

PLAY AND IMAGINATION IN DEVELOPING LANGUAGE TEACHER *IDENTITY-IN-ACTIVITY*

Paula Golombek*
University of Florida
Gainesville, FL, USA

Patrick Klager**
University of Florida
Gainesville, FL, USA

Abstract

Teacher identity and practice have been characterized as being inextricably linked, highlighting the need for L2 teacher educators to support the development of novice teacher identity and the practices that align with it. Informed by a sociocultural perspective on teacher learning (Johnson, 2009), this study traces the development of the identity of a novice teacher as he grapples with a tension while teaching an advanced grammar class. By conducting a *narrative inquiry* (Johnson & Golombek, 2002), he identified a contradiction between his *identity-in-activity* (Cross, 2006), expressed through the image of the ‘grammar inquisitor’ teaching to the test and the communication-focused instructor he aspired to be. His *narrative inquiry* created a mediational space in which he could ‘play’ with images, as well as *academic concepts* that had been introduced in a graduate course on genre-based instruction, and ‘imagine’ a more satisfying *identity-in-activity*, expressed as ‘synergy’ in a curriculum unit he designed for his grammar class.

Keywords: teacher identity, novice teacher learning, sociocultural theory, teacher cognition, teacher education.

“The clock turns to 11:45am, the students begrudgingly file into their seats, still tired and exhausted from the day before. They take out their homework and look to the board, silently beginning the grammar warm-up, which consists of five sentences where either will or be going to is omitted. Once they have finished, the students know and fear what awaits them next: the future perfect and progressive tenses. They students silently and meticulously take notes as the grammar inquisitor writes decontextualized rule after rule...

1. Use *will* or *be going to* in the independent clause and the simple present in the dependent clause when talking about two separate actions in the future.
2. Future perfect progressive = S + *will have been* + V(-ing) + O
- a. EX: I *will have been torturing* myself with English grammar for 8 months by the time I take the TOEFL. (Klager, 2013, p.1)

* Paula Golombek is Clinical Associate Professor of Linguistics at the University of Florida, where she also supervises the undergraduate Certificate in TESL Program. Paula's interests include Vygotskian sociocultural theory in both the practices of and research on language teacher development, especially the role of both narrative inquiry and emotions in teacher learning. Email: pgolombek@ufl.edu

** Patrick Klager is an instructor at the University of Florida's English language Institute, where he teaches academic and conversational English. Patrick is also the Center for Teaching and Learning in China's TEFL Trainer, where he trains native English speakers to be foreign teachers in Shenzhen, China. His pedagogical interests include teacher education, TESOL education, and creating educational materials through genre analysis. Email: paklager@ufl.edu

Introduction

Patrick, the teacher who wrote this opening narrative, is “the grammar inquisitor”. It is an identity that he perceives that he and his students reluctantly co-construct each meeting of their grammar class at an English language institute. It is an identity that materializes in his instructional activity, frustrating and angering Patrick. And it is an identity of a grammar teacher at which we language teachers can simultaneously smile and cringe because we are likely to have experienced similar frustration teaching grammar. Patrick’s frustration with his *identity-in-activity* (Cross, 2006; Cross & Gearon, 2007), how his identity was positioned in his teaching actions emerging in and shaped by larger sociohistorical discourses, initiated *his narrative inquiry* (Johnson & Golombek, 2002) and underscores the interconnectedness of emotion, identity, and activity. This study explores Patrick’s *identity-in-activity* as ‘the grammar inquisitor’, and how he uses his *narrative inquiry* as a ‘safe zone’ to play with this image and imagine, from a Vygotskian sociocultural perspective, a more satisfying *identity-in-activity* as ‘synergy’.

Research on language teacher cognition within the last decade has argued that teacher identity is a fundamental component of what teachers know and do in the language classroom (Duff & Uchida, 1997; Morgan, 2004; Varghese et al., 2005; Kanno & Stuart, 2011). For novice and experienced teachers alike, there is an “inextricable relationship between teacher identity and classroom practice” (Kanno & Stuart, 2011, p. 250). This statement holds considerable challenges for language teacher educators and language teacher education (LTE). Because novice teachers’ conceptions of teaching and the identities to which they aspire have largely been shaped by their lifelong experiences as students, their *apprenticeship of observation* (Lortie, 1975), teacher educators must engage novice teachers in varied mediational activities that will inform novice teachers’ conceptions and activities of teaching from a position of expertise. Building this expertise is multifaceted, for example intertwining knowledge about language, language teaching, and instructional routines, as well as self-knowledge, including identity.

