# Digital Autobiographical Identity Texts as Critical Plurilingual Pedagogy

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**ABSTRACT.** This article explores emergent tropes from conversations between a language teacher educator and three plurilingual language teacher candidates on the impact of creating a digital autobiographical identity text (D-AIT), a multimodal digital 'text' constructed to reflect their hybrid and evolving professional identities. In attempting to better understand the complex potential of this type of digital storytelling in the language teacher education classroom, we discuss at length several salient themes emerging from our polyvocal, or multi-voice data. These themes include the immediate and enduring impact of D-AIT production on language teacher candidates' professional identities; the impact of this plurilingual pedagogy on both teachers' and students' academic literacies; and the potential of multiethnographic, polyvocal research to empower teacher-researchers. We conclude the article with, i) tips for using D-AITs in order to support culturally and linguistically diverse language teacher candidates and students; as well as ii) suggestions for how our participatory methodological approach may contribute to scholarly conversations and teacher practices.

**RÉSUMÉ.** Cette étude explore des métaphores émergentes issues des conversations entre un enseignant de langues et trois candidats multilingues en enseignement des langues secondes. Leurs discussions portent sur l'impact de la création des textes identitaires numériques autobiographique (D-AIT, Digital Autobiographical Identity Texts), à savoir des textes numériques multimodaux qui reflètent l'hybridité et le développement de l'identité professionnelle de ces candidats. Pour qu'on puisse bien comprendre la richesse et la complexité d'une telle narration numérique en classe de formation des enseignants des langues, on examine en détail plusieurs thèmes saillants qui surgissent de nos données de recherche. Ces thèmes incluent l'impact immédiat et durable de créations D-AIT sur l'identité professionnelle des enseignants des langues, soit l'impact de cette approche pédagogique plurilingue sur les littératies académiques des enseignants et de leurs étudiants ainsi que le potentiel de l'étude multiethnographique pour renforcer les capacités des enseignants-chercheurs. L'article conclut i) en proposant des idées pour utiliser le D-AIT afin de soutenir des étudiants et des candidats à l'enseignement des langues et ii) en suggérant comment notre méthodologie d'approche participative pourrait contribuer aux discussions académiques et aux pratiques d'enseignement.

**Keywords:** *academic literacies, digital storytelling, language teacher identity, multiethnography, plurilingualism.*

## INTRODUCTION

Identity, or "how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is structured across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future" (Norton, 2013, p. 45) has been a robust topic of research since the "social turn" in applied language studies in the mid 1990's (Block, 2016; Darvin & Norton, 2015). Much of this research has considered the identities of those learning additional languages. To a lesser extent, it has also provided insight into language teachers' (and those studying to be language teachers, a.k.a. language teacher candidates') dynamic identities, beliefs, and practices (Barkhuizen, 2016b; Farrell & Kennedy, 2019; Morgan, 2004; Norton, 2013). One form of promoting reflection on identity construction and negotiation is through digital storytelling, or the "art of telling stories with a mixture of digital media" (Robin, 2016, p. 18). Storytelling can take many forms, including identity texts—creative multimodal products which may be written, spoken, visual, or constructed with any combination of these elements—which have long been discussed as progressive, identity-affirming pedagogical tools for use with language learners (e.g. Cummins et al., 2005; Cummins, Early & Stille, 2011). Cummins and Early (2011) claimed such texts can act to validate language learners' repertoires of languages, cultures, abilities, and experiences. Initially imagined as a paper-based text, they also suggest that digital media (images, audio, and video) "acts as an amplifier to enhance the process of identity text production and dissemination" (p. 3).

In applied language studies, such digital narratives have shown to positively affect learners' engagement (Prasad, 2018; Sadik, 2008), digital literacy skills (Niemi, Harju, Vivitsou, Viitanen, & Multisilta, 2014), academic literacies (Corcoran, 2017; Steinman, 2007; Yoon, 2014), and identity construction (Darvin & Norton, 2014; Skinner & Hagood, 2008). Adopted for teacher education classrooms, digital storytelling can be seen as an ideal tool for affording critical self-reflection and development of professional identity (Coggin et al., 2019; Ladson-Billings, 2000). Though research is limited on the impact of digital storytelling on language teacher candidates' beliefs and practices, such pedagogies may serve to acknowledge and affirm complex, multidimensional, and fluid identity construction and negotiation (Barkhuizen, 2016a; Morgan, 2016; Norton, 2016). Adding to the recent wave of research on language teacher identity (e.g. Barkhuizen, 2016a; Masson, 2018), our polyvocal study, that is, comprised of many voices, opinions, and viewpoints, investigates the impact of a particular pedagogical tool—digital autobiographical identity texts (D-AITs)—on three language teacher candidates' professional identities. In this article, through thematic analysis of conversations between three plurilingual language teacher candidates and one language teacher educator, we share our perspectives on D-AITs as identity affirming, transformational tools for language teacher education.

## CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Our project emerged from instructor and student experiences in a Master's level, online course called *Critical Academic Literacies: Teaching Culturally & Linguistically Diverse Students,* offered to Master of Arts, Master of Education, and Master of Teaching students in the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education's (OISE) Department of Curriculum, Teaching, & Learning (CTL). This course aimed to build theoretical and research-informed understandings among teacher candidates that they might apply to their emerging and/or existing teaching practice, specifically with regard to supporting culturally and linguistically diverse students in Ontario schools. Following completion of the course, the instructor—James—and the teacher candidates—Christina, Maria, and Allison—connected electronically (via Skype and email) to reflect upon the impact of creating digital autobiographical identity texts (D-AIT). The D-AIT assignment required teacher candidates to produce a multimodal digital text that captures their hybrid and evolving language practices over the course of their lives, with a focus on how languages have played a mediating role in the negotiation of their personal and professional identities. Along with the creation of an approximately 15-minute D-AIT, the assignment also required a one-page critical reflection where language teacher candidates reflected upon the choices they made when producing their digital texts.

Due to the fully online model of instruction for this course, teacher candidates were provided both asynchronous and synchronous guidance in the form of documents, short videos, and question and answer sessions. D-AITs (digital text and reflection piece) were assessed using a rubric with two main categories: content (e.g. depth of reflection; creativity of multimodal production; etc.) and language (e.g. effectiveness of narration; coherence; lexical choices; etc.). Following production and assessment of the D-AIT assignment, teacher candidates were invited to upload and share their products either with the entire class on a shared e-space or only with the instructor.

## CONCEPTUAL LENS

Drawing on theory from critical applied language studies, or a focus on language teaching and learning that connects classroom language use with broader social relations of power (Pennycook, 2001), this section aims to explicate and advance a particular lens for analyzing data stemming from our investigation. To better understand this conceptual approach, it is important to highlight the main theoretical underpinnings.

### Critical Plurilingualism

As part of a storied history of critical pedagogy in language studies, we are acutely interested in pedagogies that challenge inequity and asymmetrical social relations of power (Cummins, 2000; Kubota & Lin, 2009; Pennycook, 2001). This critical orientation views language as "an unstable social practice. . .not a neutral and objective conduit for description of the real world" (Kincheloe, 2007, p. 23). Importantly, this orientation necessitates the consideration of how particular language beliefs and practices may

Journal of Belonging, Identity, Language, and Diversity (J-BILD)/
Revue de langage, d'identité, de diversité et d'appartenance (R-LIDA)
Vol. 4(1) • 81-100 • ISSN 2561-7982

cement—or challenge—asymmetrical relations of power between languages, groups, and individuals (Kubota, 2016; Lin, 2016; Phillipson, 2008). Ultimately, our critical orientation allows for robust consideration of how particular pedagogies may impact teacher beliefs and practices, both within and beyond teacher education classrooms.

Our plurilingual orientation welcomes linguistic and discursive variation, challenging normative (monolingual) epistemologies, ontologies, and ideologies that may reify particular relations of power (Cummins, 2009; Lin, 2016; Marshall & Moore, 2018; Piccardo, 2013). As Lin (2013) argued, plurilingual orientations recognize the "interactions and communicative repertoires of both learners and teachers in multilingual settings, [and its affirmation acts] as a potential resource rather than necessarily a barrier to language and content learning" (p. 522). Such an orientation necessarily attends to issues of evolving professional or personal identities, positioning, in this case, plurilingual teacher candidates not as deficient but rather as pluri-competent users of English or French as an additional language. Therefore, through such a lens, we view language proficiency as part of plurilingual teacher candidates' dynamic repertoire of communicative resources (Englander & Corcoran, 2019; Galante, 2019; Lau & Van Viegen, in press), thus challenging "discourses of deficit, (in)competence, and open[ing] spaces for a plurality of languages" in the classroom (Marshall & Moore, 2018, p. 21). We argue that our critical plurilingual lens (see Figure 1) is ideal for considering language, identity, power, and pedagogies in the language teacher education classroom.
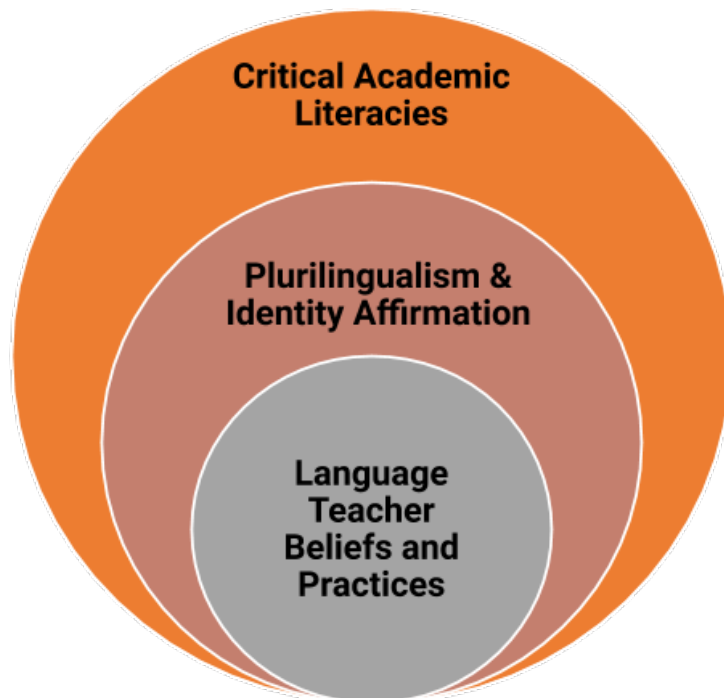


