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TEACHER AUTHENTICITY IN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

In education, the phrase "authenticity" has various connotations, including in language education. This article begins by examining different meanings of the term authenticity in language teaching. Some of these meanings refer to authenticity in the assessment, tasks, and materials that language teachers use. The main part of the article looks at another meaning of authenticity. The literature on teacher authenticity and personal authenticity in general is applied to the situation of language teachers while viewing authenticity through the lens of student-centered learning (SCL) and the overall paradigm shift from which SCL grew. Topics discussed include whether teachers should behave according to students' views of what teachers should do or according to how teachers themselves believe they should behave. The article next looks at how teachers can develop their authenticity via their lifelong, lifewide, and lifedep learning. The article also delves into various issues in which teachers can be authentic by "walking their talk," e.g., teachers who encourage students to read need to be readers themselves, and teachers who encourage their students to cooperate with their peers should cooperate with their own peers in education and elsewhere in their lives. The two final parts of the article ask what impact teacher authenticity might have on the teachers' students and how authenticity, which seems to be such an individual construct, can be put to the service of society as a whole.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The term authenticity has many meanings in education, including in language education. This article focuses on one of those meanings: do language teachers appear to students and to the teachers themselves to be “practicing what they preach,” i.e., living according to the values and behaviors that teachers encourage their students to live by? This meaning of authenticity can be seen as part of teacher identity, which Sachs (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009) explained as follows:

Teacher professional identity then stands at the core of the teaching profession. It provides a framework for teachers to construct their own ideas of ‘how to be’, ‘how to act’ and ‘how to understand’ their work and their place in society. Importantly, teacher identity is not something that is fixed nor is it imposed; rather it is negotiated through experience and the sense that is made of that experience.

Before focusing on meanings of authenticity related to how language teachers view themselves, the article first reviews some of the other meanings of authenticity associated with language teachers. The article also seeks to situate student-centered learning as a thread uniting many aspects of teacher authenticity (Varghese, et al., 2015). Of course, it should be emphasized that meanings, just as other aspects of language, vary and change (Wang & Bi, 2021).

1.1 Authenticity in Assessment, Tasks, and Materials

The present section of the article looks at authenticity in language education related to the assessment of learning, learning tasks, and learning materials (Radović, et al., 2021). Of course, teachers often have a main role in designing and conducting an assessment, setting and supervising learning tasks, and choosing, modifying, supplementing, and perhaps creating learning materials. It should be noted that authenticity of all types has a major subjective element.

Authenticity in assessment can mean that the assessment links transparently with what students will need to do outside of the learning context (Susani, 2018). It also means that the assessment measures what it is supposed to measure. Consider a listening test item which requires students to recall a specific name from memory or the spelling of a restaurant name, such as *QBistro*, *Cue Bistro*, or *Queue Bistro*, or when they are purposely presented with confusing tongue twisters. This is a meaning-deficient assessment item for testing students’ listening comprehension skills. Instead of such inauthentic assessment, assessment should be organized around meaning-focused input and output as well as fluency development (as explained by Newton & Nation in the book entitled *Teaching ESL/EFL listening and speaking* (2nd ed.) in 2020). Another example of inauthentic assessment would be using multiple choice grammar items to measure writing skill, as many students can use standard grammar in decontextualized contexts, but not in more holistic settings.

A more authentic assessment of writing ability would involve students in writing a whole, meaningful text (Osman, et al., 2019). Students might write the kind of text that they would write in their real life, either now or in the future. Students will more likely be engaged when doing tasks that they believe to be authentic to their present or future lives. However, it should be noted that Spence-Brown (2001) argued that the very act of taking a real-life task and using it as an assessment task might invalidate it as a real-life task.

A related meaning of authenticity can be seen in the choice of tasks students do in class or online (Ramírez Ortiz & Artunduaga Cuéllar, 2018). Authentic tasks are not made up by teachers and other materials writers to busy students with rote learning of concepts in their syllabus. Instead, with authentic tasks, students do activities that they might also do outside of school. For example, students in lower primary school might need to write invitations to a party or thank you notes for presents received at that party. Languages for Specific Purposes courses (Nazari, 2020) attempt to provide students with opportunities to involve themselves in tasks found in their present or future careers.