Teachers trying to develop particular identities often face tensions because the various *activity systems* (Leont’ev, 1978; Engeström, 1987) in which they participate have different values, norms, and expectations for what constitutes ‘good’ language teachers and ‘good’ language teaching. What is imparted in teacher education programs, or in literature advocating particular approaches to or goals in language teaching, may be at odds with the larger sociocultural, institutional, and historical discourses shaping a particular teaching context. For example, in mainstream teacher education, Smagorinsky et al. (2004) detail the tensions resulting from the conflicting identities and practices of what they call a pre-service teacher whose student identity was shaped by the constructivist teaching/learning principles of her teacher education program, one *activity system*, while her teacher identity was shaped by activities of what she called the ‘traditional’ teaching of her practicum setting, another *activity system*. Her teaching activity in the practicum thus accommodated and mirrored her mentor teacher’s activity rather than embodying the pedagogical tools of constructivist teaching.

Cross (2006) detailed similar tensions, but called them *contradictions* (Vygotsky, 1978; Engeström, 1987), between *activity systems* by showing how an in-service Japanese as a foreign language’s teacher’s *identity-in-activity* did not feature widespread use of the Japanese language to develop students’ communicative competence in the target language, what Cross suggests is advocated as ‘good practice’ in the field of LTE. Rather, the teacher’s activity focused on using English to establish classroom order and using Japanese as a means to enhance English literacy skills, what he characterizes as the socio-culturally constructed activity of being a ‘good Japanese language teacher’ in this particular context. What both of these studies highlight is that teachers, as the *subject* of different *activity systems*, experience *contradictions* between identities, and between identities and activity within and between those *activity systems* because those systems have different objects or goals, communities, norms of behavior, and histories. Yet, novice teachers will experience contradictions differently, even within

the same *activity system*, because of their varied social historical circumstances, and the affordances and constraints these provide (Dang, 2013). Mediating novice teachers as they encounter such *contradictions* in their identities across *activity systems* or teaching contexts should thus be part of the process of unifying their emotion, cognition, and activity of teaching within LTE programs, so that developing teacher identity means developing activity that aligns with that identity. In other words, teachers labelling themselves with new identities is not development of identity unless there is also associated changes in teaching activity.

One way that teacher educators have attempted to mediate novice teacher identities, to encourage them to envision and possibly adopt more empowering teacher identities, is through the reading of and reflective activities surrounding research and theories that challenge the dominant discourses of idealized English language teachers. A line of such research has sought to transform the identities of nonnative speaking English teachers (NNESTs) explicitly by challenging the *native speaker myth* (Phillipson, 1992) through various mediational activities exploring theories of bilingualism and multicompetence (Cook, 1992), for example in courses of MATESOL programs or teacher supervision courses in PhD programs. By exploring these theories and more empowering identities, and restorying their own identities through reflective activities, these teachers were able to reimagine themselves as multicompetent and bilingual teachers of English, viewing themselves more positively as part of an imagined community of multicompetent speakers of English (Pavlenko, 2003; Golombek & Jordan, 2005; Reis, 2011a, 2011b).

A fundamental weakness of these studies is that although they describe teachers' adoption of idealized conceptions of an alternative teacher identity, they do not show the teachers transforming the material activity of their teaching to align with their incipient identities. Moreover, as Kanno and Stuart (2011) demonstrated, formation of teacher identity is a sustained process of *learning-in-practice* (Lave, 1996), through which developing basic instructional skills, content expertise, and an understanding of what was important to teachers in their own teaching was particularly constructive

in identity building. This raises a practical and ethical concern for teacher educators as to how we can maximize opportunities for novice teachers to design instructional activity for specific teaching contexts that is congruent with both identities appropriate for those contexts, and teachers' conceptions of teaching and learning, in order to enhance the development of 'located' teacher identities that form part of *located teacher education* (Johnson, 2009).