Figure 1: A critical plurilingual conceptual lens (adapted from Corcoran, 2019)

## METHODOLOGY

Multiethnographic approaches, also referred to in the extant literature as duoethnography (Norris, 2008; Norris, Sawyer, & Lund, 2012), trioethnography (Corcoran, Gagné & McIntosh, 2018), and collaborative autoethnography (Adamson et al., 2019), are a relatively novel form of research design derived from William Pinar's (1975) autobiographical method *currere*, or curriculum of life, which aims to uncover and reconceptualize present and past histories (Sawyer & Norris, 2015). Multiethnography is a methodology through which "the self is not the topic of the research but the site of the research" (Breault, 2016, p. 778). Here, the ethnographers "use themselves to assist themselves and others in better understanding the phenomenon under investigation" (Norris & Sawyer, 2012, p. 13) by reflecting on what they experience, how they make meanings, and how the meanings transform over time (Breault, 2016). This dialogic exchange is intended to disrupt the "metanarrative of self at the personal level by questioning held beliefs" (Norris & Sawyer, 2012, p. 15). The process is not about retelling the past, but about finding meaning and reconceptualizing the past. Our polyvocal perspectives, opinions, and viewpoints are portraying "knowledge in transition" (Norris & Sawyer, 2012, p. 20) as participants reflectively engage in this form of self study (Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2015). Importantly, readers are positioned not as spectators but rather as active participants in meaning-making rather than simple "recipient[s] of newfound wisdom" (p. 22).

Our multiethnographic study brings together the dialogic exchanges between James, a language teacher educator, and Christina, Maria, and Allison, three plurilingual language teachers (see Figure 2). Our exchanges consider D-AIT pedagogy, its implications for our teaching and learning, and how it impacted our understandings of the connections between language, identity, power, and pedagogy. In our polyvocal study, we make our voices explicit and juxtapose our stories and perspectives, ultimately leading to convergent and divergent positions. Of note, power was negotiated collectively throughout this research project, resulting in, we argue, more collaborative than coercive relations of power (Cummins, 2000) between James and his former students. We explain our processes to redistribute power in the following section.

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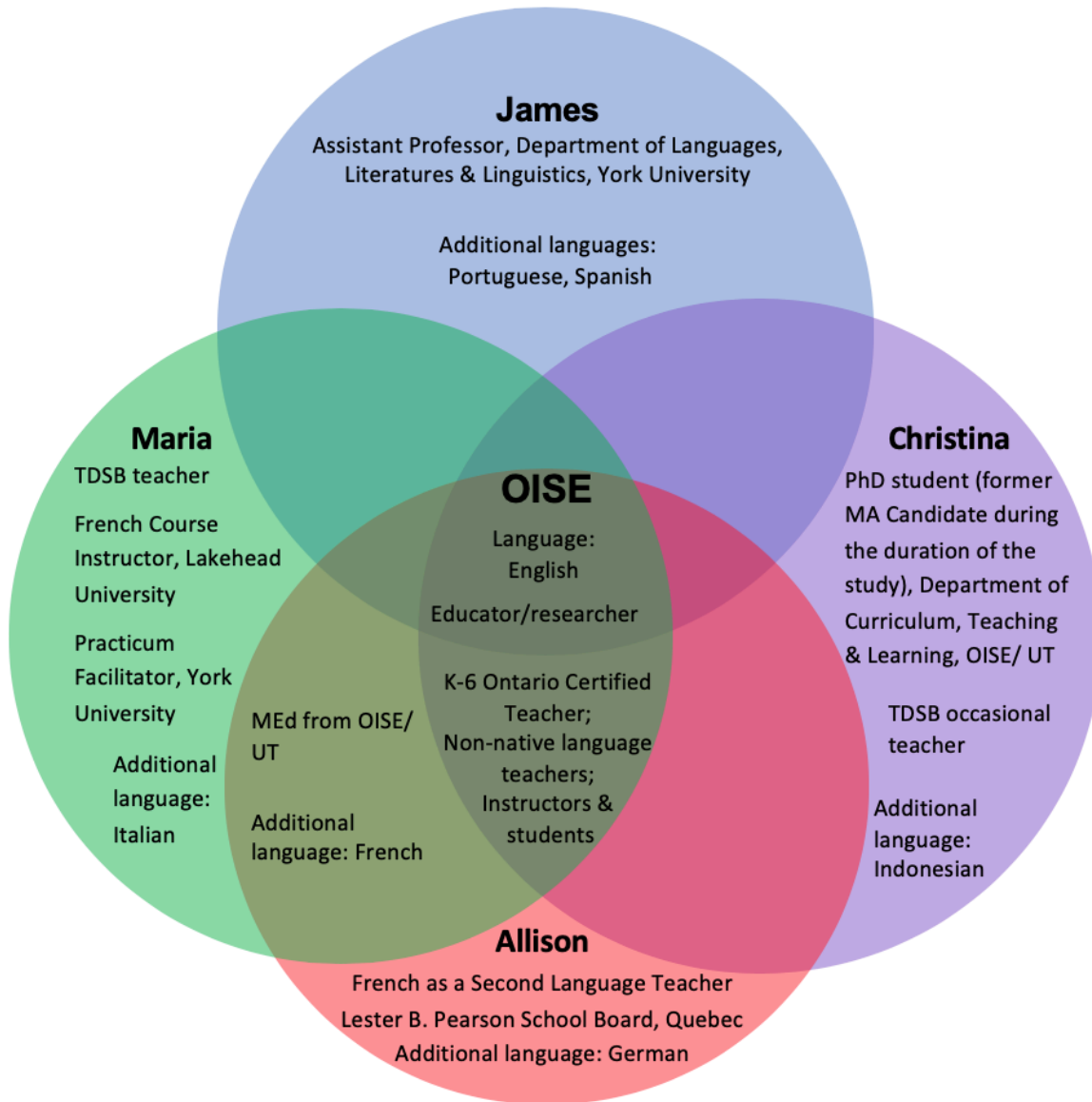Vol. 4(1) • 81-100 • ISSN 2561-7982