Yet another meaning of authenticity looks at the materials students use in their learning. Some educators contrast materials created specifically for learners with materials used by native speakers of the target language, with the latter considered authentic. This contrast raises the issue of doability and meaningful learning. For example, extensive reading (Chan, 2020) seeks to promote language acquisition by facilitating students reading large quantities of materials at or near their current proficiency level, which often involves specially created language learner literature (Lekawael & Ferdinandus, 2021). This comprehensible input promotes not only reading ability but also other language skills, such as writing and spelling (as explained by Krashen in the book entitled *The power of reading* (2nd ed.) in 2004).

The concept of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (as explained by Vygotsky in the book entitled *Mind in society* in 1978) reminds educators that assessments, tasks, and materials should be challenging yet doable for students if they make sufficient effort and have sufficient assistance from their teachers, peers, and others. ZPD provides a challenge for authenticity advocates because assessments, tasks, and materials that are similar to those used in real life by non-students may often be too challenging for younger and lower-proficiency learners. Thus, perhaps additional criteria need to be used when judging authenticity. For example, when one of the authors of this article was learning Spanish as a Foreign Language, his low proficiency class read a highly simplified version of *Don Quixote*, a famous Spanish novel written more than 400 years ago. The protagonist’s naïve idealism struck a chord with the teenage boy, who never would have read beyond the first page had he been given an unsimplified version of the book.

Similarly, an abridged version of the Romeo and Juliet text is used in the ESL classroom to not only meet the students' proficiency level but also to instill interest and love for literature through meaningful and modern English. There is also the cultural aspect to meaningfulness that more localized materials could provide to ESL students compared to native-speaker resources. More culturally appropriate materials aligned with the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) can actually enhance the English language learning of ESL students compared to native ones that to a certain extent may impede their learning because of the lack of authenticity in relation to students' life contexts.

1.2 Authenticity and Student-Centered Learning

A central link exists between the three forms of authenticity discussed above and the paradigm of student-centered learning (SCL) (as explained by Jacobs et al. in the book entitled *Simple, powerful strategies for student centered learning* in 2016). SCL, at least on paper, reigns as the dominant paradigm in education. Teacher-centered learning, the previously dominant paradigm, has roots in Behaviorist Learning Theory (as explained by Skinner in the book entitled *About behaviorism* in 1974). Behaviorism posits that there exist universal laws of learning, leading to a one-size-fits-all approach, i.e., adults and children learn in the same way, as do pigeons, rats, and humans. The driving forces in learning are the elements outside of the learners – their teachers and teaching materials. In contrast, SCL has roots in Social Cognitive Psychology (Mayer, 1992.), a theory that posits that each person constructs their own learning and that the main factors determining the success of learning attempts lie (1) inside each individual learner's mind and (2) in their interactions with others.

In keeping with the external emphasis of Behaviorist Learning Theory, motivation in teacher-centered learning tends to be extrinsic, coming from teachers and others whose responses to students' behaviors determine whether students repeat those behaviors (McPherson, 2021). For example, if students supply what the teachers/textbooks/software consider to be the correct form of a verb as part of a grammar drill, students receive a reward, such as praise from the teachers or software, making it more likely students will continue using that form of the verb in similar contexts. On the other hand, SCL leans more on intrinsic motivation which comes from within students, relating to their interests and needs. An example of intrinsic motivation would be if students of Korean enjoy K-pop and increase their second language proficiency by studying the lyrics to their favorite group's songs. In the same vein, if learners of Mandarin have key pals (similar to pen pals but communication takes place via the keyboards of electronic devices) in China, they may be intrinsically motivated to improve in their second language, because they enjoy interacting with people from other countries.

This SCL link to students' interests and needs explains why authenticity fits with SCL. Of course, interests and needs can differ. For instance, some students may be very interested in Japanese anime, a style of animation used in films and books. These works often center on fantasy, i.e., they lie far from students' present or future reality. Therefore, anime may align more with students' interests than with their immediate needs, just as some students may be very interested in the results of their favorite sports team, even though that team's success or failure probably has little impact on those students' day-to-day needs. This possible confusion over what constitutes interests and what constitutes needs provides one more example of the point made earlier in this paper about the ambiguity of meanings.