This study, informed by a sociocultural perspective on teacher learning (Johnson, 2009), thus attempted to trace the development of a novice teacher's *identity-in-activity* (Cross 2006; Cross & Gearon, 2007) that he detailed in emotional images in a *narrative inquiry* (Johnson & Golombek, 2002). The goals of this study are to show how his *narrative inquiry* created a mediational space in which he could 'play' with images, as well as *signs/academic concepts* that had been introduced in a graduate course on genre-based instruction, and 'imagine', or recreate, from a Vygotskian (2004) perspective, a new, more satisfying *identity-in-activity*.

Theoretical framework

Identity-in-activity

Though Vygotsky never used the term 'identity' in his work (Penuel & Wertsch, 1995; Cross & Gearon, 2007), others have theorized about the social origin and formation of identity by highlighting how cultural tools (re)shape action in goal-oriented activity (Penuel & Wertsch, 1995), so that identity is "a being in continuous becoming" (Roth, 2003, section 2.2) through activity. Cross (2006) and Cross and Gearon (2007) propose the construct of *identity-in-activity* as a way to unify identity as concrete practice and discursively constructed practice. More specifically, they posit that language teacher identity involves a dialectic between the microgenetic activity that a teacher realizes as a *subject* within an *activity system*, with its associated rules, community members, tools and objects; and the larger social, cultural, historic domain from which that activity emerged and is shaped. The construct of *identity-in activity* can thus be used to analyze the

development of teacher identity because it can be applied initially to characterize a teacher's identities in different *activity systems*, or instructional contexts, and the larger discourses shaping those identities in different contexts. If there is a sense that tensions exist, it can then be used to identify possible *contradictions* between identity and activity within and between *activity systems*. Identity, along with motive, are byproducts of emotion, thus suggesting that emotion and motive are central to understanding the formation of identity (Roth, 2007). Although *emotional/cognitive dissonance* can act as a catalyst for teacher development, dissonance alone does not realize change in teacher development (Golombek & Johnson, 2004; Childs, 2011; Reis, 2011a, 2011b; Kubanyiova, 2012). What is crucial in pushing teacher development is the quality, nature, and timing of mediation being responsive to a particular teacher's needs and abilities within a particular context (Johnson & Golombek, 2011, 2013; Johnson & Dellagnelo, 2013; Arshavskaya, 2014; Golombek & Doran, 2014; Johnson & Worden, 2014). To do this, a teacher or teacher educators can look for *growth points* (Golombek & Doran, 2014; Johnson & Worden, 2014), the moment or moments of a dialectic of cognition and emotion "coming into being" (Johnson & Worden, 2014, p. 124) that become evident in what teachers say and do. When a teacher expresses emotion, it signals a need to pay attention to some area of cognitive understanding or activity that needs mediation. Then, when mediation is directed at the *growth point*, the teacher is ripe for mediation that can push development.

One important way that teacher educators mediate is by introducing new tools or *signs* to support the qualitative transformation of teachers' mental activity (Johnson & Dellagnelo, 2013). Vygotsky's unit of analysis, *word meaning*, was based on a dialectic between word (*sign form*) and thought (*sign meaning*), for, according to Wertsch (2007), "the general goal of instruction is to assist students in becoming fluent users of a sign system" (p. 186). From the perspective of Vygotsky's (1978, 1987) genetic method, these *signs* would be overtly introduced in social interaction on the *intermental* plane and gradually the meaning of the sign system develops, emerging in fits and starts

on the *intramental* plane, through sustained goal-oriented cultural activities. Of particular importance is the development of *academic concepts*: "concepts that emerge in children's use in conjunction with school education, in the context of academic curricular disciplines" (van der Veer & Valsiner, 1994, p. 369) In language teacher education, for example, the *academic concept* of 'multicompetence' adopted in research attempting to mediate NNESTs' identities (Pavlenko, 2003; Golombek & Jordan, 2005; Reis, 2011a, 2011b) can be characterized as a *sign* that has been introduced to change teachers' identity, and associated cognition and activity, as a reaction against the discourse of the deficient identity of NNESTs.