Figure 2: Researcher Positionalities

As project leader, James (Author 2) initiated and facilitated dialogic exchanges carried out by the entire group via synchronous (1 hour and 41 minutes of Skype meetings) and asynchronous (41 email threads) means over the course of a full calendar year. In each discussion, we negotiated and reflected upon a "narrative frame" (Barkhuizen & Wette, 2008, p. 373). These frames provided direction for our conversations that might open doors to new themes and dialogues. Once we decided that each theme was exhausted or had reached a saturation point, we met to negotiate who would take on subsequent roles in data analysis and research write-up. We collectively decided that Christina, as a research-stream teacher candidate, would take over the lead in data analysis, while Maria and Allison, due to intensive classroom teaching schedules, would assume supporting

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Vol. 4(1) • 81-100 • ISSN 2561-7982

roles. Christina, Maria, and Allison transcribed and merged the Skype data with our email threads into a single Google Docs file. After capturing a significant amount of data via synchronous discussions and asynchronous email exchanges, Christina, Maria, and Allison coded the data using the three main narrative frames: experiences of plurilingual teacher candidates with digital AITs; potential and limitations of digital AITs; and impact of digital AITs on teacher candidates' language teaching practices. Next, as a group, we identified seven emergent, salient themes, with 21 sub-themes. Christina subsequently amalgamated and reduced the data into the five themes outlined in our dialogic conversations presented in the findings section. Once data was collected and analyzed, we decided as a group that Christina, as an emerging scholar who could benefit from leading the research writing process, should take on the primary role in writing up the findings, with James, as a more experienced scholar, playing a supporting research/ writing role. Though not representative of actual progression of exchanges between the researchers, we have mindfully organized and presented the data as linear conversations, aiming to achieve a high level of readability while maintaining our distinct voices and perspectives.

## FINDINGS

This section highlights the collaborative nature of the polyvocal inquiry (Corcoran, Gagné & McIntosh, 2018; Crump, Halcomb-Smith & Sarkar, 2019). The language teacher educator, James, facilitated and moderated the discussion, listed under five thematic categories; however, the main voices highlighted are those of the three plurilingual language teacher candidates.

### D-AITs: Facilitating Reflections on Professional Identity

**James:** So, how about we start the discussion by reflecting upon the D-AIT production process. How did this assignment impact your ideas about language, identity, power, and pedagogy?

**Christina**: For a non-native English speaker teacher (NNEST) like myself, this activity has helped me appreciate the languages that I speak and has helped me reflect on my own practice as a researcher and educator. Creating a D-AIT (Click to view Christina's D-AIT) has helped me to look inwards and to better understand how my learning and teaching experiences informed my beliefs on how to teach a language. Instead of doubting my credibility as a language teacher, the process of creating a D-AIT has helped me embrace my non-native English-speaking teacher (NNEST) identity.

**James:** Yes, Christina, I certainly sensed that you embraced your plurilingual and pluricultural identity when "reading" your D-AIT. What about those of you who use / teach French as an additional language?

**Maria**: Right, so, I must say that, though I have experience teaching in a number of different contexts and languages (FSL; ESL; K-12; post-secondary), I had never before

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Revue de langage, d'identité, de diversité et d'appartenance (R-LIDA)
Vol. 4(1) • 81-100 • ISSN 2561-7982

taken the time to reflect on my language learning experiences, tensions and privileges, and relationships with others to the extent that I did during my digital AIT production process (Click to view Maria's D-AIT). It is the most transformative project I have experienced. Reflecting on who I am as a French language learner revealed tension-filled experiences that inform my teaching practices and relationships with students. For example, I am much more accepting, flexible and patient with my diverse learners' language production.