2. METHOD

The present study employs the literature review method to explore the concept of authenticity in language education and its dynamic interplay with student-centered learning approaches. The authors collected the literature from the existing database, including journal articles, case studies, and other academic papers. The papers were selected, based on the alignment of its objective and content with language education in a broader sense or language teaching and learning, language teachers and learners, and language assessment in a narrower scope. The papers were further analyzed by coding the relevant information conveyed in each paper and making connection between the codes. The analysis results pinpointed the concept of authenticity in language education, the concept of teacher authenticity, and the position of authenticity in student-centered learning.

2. TEACHER AUTHENTICITY

2.1 Walking the Talk

Teacher authenticity, as opposed to the authenticity of assessment, tasks, or materials, constitutes the main focus of this article. What might "teacher authenticity" mean? One possible meaning involves letting students see teachers putting their beliefs into practice, i.e., "walking their talk," and "practicing what they preach." Cates in the book chapter entitled *Language teaching, environmental education, and community engagement in 2022* recounted his admiration of a high school physics teacher whom he saw as authentic because he walked the talk about environmental protection:

Excerpt 2

At school, he taught physics. But outside class, he was a tireless advocate for the environment, working for clean air and water for our community. In our morning newspapers, we'd read articles about him collecting signatures for a new pollution law or announcing a nature conservation campaign. On the weekends, we'd see him on TV picking up litter f

rom a local beach or protesting toxic waste. He was a teacher who cared and all of us knew it. The actions he took for our community left a strong impact on my classmates and me.

Cates and his classmates could see that this teacher not only espoused environmental protection; he also spent his time and energy on actions to protect the environment. Of course, in most cases, students will not be able to turn on their television or open the local newspaper to see their teachers walking their talk. However, with the advent of social media, it has become much easier for people to publicly share their actions and beliefs, although with so many social media platforms and generational gaps in who uses which platform, students may not see what their teachers post.

More often, teachers sharing with students happens in class, not in the media. For example, when teachers advocate that students read as a way to learn and enjoy, teachers have several means to demonstrate their authenticity, to show they are walking their talk (as explained by Jacobs & Farrell in the book entitled *Teachers Sourcebook for Extensive Reading* in 2012). Teachers can share with students about what they are reading, whether teachers are reading what students might read or teachers are reading materials that might be too difficult for students, e.g., when teachers of lower primary school students read books written for adults. Similarly, teachers might hear from students about a book students enjoy and then join their students in also reading that book. Some teachers put up a sign announcing what they are currently reading, e.g., Mr. Wong is now reading “*Ellie Belly: Follow That Bird*.”

How much to share can be a difficult issue in teacher authenticity. Teachers have lost their jobs for walking their talk. Runkle & Stone in the book entitled *Mercy for Animals: One Man's Quest to Inspire Compassion and Improve the Life of Farm Animals* in 2017 told the story of a high school teacher who lost their job for being authentic. This occurred in a rural area of the U.S., where many people worked in agriculture, including the raising of nonhuman animals for food. One day, one of the school's teachers who was also a farmer brought in six piglets he thought he had killed earlier to be used to teach dissection to the students. Except one of the piglets had not died. Seeing this still living animal, a student in the class unsuccessfully attempted to kill the piglet by twice slamming her head onto the concrete floor.

In response, another student in the class felt sorry for the piglet, took her from the classmate, and brought her to the class of another teacher, Molly Fearing, who was known to be an animal lover. Molly rushed the piglet to an animal hospital, but it was too late, and the piglet was euthanized. Molly took photos of the piglet and filed a complaint with the local sheriff against her fellow teacher, the one who had brought the piglets to class. However, the judge in the case dismissed the charges, and Fearing, instead of being praised for her compassion, was forced by the school to resign from her job.