However, if the teacher only reflects on these concepts as was done in these studies, and does not grapple with them through sustained, culturally meaningful, goal-oriented activities (i.e., materialized and enacted in instructional activity), the teacher may have an idealized identity as a multicompetent teacher but his/her *identity-in-activity* may not change to reflect this. Mastery of concepts cannot be separated from material activity, or the concept remains a "generalization of the most elementary type" (Vygotsky, 1994, p. 356). If a teacher cannot design and enact instructional activity that aligns with a new identity, the new identity has not become a psychological tool regulating that teacher's activity, or, in other words, *identity-in-activity* has not changed. Although LTE programs are on record introducing numerous sign forms to novice teachers, how they engage those teachers' meaning making of signs in sustained, goal-oriented activity—activity that is crucial to teachers being able to use those *sign systems* to regulate their teaching activity—remains unclear (Johnson & Dellagnelo, 2013), especially as to how they shape teacher identity. This study explored how a teacher, Patrick, addressed a *growth point* by working through his understanding of the *academic concept* of 'genre' through the problem solving activity of his *narrative inquiry* and his design of a context-specific, genre-based curriculum unit.

The role of play and imagination in development

Immersing novice teachers in manipulating *sign forms* in meaningful activities can be likened to Vygotsky's idea concerning the role of play in the development of children's higher mental processes. Vygotsky (1967) described play as follows:

“In play the child is always behaving beyond his age, above his usual everyday behavior; in play he is, as it were, a head above himself. Play contains in a concentrated form, as in the focus of a magnifying glass, all developmental tendencies; it is as if the child tries to jump above his usual level. The relation of play to development should be compared to the relation between instruction and development... Play is a source of development and creates the zone of proximal development” (p. 16).

Children, through play, especially play mediated by adults, engage in a zone of proximal development (ZPD), a metaphorical space of maturing cognitive functions (Vygotsky, 1978), and learn the cultural rules of dealing with both imaginary and real worlds. Vygotsky posits that what children are doing through play, in essence, is working through their understandings of signs and cultural artifacts in ways that initially mimic interactions in which they have participated or observed, a kind of ‘practice’ in an imaginary situation, or a ‘safe zone’. This idea of play, of practicing *signs* in a safe zone, has implications for language teacher education, but in order to illustrate that, Vygotsky's (2004) thinking on imagination is pivotal:

“the creative activity of the imagination depends directly on the richness and variety of a person's previous experience because this experience provides the material from which the products of fantasy are constructed. The richer a person's experience, the richer is the material his imagination has access to” (pp. 14-15).

Vygotsky argued that experience (reality) and imagination are dialectically related. In developing rich stores of experience as we mature, our

imagination develops and we can recreate experiences to help solve new problems. The adult, by having a store of rich experiences, has a greater imagination than a child. Imagination, as a higher psychological process involving affect and intellect, evolves “very slowly and gradually” (2004, p. 13), so that children acquire increasingly complex rule-based behaviors in increasingly complex problem solving interactions, that is, in play activity, in imaginary situations, that is increasingly amplified. We could say that children take each play experience into their next, so that play provides a way to develop rich experiences. We can imagine a child picking up from their last play activity and continuing it on a new day. But being able to reinterpret past experiences is what Vygotsky (2004) argued was essential to understanding imagination:

“It is precisely human creative activity that makes the human being a creature oriented toward the future, creating the future and thus altering his own present. This creative activity, based on the ability of our brain to combine elements, is called imagination or fantasy in psychology” (Vygotsky, 2004, p. 9).