**Allison**: First, I want to say that all teachers are language teachers. Regardless of the subject we teach, we all use language to convey meaning in the classroom. Specifically, though, my role as a French as a second language (FSL) teacher—who often works with elementary students—is to create an environment where my students feel safe, confident, and excited to explore the French language and culture. After years of struggling with my non-native speaker identity, I have come to accept that I do not need to speak perfect French; in fact, each mistake I make creates a teaching opportunity. The D-AIT assignment allowed me to reflect on my hybrid identity as both a language teacher and a language learner (Click to view Allison's D-AIT reflection). Creating the D-AIT brought back difficult memories of feeling like an outsider while learning a new language and trying to gain access to certain communities. In the end, I think these experiences may help me empathize with my own plurilingual students who may be experiencing similar challenges, perhaps motivating me to try to get to know them better. The D-AIT allowed me to realize that we all have these really complex, hybrid identities.

**Maria**: Totally agree, Allison. This type of assignment can allow for the teacher to share her unique life and learning experiences, leading, in turn, to better appreciating our students' identities. Also, from my experience using D-AITs in the classroom, I think students are more comfortable and empowered when instructors allow for plurilingual self-expression through code-switching and translanguaging.

**Christina:** I agree with Maria in that acknowledging learners' linguistic and cultural heritage through the production of Digital AITs can create a space to explore and develop meaningful connections between their lives and language learning.

**Maria**: Right! By drawing attention to learners' experiences, we can teach them to read the world, improving their critical language awareness. Teachers need to care about the challenges facing ELLs and demonstrate this care through reflection and consideration of tasks/goals/success criteria that serve the needs of all learners. This can be done while supporting overall academic literacies.

**James:** One of the main objectives of this assignment is to meaningfully reflect and engage with the role of language in our complex, diverse life trajectories and hybrid professional identity construction / negotiation. It has certainly been my experience that this type of pedagogy can be identity-affirming, particularly for those who have all too often been dismissed as less than optimal teachers due to their diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

**D-AITs: Development of Academic Literacy Skills**

**James:** What were the affordances of this type of assignment (D-AIT) for developing your academic literacy and/or digital literacy skills?

**Christina**: The process of digital storytelling required accessing my different academic literacy skills and practices: organization; writing; editing; oral presentation skills; creating media texts for different purposes and audiences; experimenting with different writing conventions; using various computer software; and considering how to execute the digital production successfully in light of the assessment rubric (metacognition).

**Maria:** Yeah, my digital literacy competencies have expanded through this assignment. I am much more confident not only using such communicative tools for future presentations, but also more comfortable with inspiring students to use them for various purposes. When I shared my D-AIT with some of my more seasoned language teacher colleagues, they were impressed and intimidated by it, commenting that technologies they never learned are now commonplace. I think digital production processes like the ones we used when producing the D-AIT should be learned by language teacher candidates so that they may be implemented with K-12 language learners, but I understand this may be challenging for some teachers.

**Allison:** I agree that this assignment was extremely multi-faceted, constantly requiring me to think critically and make reflective choices. It was like putting together the pieces of a puzzle that would accurately tell the story of who I am as a language learner/teacher to my audience of university peers. Because of how well the D-AIT was scaffolded, I was able to experiment with new digital tools—which I have since used with my students— and gain confidence in my digital text production. This scaffolding is now part of my process when I employ this type of assignment with my own FSL students.

**Maria:** Yes, from my experience with learners in varied contexts, D-AITs can strengthen communication, writing, language and presentation skills, as well as their metacognitive skills.

**James:** Yes, this pedagogy affords development of a broad range of literacy practices. From my perspective, not only do language teacher candidates need scaffolding in support of their more traditional literacy practices (e.g., reflective writing; oral presentation skills) but also in their use of digital technologies. Providing time and tips to engage with the varied digital production tools (e.g., screencasting; embedding videos; using PPT slides; etc.) can benefit teacher candidates both in terms of their digital AIT production as well as their subsequent language teaching practices. One of the distinct pleasures of incorporating this pedagogy into the language teacher education classroom has been the chance to engage with teacher candidates' varied levels of digital savvy and creativity. At times I have found myself in awe of the sophistication of the digital production by language

Journal of Belonging, Identity, Language, and Diversity (J-BILD)/
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teacher candidates. On a personal note, my own digital literacy practices have benefited from engaging with my students' work. Bonus!

## D-AITs: Pedagogical Resource for (Future) Language Teachers

**James:** When reviewing your wonderful D-AITs as part of the CTL 5300 course, I distinctly remember each of you imagining how you might use this type of activity with your own students. What are your thoughts now that some time has passed since you took the course and you are all active language teachers?

**Allison:** I believe the digital AIT is a great tool for teachers to explore students' language identities. In the past I've found it really hard to assess what my students' home languages are. Recently, I used an AIT-type task—that I used when creating my own D-AIT—where students could colour/write in or around a human silhouette in order to express their language repertoires. It was great. Modeling my language identity through this AIT task really unlocked a lot of things for my students as they created their own and I was able to have a different relationship with this class.