In this case, perhaps both the teacher who brought the piglets to school and the teacher who complained were being authentic. Unfortunately, their disagreement could not be resolved more amicably. In the end, Fearing joined Runkle, who at the time was a high school student doing homeschooling, to found an animal welfare organization. Perhaps, in this context, leaving her job was an authentic action for that teacher. Similarly, people leave other careers to become teachers to pursue what they feel is an authentic calling for them (as explained by Chakrabarty in the research entitled *Why a Pilot, a Banker, and an IT Professional Left Their Jobs to Become Teachers* in 2019 <https://www.indiatoday.in/education-today/featurephilia/story/why-a-pilot-a-banker-and-an-it-professional-left-their-jobs-to-become-teachers-1595974-2019-09-05>)

2.2 Further Unpacking Teacher Authenticity

Teacher authenticity can be viewed in many ways (De Bruyckere & Kirschner, 2017). Rogers in the book entitled *Freedom to Learning* in 1979 talked about authenticity as teachers being themselves, i.e., being true to themselves. In other words, teachers should live up to their own expectations as to how teachers should act. To provide another view, De Bruyckere and Kirschner (2017) studied what teacher authenticity means from the student perspective. Participants in their study were more than 1000 Grade 11 and 12 students in Belgium. Results derived three factors in teacher authenticity in students' eyes:

1. Live to Teach – a combination of passion for the subject being taught and expertise in teaching it (which is not necessarily the same thing as expertise in the subject itself), as well as helping students enjoy learning.
2. Unicity – seeing that each student is unique and being sufficiently caring and capable to cater to this diversity.
3. Distance – a combination of being fair, maintaining a distance from students but not being too distant, sharing with students about themselves, and encouraging students to collaborate with each other.

A famous study Rosenthal & Jacobsen in the book entitled *Pygmalion in the Classroom: Teacher Expectation and Pupils' Intellectual Development* in 1968 introduced the term Pygmalion Effect, i.e., the power of expectations in learning. The researchers found that teachers' expectations of students impacted the way teachers taught, as well as impacting students' own expectations of themselves. In the end, students for whom teachers had high expectations outperformed those students for whom teachers had low expectations, even though these expectations were manipulated by the researchers. Why? Teachers' high expectations led them to try harder to teach these students and to give them more challenging tasks. Furthermore, teachers communicated their low expectations of the other students to those students, leading them to have lower expectations of themselves and to make less effort.

A later study, Feldman and Prohaska (1979) used similar manipulation, but focused not on teacher expectations of students but student expectations of their teachers, and found that expectations, even when artificially invented by researchers rather than being based on actual past performance, impacted student learning. For example, when students have lower expectations of their teachers, students may be less likely to ask teachers for help, because they do not believe that those teachers are capable of providing worthwhile assistance.

As explained by Cox in the research entitled *What are students' expectation of teachers while checking in?* in 2017 <https://www.teacherready.org/students-expectations/#:~:text=Students%20want%20teachers%20who%3A%20Show%20students%20they%20care,students%20in%20the%20classroom.%20Teach%20students%20as%20individuals>, offered six suggestions for what teachers can do to raise student expectations of their teachers:

1. Show concern for students
2. Use active learning
3. Appreciate student progress
4. Have high expectations for students
5. Recognize student individuality
6. Demonstrate enjoyment in being with students.

Major overlap exists between Cox's list of suggestions for what teachers can do to raise their students' expectations of their teachers and De Bruyckere and Kirschner's (2017) three factors of teacher authenticity in students' view. This raises a question: What happens when actions teachers take in order to be true to themselves lead these teachers to not fit with student views on how teachers should behave in and out of class? Of course, in addition to students, other stakeholders, e.g., school administrators and students' family members, may have different views of what constitutes a good teacher. Can teachers be true to their authentic selves, at the same time being faithful to what others see as authentic teachers? For instance, Grote in the book chapter entitled *Authenticity as activism in 2022* wrote about how in her early career she gave up some of her preferred behaviors, such as mode of transportation to school and style of dress at school, in order to meet others' expectations.

The matter of teacher authenticity in terms of different views on the behaviors and appearance of teachers also triggers the question of whether to adopt a flexible outlook on teacher and student identities, especially in the current borderless world. As explained by Hua in the book entitled *Exploring intercultural communication: Language in action in 2014*, cultural identity is "a collection of multiple identities...with other intersecting identities such as race, nationality, gender, class, and religious affiliation" (p. 2). In the third decade of the 21st century, there are many identities that must be considered, requiring adaptability and expansion in understanding expectations and what walking the talk means.