Imagination enables us to recontextualize and broaden our experiences, as well as those of others, so that “creating an imaginary situation can be regarded as means of developing abstract thought” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 103). Imagination then for a novice teacher may be difficult to call upon when his/her experiences are rich as students, but not as teachers. For language teacher educators, the task becomes to provide novice teachers with ‘play experiences’, in which they can “jump above his [or her] usual level” (Vygotsky, 1967, p. 16), and which can thus serve as sources of development. Furthermore, ‘play experiences’ can support practice engaging with *signs* in a safe zone, providing novice teachers, in the process, with rich experiences that can be reinterpreted for future teaching activity

This study details how Patrick plays with the images of ‘the grammar inquisitor’ and ‘synergy’ as a way to regulate his emotions about his grammar teaching activity, and imagines his previous experiences as a grammar teacher and a language assistant, mediated

by the *academic concept* of 'genre', in the 'safe zone' provided by his *narrative inquiry* and development of a genre-based curriculum unit. This concept becomes a psychological tool that enables Patrick to create an *identity-in-activity*, 'synergy', which helps him address the *contradictions* he experiences between his students' goals for learning grammar and his goals for teaching it.

Methodology

Patrick and the context of his narrative inquiry

Patrick graduated with a BS in Business Administration and a BA in Linguistics. He had numerous experiences as a tutor and instructor since he was in high school, for example as an algebra tutor for homeschooled children and as a teacher of recreational and competitive gymnastics. During his undergraduate studies, Patrick worked in a paid position as a Language Assistant (LA) at an English Language Institute (ELI). Language Assistants (LAs) work with a partner and are positioned as conversation partners rather than teachers. They prepare and engage the same group of students in communicative activities four times per week. After graduating from college in 2009, Patrick taught English as a foreign language to junior high students in Shenzhen, China, for 2 years. Patrick returned to his undergraduate university to pursue his Master's Degree in Linguistics where he hoped to receive more systematic and substantive professional development for teaching ESL/EFL. He worked again at the ELI, but this time as an independent instructor teaching adults.¹ He was teaching a low advanced grammar class during the time described in this study. There were fifteen students in the class from various countries such as Saudi Arabia, Venezuela, China, and South Korea.

Patrick's undertaking of his *narrative inquiry* did not strictly mark the beginning of his story for this study. During the final semester of his MA program, Patrick was taking a course on genre-based approaches to language teaching with me,² and frequently in class, he described tensions he was experiencing

in his teaching of grammar through *small stories* (Georgakopoulou, 2006), brief vignettes describing something that happened, usually frustrating, in class. Though we did not record these stories, they became part of our classroom discussions, as well as Patrick and my professional/personal discussions. Patrick's repeated *small stories* of frustration teaching grammar informed my suggestion as his advisor that he conduct a *narrative inquiry* for his final MA project (due in early April) in order to help him figure out more deeply what was frustrating him in his teaching of grammar. During the same semester, Patrick was also required to do a curriculum unit as the final requirement in the genre course he was taking with me (due in late April). Patrick expressed positive reactions to the readings and activities we did in class, so I recommended that he use the findings from his *narrative inquiry* to inform his genre unit. Through these two requirements, Patrick could thus systematically investigate his grammar class through his *narrative inquiry*, and then use his findings to inform his genre-based grammar unit in hopes that he could devise a more satisfying instructional response.

The *academic concept* of 'genre' was introduced to Patrick in the graduate course in terms of three commonly identified theoretical perspectives, English for Specific Purposes, Systemic Functional Linguistics, and the New Rhetoric (Hyon, 1996). The course focused more on the first two as they present more detailed approaches to using genre as an organizing principle in instruction. Students read seminal pieces from the perspectives, conducted genre analyses from the different perspectives (e.g., Swales, 1990; Paltridge, 2001), conducted discourse analyses of different genres (e.g., McCarthy, 1998), designed and critiqued genre-based activities, and designed a genre-based curriculum unit as a final project.

As the first step in his *narrative inquiry*, Patrick designed a short questionnaire (see Appendix A) to acquire some understanding of why his students were studying English and what they thought about grammar. Patrick's findings, which will be discussed further in the findings, proved informative. The top two reasons that his students identified for studying English were 'to get a degree then return to my country'

and to do well on 'IELTS/TOEFL. The results from the questionnaire provided Patrick with an understanding of what students wanted to achieve as a result of taking his grammar class, which Engeström (1987) might operationalize as *objects*. Patrick wrote two drafts of his *narrative inquiry*, which I mediated by providing feedback on the content. He also worked through several drafts of his genre-based grammar unit. I provided both verbal and written feedback to each draft of the unit. My mediation, though undoubtedly playing a role in his developing his *identity-in-activity*, is beyond the scope of this paper.