**Maria:** Personally, I see D-AITs as a creative solution to otherwise standard (stagnant) institutional norms and pedagogies. The main purpose of adopting this pedagogy in my classroom is to legitimize all voices, identities, interests and trajectories so that all students feel like legitimate members of the classroom community. Going through the D-AIT production process, I have become much more of an advocate for identity-affirming pedagogies and I consistently use them with my students.

**Christina:** I agree with Maria that digital AITs are a type of pedagogy that supports collaborative classrooms, one that fits with my educational philosophy: all educators have a central role in co-constructing a high-quality education system that is equitable and democratic. Though I have yet to use D-AITs as an instructor, I imagine implementing such pedagogy in my own teaching and research as a tool to understand children's experiences.

**James:** Your comments remind me that one of the areas of emphasis with this critical, plurilingual pedagogy is to not only affirm students' plurilingual / pluricultural identities—either in service of stimulating greater student investment in the language learning or improving student self-efficacy—but also to break down the unnecessary, artificial "walls" between the teacher and students.

## D-AIT Limitations: Access, Assessment and Vulnerability

**James:** It seems we are fairly aligned in our perceptions of the positive potential of D-AITs. Now, does anyone have concerns about using this type of digital activity across diverse learning contexts?

**Christina:** My experiences working with K-6 children have shown me that children are very tech-savvy; however, I recognize that producing multimodal texts can be challenging given the lack of technology/digital resources, software, and uneven functionality of the devices in some schools. For example, during one of my practicum experiences, I noticed that children at an inner city school did not have access to particular technology at home. This would make digital AIT production a school-based activity only. Can we really sacrifice that much classroom time for such an activity?

**Maria:** Right. Some schools have more access to Chromebooks and iPads than other schools, so every context will vary in this regard. However, more traditional written autobiographies can be powerful reflective pieces as well and well worth the classroom time, in my opinion.

**James:** Your concerns are valid, Christina and Maria. Access should be a major consideration for teachers when building and maintaining equitable learning environments. That being said, I would also argue, again drawing on Jim Cummins and Margaret Early's work, that teachers can be excellent advocates for their students by getting buy-in from colleagues, including those higher up the chain. For example, I heard from one of my former language teacher candidates that she was able to convince the vice-principal at her school to provide additional resources for producing digital texts by showing how the assignment could meet language and content learning objectives across the high school curriculum.

On the topic of potential limitations of this pedagogy, some of the most salient pushback from language teachers is that they are not sure this type of assignment is viable in a high-stakes teaching / learning environment. What are your thoughts?

**Maria:** Considerations for assessing a D-AIT must involve the clearly stated purposes and goals of the task. As we have discussed, content and language can be assessed through the artifact, and a formative assessment framework should be utilized rather than it being assessed in a summative manner. I guess what I'm saying is that D-AITs shouldn't be used in a high stakes manner. If what we ultimately desire in our teaching is to move those students on the periphery to a more central position, our pedagogical practices must reflect this desire in the interactions we have with our students, e.g. moving away from tasks that have an element of high-stakes assessment attached to them.

**Christina:** I agree with Maria. This type of activity should not be summatively assessed. Creating a D-AIT is actually part of a continuous language learning process, and I think teachers need to recognize the value of this process rather than simply the product. When considering D-AITs, I also like the idea of responsive assessment, that is, to observe and note what students say and do during the process of creating the identity text. I also imagine students employing self-assessment using a student-generated performance rubric that helps them to monitor their own progress as learners.

Journal of Belonging, Identity, Language, and Diversity (J-BILD)/
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**Allison:** Exactly. For example, the continuous feedback we received from James during this assignment had a greater impact on my learning process than the final grade. Exploring our language identities together (instructors and students), in my opinion, should not be a "high-stakes" task, but rather a chance to open up and learn from and about each other. In my own elementary teaching practice, I prefer introducing the D-AIT at the beginning of a language course as a way of getting to know where they are coming from and to foster a more supportive language community. The digital AIT provides me with important information as an instructor about how to tap into my students' existing languages as well as their prior knowledge. I often refer back to the Digital AIT throughout the school year or ask my students to reflect on how their feelings have changed by the end of our time together. Ultimately, the D-AIT can be an excellent tool for self-reflection, peer evaluation and formative evaluation of my students in the FSL classroom.

**James:** I agree with your sentiment, folks. I will consider using this pedagogy as a type of needs analysis and rolling assessment in the future. I also support the inclusion of a self-assessed component should the teacher feel this may benefit student engagement. Thanks for the tips! However, I also know from experience teaching in a variety of post-secondary contexts that having an evaluation rubric that incorporates more traditional academic literacies and language learning outcomes can be beneficial when looking for buy-in from colleagues, administrators, and students themselves. I hope to see advancement on this front as more teachers and teacher educators take up this progressive pedagogy in their language classrooms.

**Allison:** I would like to add another caveat. In asking our students to produce a D-AIT, we are asking our students to really "put themselves out there". I think this openness taps into important emotions tied to language and identity that can create important bonds between the students and with the teacher. . .but it is a lot to ask and a bit risky.