2.3 Lifewide and Lifedeeep Learning

The concept of lifelong learning is well-established in education (Sung, et al., 2022). In fact, a relatively new area of continuous learning along people's life journey has been labelled "geragogy," i.e., the learning of seniors (as explained by Semigina in the book chapter entitled *The elderly care, active ageing and geragogy: Could they co-exist in Ukraine and how?* in 2021), highlighting the point that learning can continue throughout people's lives, even in their older years. SCL plays a role in lifelong learning, as this ongoing education needs to suit each learner's interests and needs, while also bearing in mind the needs of society. Less well-known than lifelong learning is two other concepts related to how people can learn throughout their lives: lifewide learning and lifedeeep learning (Ojokheta, 2020).

Lifewide learning involves people going beyond their main activities (Zhuang, et al., 2017). Examples of main activities could be engineering students using their engineering knowledge to design solar-powered cars as part of their studies, and chefs using their culinary skills to prepare food at a fine dining restaurant as part of their jobs. Examples of widening their spheres of activity could be engineering students and chefs taking up a hobby, learning an additional language, volunteering at a home for indigent seniors, or campaigning on behalf of the welfare of farmed animals, such as chickens. Again, the link with SCL lies in the fact that people decide on their lifewide learning in line with their interests and needs. Unfortunately, many people may be too busy with their main pursuits to undertake lifewide learning.

Lifedeeep learning encourages people to reflect on their lives and consider various profound questions, such as their purpose in life, whether they are fulfilling that purpose, whether they are happy, what happiness means to them, what are their strengths and weaknesses, how to improve themselves, whether they are a success, and what success means to them (Jacobs & Renandya, 2021). Such deep questions prepare students of any age to make wiser, more grounded choices as they pursue SCL. Authentic teachers can model lifelong, lifewide, and lifedeeep learning for their students.

2.4 Promoting Diversity

Education and society generally place increased emphasis on mental health (Khazanchi, et al., 2021). Mental health includes being willing to be different and appreciating the benefits of diversity. By sharing about their authentic selves, teachers can demonstrate pride in being different; they can be a resource for diversity. However, being different is often difficult, even for teachers, who enjoy a position of power in their classrooms. Grote in the

book chapter entitled *Authenticity as activism* in 2022, mentioned earlier in this article, provided an example of overcoming the difficulty of talking about one's differences. Early in her teaching career, fitting in was a key goal:

Excerpt 3

Fitting the image of a professional teacher was paramount when this was what I was trying to become. I was young, inexperienced, and struggling to maintain enough of a divide between myself and my students. ... I quickly determined that the fastest way to professionalism was a hefty wall between myself as an individual and my identity as a teacher in the classroom. Personal questions were met with the smiling response, "It's a secret," and I let very few stories of my life outside the classroom slip into my pedagogical choices

Later, Grote decided that she needed to shift to being a model of authenticity and openness with her students. Therefore, she started to share about her LGBTQ+ lifestyle. At first, she felt anxious when doing so, but after a while, the anxiety eased. "I don't want my students to see me as nervous or uncomfortable in who I am; I want to model pride and courage." As a result of Grote's authenticity with her students, those students who felt they were different from average were willing to share, sometimes just with her alone, other times with the entire class. Additionally, Grote became a resource for students and colleagues who wanted to learn about her lifestyle. Indeed, in education and many other fields, the value of diversity of many types, such as diversity of perspectives, experiences, and answers to open-ended questions, is gaining increasing recognition (Fatmawati, 2021; Rosenkranz, et al., 2021).

Grote seeks to encourage authenticity for everyone and to establish a diversity-positive classroom, a place where students feel they are safe and accepted by others. To do this, she discusses guidelines and hopes for her classes to live by something like the ones below.