Data collection and analysis

The primary data analyzed in this study was the narrative Patrick wrote for his narrative inquiry, while a secondary piece of data was the curriculum unit he designed for the genre class. In order to check my interpretation of Patrick's data, I included member checks (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) with Patrick at various points. For example, I presented drafts of the analysis to Patrick twice for feedback. Patrick largely provided further details for the analysis.³ Member checks are denoted as (MC) in the analysis.

Patrick's development of his *identity-in-activity* is traced from his initial feelings of frustration expressed in his narrative that helps describe his *identity-in-activity* expressed as 'the grammar inquisitor', the contradiction that emerged in his narrative concerning his students' *object* for learning grammar and his *object* for teaching grammar, and his new *identity-in-activity* expressed as 'synergy' and exemplified in selections from his curriculum unit. In order to analyze Patrick's *identity-in-activity*, his activity and the cultural forces shaping it, I followed Cross (2006) and Cross and Gearon (2007) by doing a microgenetic analysis of Patrick's narrative in order to trace Patrick's *identity-in-activity*, and an analysis of the cultural-historic domain to contextualize it. The microgenetic analysis, however, forms the primary part of the analysis. In order to characterize Patrick's *identity-in-activity*, I looked for images to capture that identity as well as instances where Patrick described his activity of teaching. I also

used a heuristic for identifying emotional language and content in teacher narratives (Golombek & Doran, 2014) in order to extrapolate Patrick's feelings about his *identity-in-activity*. In order to illustrate what Patrick described as the changes in his activity of teaching in his narrative, what I operationalized as *identity-in-activity*, and to show his taking up of genre as a psychological tool shaping his instruction, I provided examples from his curriculum unit that represented concrete instances of his *thinking in concepts* (Karpov, 2003).

Patrick's narrative inquiry

As noted when describing the context of Patrick's *narrative inquiry*, he surveyed his students' conceptions of grammar and their reasons for learning English. He wrote:

"By conducting this questionnaire, I came across some interesting information. The salient conceptions are listed as follows:

- Grammar is the most important thing in order to know a language fluently.
- There are no big differences between written and spoken grammar except that Americans do not use grammar properly when speaking.
- Grammar has many rules with exceptions that need to be memorized.
- Grammar must be learned through rules and memorizing.
- The purpose of grammar class is to learn English grammar to do well on a test, like the IELTS or TOEFL, or to write a paper for class." (Klager, 2013, p. 4)

Patrick's findings showed that students largely thought of grammar as the most important aspect of learning a language, as being rule-based, and as needing to be memorized. That they do not perceive a difference between written and spoken grammar and that Americans do not use grammar correctly, indicating that they conceive of grammar from a strict prescriptive point of view rather than functional or communicative.

Most importantly, he learned that their purpose for learning in a grammar class was to do well on a test, especially a high stakes test like TOEFL. Patrick also found that the two most important reasons for studying English were 1) To get a degree then return to my country and 2) IELTS/TOEFL. These findings helped Patrick understand what his students wanted from the grammar class, their *objects* from an SCT perspective, and helped him to restore the way he had been teaching, his *identity-in-activity* as ‘the grammar inquisitor’

Patrick’s explanation of ‘the grammar inquisitor’

Patrick’s *identity-in-activity* was introduced at the beginning of this article through the image of ‘the grammar inquisitor’ and the passage that served as the introduction to his *narrative inquiry*:

They take out their homework and look to the board, silently beginning the grammar warm-up, which consists of five sentences where either will or be going to is omitted. Once they have finished, the students know and fear what awaits them next: the future perfect and progressive tenses. **The students silently and meticulously take notes as the grammar inquisitor writes decontextualized rule after rule...** on the board, seemingly with no end. After thirty minutes, tortured by their boredom and lack of comprehension, the students let out a collective sigh of relief as the final rule of the future perfect tense used in conjunction with *by the time*-phrases is written on the board—which is now completely obscured by rules they have yet to comprehend” (Klager, 2013, p. 1).