**James:** Allison, thanks for bringing up the issue of vulnerability. When using D-AITs, I try to make clear to students and teacher candidates that they are free to share their final product with those in the classroom community (and beyond) should they wish, but that this decision is theirs alone and will not impact their assignment or course grade. Also, I try to scaffold the production of this digital text by providing extensive class time for students to brainstorm their language use, identity construction / negotiation, and how they choose to represent their life / language journey. Again, I think the benefits of such critical reflection on identity, language, and power extend far beyond the assignment itself.

**Maria:** On the topic of vulnerability, the D-AIT assignment presented an uncomfortable opportunity to revisit, re-examine and reconcile language and identity issues that have arisen during my educational journey. For example, at times, I internalized the message that 'Italian-ness' was not something to be proud of as a French language teacher/student. I sometimes wonder if it isn't too much of a burden for some younger learners to engage with these sensitive identity issues.

**Christina:** From my perspective, being vulnerable is not always a bad thing. It gives us the opportunity to unpack and discuss our stories and experiences. A teacher of mine once said that it is better to be responsive than reactive. Therefore, perhaps vulnerability can be an opportunity for young learners to be responsive about these sensitive identity issues?

**Maria:** Good point, Christina. From my perspective, in order to mitigate vulnerability, the teacher should always produce a D-AIT exemplar. We were definitely feeling confident, comfortable and accepted for our diverse experiences and identities once we saw James' exemplar.

**James:** I am a bit torn on this issue. I can appreciate the need for being responsive to student vulnerability, particularly when advocating an identity-affirming type of pedagogy. However, I also agree that through engaging with complexity and discomfort can come greater reward, especially when looking to develop students' awareness of the inextricable links between language, identity, and power. These types of questions can serve as entry points into critical reflection on the mediating role of language in identity formation and negotiation (see Table 1).

| Digital AIT Prompts |
| --- |
| • What are some personal characteristics that define you as a person? |
| • What are some professional characteristics that define you as a language teacher? |
| • What are some of the communities you belong to? |
| • Describe how your language use (languages; dialects; varieties) changes when interacting with different communities (professional; family; friends). |
| • What is "standard" [add target language or L1] and do you use / teach it? |
| • How has your language use changed over the course of your professional (and life) trajectory? |
| • Which language(s) do you use (or exclude / limit) inside the classroom? Why? |
| • Do you see yourself as a legitimate member of the [add target language] community? Why or why not? |
| • Do others view you as a legitimate member of this community? Why or why not? |

Table 1: AIT Brainstorming Prompts for Use with Language Teacher Candidates

**Multiethnography, Accessibility, and Negotiating Power**

**James:** I have been part of several multiethnographic projects and have recognized some of the potential affordances and challenges of such an approach, particularly when pairing more experienced and less experienced scholars. As teacher-researchers, I wonder how you feel about our methodological approach?

**Christina**: What I found most interesting is the opportunity to speak and discuss with fellow teachers about our values and professional experiences in the classroom. Through

Journal of Belonging, Identity, Language, and Diversity (J-BILD)/
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our reflections, feedback and in-depth discussions on various topics, I feel very appreciative for the opportunity to exchange knowledge, to empower and be empowered.

**Maria**: This research project has made me appreciate the rigorous work—especially the qualitative data coding—professional researchers undertake. It has been meaningful work that has built relationships based on trust and respect for one another. It has enabled me to believe in myself as a legitimate teacher-researcher and strengthened my critical lens through which I view current teaching practices.

**Allison**: Totally. Being a part of this D-AIT research has given me a chance to step outside of my everyday teacher concerns. The best part of this research, by far, was connecting with other teachers from different backgrounds. This allowed me to compare and contrast my own pedagogies and life experiences with others, providing me with a lot of food for thought moving forward in my teaching career, especially on the topic of language and identity.

**James:** I get excited when I have a chance to collaborate with classroom teachers, whether it be co-developing classroom activities or finding connections between research, theory, and practice. I also recognize the challenge teachers and teacher candidates have in finding time for research, not to mention the lack of clear incentive for many teachers to engage in scholarship. Thus, I appreciate the time and energy my colleagues have put into this collaborative work!

**Christina:** I feel that this project has allowed me to take on a leadership role that is both comfortable and uncomfortable. At first, I was uncomfortable with the suggestion of me taking on first authorship given my lack of experience with research writing. However, as we negotiated our roles, James gave me confidence that, as an emerging scholar, I could do it in a way that advances scholarship and teaching in a meaningful way.

**James:** As you all have clearly indicated, this collaborative, multiethnographic research project has proven to be an accessible entry point for teacher candidates without extensive research experience to advance scholarship, while critically considering their language teaching beliefs and classroom practices. Well done, team!