1. Talk about yourself but try not to assume about others.
2. Give people the benefit of the doubt. They are speaking in second or third, etc. languages. Although they may accidentally say something that sounds offensive, this may be a linguistic issue rather than one of malicious intent, or it may be due to lack of knowledge, not lack of manners.
3. Listen respectfully.
4. Don't judge others.
5. Be brave and curious. (It can be hard to share your own stories or ask others about theirs, but doing so can deepen everyone's understanding.)
6. Share as much as you presently feel comfortable with sharing.
7. Don't be afraid to say, "Sorry, but I don't want to answer at this time" / "I don't want to talk about it right now, please." Assert your boundaries.

Similarly, to encourage the authenticity of teachers and students, Sumanto and Asmawi in the book entitled *From me to we: Teaching children taboo topics for empathy through spoken word poetry in Malaysia in 2022* used spoken word poetry as a critical pedagogical tool in the ESL classroom. They provided a step-by-step guide for teachers to use taboo topics for empathy development among students. Here, teachers engage in dialogues that endorse critical thinking and encourage students to do the same. Students then question and speak on behalf of what they believe in. A discussion on stereotypes, for example, could lead to "an exploration of gender roles, expectations, and effects of rigid gender stereotyping on both girls and boys" (p. 64). Both teacher and students engage in critical discourse suggesting authenticity of teacher practice.

2.5 Saying "I Don't Know"

The roles of teachers in SCL greatly change from the roles teachers play in teacher-centered learning (Khanna & Mehrotra, 2019; Rachmawati & Ekasiwi, 2017). In SCL, teachers are "guides on the side," facilitating student learning, rather than "sages on stages," downloading information directly to students' minds (Ananga & Biney, 2017; Lau, 2020). Teachers working in the SCL paradigm are not embarrassed - they do not lose face - when they say to their students, "I don't know." Instead, teachers are co-learners, part of communities of learning and practice (as explained by Wenger in the book chapter entitled *Communities of practice and social learning systems: The career of a concept*. In C. Blackmore in 2010) along with their students and others, communities of both novices and experts.

Why should anyone be embarrassed about not knowing? After all, knowledge is huge and changes in knowledge are constant, resulting in new knowledge being created and other knowledge going out of date or being seen as wrong. Nonetheless, the authors of this article can attest to the discomfort teachers may experience when they tell students they do not know the answer to a student question or, perhaps worse, they admit to students that something they had said or written for students was wrong. Support for teacher willingness to admit their weaknesses can be traced back at least to Confucius who lived about 2500 years ago and is believed to have said, "Do I regard myself as a possessor of wisdom? Far from it!" and "Be not ashamed of mistakes and thus make them crimes" (as explained by Beck in the research entitled *How confucius taught in 2006* <http://www.san.beck.org/CONFUCIUS3-How.html>)

One context in which teachers might say, "I don't know" occurs in language teaching when teachers do not know the languages of their students. For instance, English teachers from the U.S. teaching in Malaysia might not know any of the languages their students speak at home. Furthermore, these teachers might be monolingual English speakers and not making much progress or not even much effort to learn students' languages or, for that matter, any other languages. If instead, teachers at least tried to learn students' languages, they might show more

patience in regard to their students' difficulties with English and even their students' ambivalence toward learning English or whatever language is being taught (Hedman & Magnusson, 2020).

Teachers admitting their ignorance and their fallibility represent authenticity, as everyone, even renowned experts, is ignorant in so many ways. Furthermore, for many reasons, even these experts make many mistakes. At the same time that teachers show humility by sharing about their lack of knowledge and their mistakes, teachers should also demonstrate enthusiasm for learning. This is the main idea behind the SCL concept of Teachers as Co-Learners (as explained by Jacobs et al. in the book entitled *Simple, powerful strategies for student centered learning* in 2016), demonstrating authenticity in learning (e.g., that they too experience the same struggles, occasional losses of motivation, and mistakes when learning new things), not only in teaching.

Teachers as Co-Learners can result in fortuitous events (as explained by Jablon in the book chapter entitled "To Kill a Mockingbird" is a racist book in 2022). Students can become teachers of their teachers, e.g., when Tamil-speaking students help their teachers learn Tamil. Students can also become co-learners with their teachers, e.g., when a native speaker of Malay joins their teachers in studying Tamil. As a result, classroom dynamics can change toward more egalitarian status which encourages greater student ownership.