Patrick describes his teacher *identity-in activity*, ‘the grammar inquisitor’, as writing ‘decontextualized rule after rule’ until the board is full, the kind of *banking education* (Freire, 1993) in which teachers ‘deposit’ knowledge into students. Students’ activity is copying the rules and completing a sentence-level exercise in which they have to determine the correct grammatical form. His description of their activity is supplemented by what he perceives his students’ negative emotions to be: resistance as they ‘be grudgingly file into their seats’; and ‘fear’ as

to what will happen after the opening warm-up activity. Although negative emotions pervade the introduction to his narrative, Patrick does not express his emotions through the personal pronoun ‘I’, but distances himself instead in the third person as “the grammar inquisitor”. Likewise, he refers to the students as ‘the students’ rather than ‘my students’. Patrick noted in an email that

“...the ‘grammar inquisitor image’ basically made me realize that my approach to teaching was wrong, even if the students did claim to want it. It basically led me to the conclusion that I needed to ‘give them what they want’ but do it through my own means. I was able to use the analogy of the grammar inquisitor (a torturer of sorts) to help me realize that I was unhappy, as well as the students” (personal communication, April 11, 2011).

Patrick’s adoption of ‘the grammar inquisitor’ helped him recognize that his ‘approach to teaching was wrong’ through a kind of fantastical representation of ‘a torturer of sorts’. Vygotsky noted that through play, children develop the cultural artifacts that act as psychological tools that enable them to enact with increasing control over their worlds. Patrick’s use of this grotesque image is, in a sense, like Vygotsky’s (2004) suggestion that fairy tales act like a cognitive tool for children, enabling them to self-regulate and “develop emotional control on the products of imagination itself” (Gajdamaschko, 2006, p. 19). In helping him to recognize his unhappiness and what he perceived as student happiness, Patrick was able to begin to imagine a different *identity-in-activity* through which he would address what students’ *object* for learning grammar in his class were, ‘but do it through my own means’. This marks a move to Patrick asserting his agency, and moving toward self-regulation of his thinking and doing of teaching.

What Patrick’s ‘means’ became clearer as he contrasted his current situation teaching grammar with his previous experience teaching at the ELI, recalling a happier time when he was an LA.

“When I taught my first IEP English class 4 years ago, I was instantly entranced with

teaching English (much different than present-me). I was hooked because it is a truly amazing experience to watch non-native English speakers, from different parts of the world, communicating in English. The only way that these non-native English speakers could communicate with each other was by using English, **and it feels good as a teacher to help facilitate this communication. From my first classroom interaction, I was convinced that learning and teaching English served the purpose of communicating**” (Klager, 2013, p. 2).

Patrick’s *identity-in-activity* as an LA was as a teacher who facilitates communication, and his purpose, or *object*, for learning and teaching English was ‘communicating.’ He describes his feelings about what he was doing as an LA facilitating communication in playful language: ‘instantly entranced’, ‘hooked’, and ‘feeling good’ about the ‘amazing experience’ of helping learners communicate in English. In recollecting his time as an LA, Patrick has previous experience and good feelings from which to draw as he imagines a different *identity-in-activity*.

An analysis of ‘the grammar inquisitor’ from a cultural-historic domain

The value of *identity-in-activity* as a way to conceptualize identity is that it brings together what a teacher does in a particular instructional context with the larger social, cultural, historic domain from which that activity emerged and is shaped. An analysis of the cultural-historic domain of Patrick’s grammar classroom at the ELI demonstrates that the policy of using standardized tests as a gatekeeper for academic admission can be seen as a powerful cultural tool that shapes Patrick’s individual activity in his classroom interactions. His findings from the survey resonate with how high stakes tests play a prominent role in students’ *object* for studying English in the U.S., scoring well on standardized tests. Similarly, their *object* of obtaining acceptance in a graduate program involves scoring sufficiently well on a high stakes English exam like the IELTS or TOEFL. Moreover, the discourse of the ELI supports this *object* as it is

clearly stated on the Academic Information page of the ELI’s webpage, where they note that “students who wish to enter graduate school at “University X” may be interested in exiting (or completing) the English Language Institute and receiving an English language test score (IELTS, MELAB, TOEFL) exemption from “University X’s” Graduate School”. To parallel Cross and Gearon’s (2007) explanation, the grammar teacher’s *identity-in-activity*, what it means to be a ‘good grammar teacher’ in this particular context is teach grammar for the standardized tests. Although the disproportionate power of high-stakes English language tests may be well-documented in the literature (Shohamy, 2001; Menken, 2008), Patrick’s experiences as an LA focusing on communication shaped his initial teaching of grammar.

