor and students held different beliefs about what being a university student and what a course at a university should be like from the emotions that accompany these beliefs and how they influence the identities constructed in this transition phase. As Hutchinson mentions, as socializers, teachers and other students should be aware of the beliefs and emotions in the classroom so that they help each other in taking advantage of the affordances given in each context.

The study by Takuya Kojima and Chihiro Thomson also dealt with belief mismatch, in my opinion, in their investigation of the identity of a marginalized student of Japanese in Australia. This study clearly shows us what can happen when instructors and students have different beliefs about what a language class at a university should be like and the sorts of conflicts and emotions that come with that and how it helps shape the identities that the students are able to perform or enact. The conflict and frustration over the mismatch of expectations and beliefs between instructors and this learner brought strong emotions. These in turn helped the teachers to reflect about their own practice.

Paula Kalaja and Maria Ruohotie-Lyhty reviewed their previous studies of learner identity in pre-service and in-service teachers of English conducted in the Finnish context. Their thorough review pointed out the theoretical and methodological lessons learned in using visual, oral and written narratives. In their implications, they highlight the pedagogical potential use of narratives, as well as the use of other media, such as moving pictures, social media and natural data, among others, in creating narratives. In addition, they believe it is wise to give participants a choice on how they want to share their stories. Once again, these authors point out in their review the importance of emotions and beliefs in learners' (and teachers') identities.

Kie Yamamoto uses narratives to investigate a female student's positioning while studying English abroad. Her results indicate how students learning English abroad are positioned as "international students" and how they deal with this. Yamamoto also shows us her own positionality as a researcher and the emotions that ensued when she reflected on her own beliefs and emotions. As narratives are a "social practice co-constructed by a narrator and audience", the relationship between researchers and participants can bring a lot of vulnerability to both the participant and the researcher as well. Yamamoto reminds us of the importance of researchers' reflexivity and how researchers can feel emotionally moved by listening to participants' histories, emotions and beliefs. Like Yamamoto, Masuko Miyahara was also concerned about researcher reflexivity (as well as her own emotions, beliefs and identities) when doing a research study with an EFL student at a university. Revisiting her own diaries she calls our attention to the importance of the relationship between researcher and participants and states that we "research not only *on* or *for* participants, but *with*". According to the author, her reflections and journal writing were "not only effective in locating [her] subjectivity, but also enabled [her] to consider different aspects of [her]self (e.g., identities, positions, roles as well as [her] beliefs, assumptions, etc.), and evaluate the impact they could potentially have on the entire research. Such a "reflexive space" also gave [her] the opportunity to carefully monitor how and in which ways our beliefs and biases are crucial to the understanding of the self in the creation of knowledge".

The two other studies that complete this collection use a different instrument and methodology to understand learners' identities. Andy Barfield investigated the identity conflicts as well as the language ideologies that students had during their coursework in a year-long study. In analyzing their narratives, the author used "I" statements to write poems that clearly show not only students' identities but also how they felt about it (their emotions) and their beliefs about languages. In a similar vein, although with learners of Japanese, Noriko Iwasaki used students' language portraits to show their multilingual selves in a study abroad context. In this way we learn that students' anxieties triggered some emotions and shaped their multilingual identities.

In summary, the collection of papers in this Special Issue makes it explicit first, that identities are related not only to age, gender, race/ethnicity, autonomy, nationalities, class, money, status, appropriation, ownership, intersectionality, situated practice, globalization, opportunity/access, expectations, languages, motivation, personal history, faith, family, subcultures, negotiation, agency, structure, self/other positioning, but also, and very importantly, to the beliefs we hold dear and the emotions attached to these beliefs. Secondly, the papers show that if we want to understand students' identities we have to make *time* to really *listen* to them as teachers and/or researchers. By listening to them and honoring and respecting this relationship, we are able to identify their beliefs and emotions. By narrativizing our histories and lives (Murphey, Barcelos, & Moraes, 2014) we can also notice our own beliefs and emotions; we can notice how teachers and students, researchers and participants may hold different beliefs about what a language classroom or process should be like and the array of emotions that can be stirred up not only in our students but within ourselves. Through our narratives we become language learners and teachers. Through narrating our research we become researchers. Through narratives we can see ourselves holistically and acknowledge the complexities, vulnerabilities and beauty of shifting identities, emotions and beliefs along the path of learning and teaching languages.

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