The authenticity of admitting to ignorance and mistakes fits well with the concept of resilience (Mai, et al., 2021), i.e., students dealing with setbacks and deficits. For example, contrary to what some students may think, it is the experience of the authors of this article that when, for example, in the middle of a term, students are doing poorly and have not reached the expected level of progress, teachers take it as a personal setback, as an indication of their own deficiency. Teachers can demonstrate resilience by discussing with students what both parties – students and teachers – can do moving forward. In this case, Teachers as Co-Learners can mean teachers learning with their students about how to better promote student learning.

2.6 Promoting Cooperation

Students learning in groups occurs even without prompting by teachers. For instance, in high school, one of the authors of this article was particularly bad at mathematics. One of his friends kindly offered to tutor him. Unfortunately, the tutoring did not help, but 50+ years later, the kindness is still remembered. Later in his student career, this same author formed voluntary study groups with fellow students which were more successful. Today, education systems around the world seek to formalize this student-student learning via such names as problem-based learning, project-based learning, collaborative learning, and cooperative learning. These and other iterations of student-student interaction constitute an important way of operationalizing (SCL). Furthermore, many theories in Psychology and related fields – including Socio-Cultural Theory, Social Interdependence Theory, and Humanism – highlight the benefits of students learning, not just from and with teachers, but also from and with peers.

However, strong forces in many societies militate against cooperation. Social Interdependence Theory describes three different feelings that can exist between people (as explained by Johnson & Johnson in the book entitled *Joining together: Group theory and group skills* (12th ed.) in 2017): positive interdependence, negative interdependence, and no interdependence. When people feel positively interdependent with others, they feel as though their outcomes are positively correlated, i.e., they feel that success for one is success for others, and failure for one is a failure for others. Such feelings promote cooperation. In contrast, with negative interdependence, people feel that their outcomes correlate negatively with the outcomes of others, and with no interdependence, people see no correlation between their own outcomes and those of others. Thus, feelings of negative interdependence and no interdependence work against cooperation.

Unfortunately, many practices in education as well as society generally promote competition with or lack of concern for others. For example, many schools use norm-referenced assessment, also known as grading on a curve. This could mistakenly lead some students to adopt a feeling of negative interdependence toward classmates (Jacobs & Greliche, 2017). Along the same lines, in many societies, the view is that humans are innately competitive. Famous research, e.g., Milgram (1963) as well as the famous novel about a group of boys stranded on an island after a plane crash, *Lord of the Flies* (as explained by Golding in the book entitled *Lord of the Flies* in 1954), support this negative interdependence view of humans. As explained by Bregman in the book entitled *Humankind: A hopeful history* in 2020 debunked these famous studies and described a real-life example of cooperation among stranded boys to counter Golding's fictional portrayal of a savage society created by stranded boys.

How does the controversy about the most prominent type of interdependence people feel connect with teacher authenticity? As noted above, teachers often encourage students to cooperate with their peers, but are teachers cooperating with their own peers and others? Due to the messages students too often receive from society, students might assume that their teachers are not practicing what they preach when it comes to cooperation. Therefore, teachers may want to take steps to let students know that their teachers are indeed walking their talk as to peer collaboration. For instance, many teachers cooperate to find, create, and modify materials, develop programs for students, help students facing difficulties, etc. (Drossel, et al., 2019).

Outside school, many teachers also do a great deal of cooperating, e.g., in NGOs, religious organizations, sports teams, and music/theatre organizations. Teacher communities of practice (as explained by Wenger in the book chapter entitled *Communities of practice and social learning systems: The career of a concept*. In C. Blackmore in 2010) have members who mutually focus on joint programs through the sharing of skills. For example, one of the authors of the present article founded a community engagement project called PEARL, in collaboration with several urban poor communities to develop English language acquisition for underprivileged children. Several volunteers who are also undergraduate and postgraduate students work closely with the author for this project. They join the author's regular discussions with the community representatives on the preparation of venues, sponsorship of food and beverages, communication with parents, and support in terms of digital tools and other

necessities to facilitate the smooth running of the project. Having observed how things are carried out in such a community project over several months, these students started to develop collaborative skills as well as adopt other practices required of a community of volunteers. Based on these authentic experiences, it became easier for undergraduate and graduate students to discuss concepts and relate them to real issues as well as to develop a passion for volunteerism.