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

As reflected in our dialogic exchanges, there was widespread agreement regarding the positive impacts of digital autobiographical identity text (D-AIT) production on language teaching beliefs and practices. Christina, Maria, and Allison all emerged with an affirmed sense of personal and professional self-efficacy, viewing their plurilingual language use and teaching practices in a positive light. Drawing on our critical plurilingual framework, we argue that engaging in D-AIT production was beneficial in "creating and affirming [language teacher candidates'] plurilingual identities and subjectivities" (Lin, 2013, p. 20), while stimulating critical reflection on the inextricable links between language, identity, power, and pedagogy. This critical reflection resulted in a shared mindset where we

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increasingly considered ourselves pluri-competent teacher candidates, ready to challenge those who may position us as deficient teachers of our additional languages. Our findings add to the literature positioning digital storytelling as a viable form of identity affirming, critical reflective practice in language teacher education classrooms; perhaps, in the case of D-AITs, a pedagogy particularly well-suited to contexts where plurilingual language teacher candidates abound (e.g., see Rocafort, 2019).

Clearly, D-AITs provided us with an opportunity to critically reflect upon the role of language as a mediating tool in our professional identity construction and negotiation. This was evident in how we reconceptualized our plurilingual, professional academic literacies/competencies (Galante, 2019; Lau & Van Viegen, in press; Marshall & Moore, 2018). However, academic literacies outcomes were possibly less important than the role this pedagogy played in allowing the imagining of our (future) professional selves (Masson, 2018; Norton, 2013; Norton & Costa, 2018). Our critical reflections on the potential impact of employing this type of plurilingual pedagogy in our future classroom communities again suggests its potential efficacy in critical language teacher education (Barkhuizen, 2016b; Chun, Kern & Smith, 2016; Morgan, 2016). Thus, as was the case for us, the implementation of D-AITs in language teacher education classrooms may not only represent a form of effective and equitable support for culturally and linguistically diverse teacher candidates, but also, potentially, for our future students. Thus, we posit, if afforded opportunities for "understanding praxis in their future classrooms" (Coggin et al., 2019) via this type of digital storytelling, language teacher candidates may ultimately better serve increasingly diverse student populations across Canada.

Of note, our conversations did not always reflect convergent perspectives. For example, we disagreed on whether this plurilingual pedagogy is always accessible, particularly with respect to disadvantaged populations. Perhaps this divergence of opinion, largely based on our in-service teaching experiences, suggests the need for adapting D-AITs in response to local needs rather than as a "one size fits all" pedagogy for equitably supporting diverse student populations. Again, drawing on recent experience as in-service language teachers in varying contexts (EAL vs. FSL; K-12 vs. post-secondary), we diverged on how D-AITs should be assessed, and to what ends. Ultimately, our divergent perspectives suggest that formative, summative—or no assessment at all—may be appropriate, depending on the needs and objectives of the local stakeholders (Marshall & Moore, 2013; Piccardo, 2013).

Our multiethnographic research design provided an accessible entry point into scholarly conversations for in-service language teachers. As argued elsewhere, multiethnographies can often serve to challenge normative ways of doing and conceptualizing research (Adamson et al., 2019; Corcoran, Gagné, & McIntosh, 2018; Heng Hartse & Nazari, 2018). In our case, our polyvocal research design afforded a longer term perspective on the impact of D-AITs on our beliefs and practices. Further, by bringing together, and thus validating, language teacher experiences and perspectives, our project has, we hope, added to the blurring of boundaries between research, theory, and pedagogical practice, while fomenting more collaborative relations of power between more and less

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experienced teacher-researchers (Cummins, forthcoming; Burns, 2016). In doing so, we look to provide food for thought for language teacher educators looking to meaningfully involve current or future language teachers in research work (see Table 2). We anticipate a rise in such work in the field of applied language studies as such participatory methods gain more acceptance and legitimacy.

Clearly, perspectives expressed in our polyvocal, dialogic exchanges do not represent all plurilingual language teacher candidates who have engaged in D-AIT production, nor do digital AITs guarantee personal/professional growth. However, we argue that these findings point to the potential of D-AITs as critical, plurilingual pedagogy that may concurrently affirm plurilingual language teacher candidates' professional identities, increase their critical language awareness, and improve their broader academic literacies. Importantly, we see this pedagogy as potentially impactful not only in language teacher education classrooms, but also in increasingly diverse classrooms where plurilingual pre-service teachers end up wielding their craft as confident, critical, in-service language teachers. Ultimately, though our findings suggest that D-AITs may indeed be impactful, identity-affirming tools for teacher educators, we look forward to further empirical work—ethnographic and otherwise—that may better answer questions surrounding the impact of this critical, plurilingual pedagogy.

| Digital AIT Tips & Tricks |
| --- |
| • Adopt D-AITs in consideration of course and program objectives |
| • Provide teachers with a clear evaluation rubric and assignment objectives |
| • Produce and share an instructor D-AIT with teachers |
| • If available, provide models of effective teacher D-AITs and reflective texts |
| • Allow class time for investigation and modeling of audio / visual production tools |
| • Allow class time for follow-up textual production (critical reflection) describing why particular choices were made to represent hybrid, evolving professional identities |
| • Provide assignment feedback at several levels: critical thinking; creativity; clarity; coherence; rhetoric / discourse; lexicogrammatical |

Table 2: Tips for Using Digital AITs in Language Teacher Education Classrooms

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