2.7 Mixed Messages

For teachers, being authentic can be difficult, as teachers must deal with a number of conflicting forces. An example of such difficulties occurred to one of the authors of this article who was teaching a module on cooperative learning as part of a graduate course in education, and 60% of the grade was based on an essay that course members had to write. In keeping with SCL, the plan was for each student to choose their own individual essay topic, rather than for the lecturer to assign one topic to the entire class or give students a menu of approved topics from which to choose. Students could provide each other with peer feedback and other forms of assistance on the essay, but they were to develop the skill of developing their own topic. Thus, the teacher seemed to be walking the talk as to SCL. However, the teacher soon discovered that inadvertently competition soon developed among students for what they perceived to be a small number of preferred essay topics.

Another example of mixed messages occurs when teachers promise students to be there to help any student who may be having difficulties, at the same time that teachers espouse a belief in “teaching students to grow rice, not giving students a bowl of rice.” One of the authors of this article was working in a university’s learning support center which mostly helped students with their academic writing. On one hand, although almost everyone – the authors of this article included – can benefit from writing assistance, the overwhelming majority of students at the university never availed themselves of the learning support center’s services, while a very small number of students seemed to view the center as a kind of drop-off cleaning service for their academic writing. Instead of learning how to write well, they would just come by for their learning-free bowl of rice. How could the teachers at the learning support center simultaneously demonstrate authenticity to their belief in caring for students and to their belief in SCL?

2.8 How Influential Are Teachers?

This article is based on the assumption that what teachers do impacts students, that instances of teacher authenticity where teachers walk their talk will lead, as it did for Cates (above) to students following in those teachers’ footsteps, as well as walking their own talk, whatever that might be. Thus, maybe the article should have started with a discussion of teachers’ impact on students. The research on this matter is complicated (Wentzel, et al., 2010), with many factors at play, particularly students’ age. In reality, much of what teachers teach seems to go in one of the students’ ears and quickly out the other ear, or remain in students’ minds only for a short period of time before the information taught is regurgitated on some type of assessment instrument, such as an exam.

In response to this uncertainty, teachers need a healthy dose of hope, because they may never know what their influence will be. The philosopher Henry Adam (Edwards, 2021) wrote optimistically that “Teachers affect eternity; they never know where their influence stops”. Whatever teachers’ influence may be on their students, teachers themselves can benefit from being authentic (Keller & Becker, 2021). In other words, teacher authenticity involves not just teachers’ impact on their students but also teachers’ impact on themselves. For instance as explained by Beauregard in the book chapter entitled “To Thine Own Self Be True”: One music educator’s transition from higher education faculty member to high school teacher in 2020 quoted Shakespeare’s famous line, “To thine own self be true” as a motivation that drove a music teacher to make the unusual choice of giving up a tenure-track university faculty position to teach at a high school. Indeed, research by Zheng et al. (2020) and others has suggested that a feeling of authenticity positively correlates with teacher happiness.

3. CONCLUSION

To conclude, this article has sought to situate language teacher authenticity within the SCL paradigm. SCL might seem to be a very individualistic perspective on education, with each student constructing their own learning, and the curriculum is designed to suit each learner’s individual interests and needs. Perhaps, if teachers attempt to be authentic to themselves, and their learning institution does not allow teachers to do what makes them feel authentic, teachers may want to teach at another institution or find another profession. Indeed, at least one of the authors of this article has made both such choices at various times in his life.

As stated earlier in the section on Authenticity and SCL, SCL has roots in Social Cognitive Theory. This theory connects with the work of Dewey and his colleagues from more than 100 years ago (as explained by Dewey in the book chapter entitled *My pedagogic creed* in 1896) who advocated that education be tied with the life of society and that education should not be separated from the world beyond the school. Indeed, cooperative learning, an education approach that strongly resonates with SCL, highlights the positive interdependence that exists in the world. Thus, teacher authenticity should also be in service to society, because we humans are citizens of the world we live in, and the main reason why we learn lies in being better able to serve that world. Perhaps, that is the best path toward an authentic life.

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