Creating a new identity-in-activity: Synergy

Patrick now understood what his students’ reasons were for studying English, and grammar in particular, and he also understood what he wanted his goal to be for teaching grammar. From the point of view of this analysis, Patrick’s new understanding resulted in a *contradiction* between his students’ *object* for learning grammar and his *object* for teaching it. Patrick’s *narrative inquiry* demonstrates how he used his imagination to recreate his past experiences of teaching grammar as ‘the grammar inquisitor’ and his experiences as an LA when he focused on communication by assigning meaning to the *academic concept* of ‘genre’ to which he had been introduced in the graduate course he was taking. By creating the genre-based grammar unit for the graduate course, the materialization of his imagination, Patrick had a ‘safe zone’ to play with these concepts for his particular instructional context. He identifies the grammatical features that he could address in his curriculum unit, for example, conditionals, passives, and gerunds as objects of prepositions, which will be on an exam that students must pass to move on to the next level. Then, he imagines, that is, recreates his past experiences as a grammar teacher and LA in his *narrative inquiry* by first orienting (Galperin, 1989) his activity with a plan of action.

“What I plan to do is develop a curriculum that follows the following sequence of events:

1. Use the textbook for the teach-for-test grammar objectives that are required by the IEP.
2. This needs to be done first because you are still trying to meet the motivations and needs of your students and institution. Not meeting these needs might make the students disengage from your class and teaching.
3. Find spoken and written texts for analysis that cover specifically the objectives required by the IEP.
4. Use these spoken and written texts for your students to analyze to reinforce the teach-for-test grammar as well as address the communicative purposes of the grammar (Klager, 2013), p. 6).

Patrick’s plan to develop a curriculum addressing the two *objects*, which he articulated in the imperative in the enumerated bullet points, embodies his new image of ‘teach-for-test grammar and Genre Analysis synergism’ that he will enact in his grammar teaching. In number 1, he highlights how he will use the textbook to fulfill student expectations, and in number 2, he identifies what he needs to do, finding authentic texts that the students can analyze, in order to implement a genre-based approach to teaching grammar. He also provides his pedagogical reasoning, noted by being underlined, for taking these actions. A key activity for Patrick to work through the *sign form/meaning* of the *academic concept* of ‘genre’ is finding authentic examples of discourse that includes the grammatical items that are part of the student learning objectives at the ELL, but that can be used for communicative purposes. Patrick is moving towards greater agency in providing his pedagogical reasoning in that he is not only asserting increasing control over his activity, but

he is assigning “significance” (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p. 143) to his activity.

Patrick then overviews what the goals of his curriculum unit are through some of the signs to which he was introduced in his graduate course and working through in his curriculum unit.

“Currently, I have developed a 7-day review instructional unit that will examine and revisit the previously taught text-based grammar, as well as compare contextualized analyses from genre texts. The goals for this instructional unit are to have students apply the SLOs they learned in a communicative and contextualized way; analyze contextualized texts and then employ their analyses in communicative interactions; and distinguish and compare prescriptive text-based grammar from descriptive and contextualized uses of grammar” (Klager, 2013, p. 6).

To illustrate how his *identity-in-activity* changed to ‘synergism’, as well as how he worked through these signs in his curriculum unit, a specific example is useful. To have students do ‘contextualized analyses from genre texts’, Patrick gave his students some authentic examples of reminiscing texts in which ‘used to’ and ‘would’ were used for specific discourse-level functions (for example, McCarthy, 1998). To guide them to do a genre analysis of these texts, he had them circle all verbs in red marker, all instances of would and used to in blue marker, and think about the type of writing and its purpose. He then included the following homework assignment and instructions on how to explain the homework assignment (taken from Patrick genre-based grammar unit), an example of how Patrick had students ‘analyze contextualized texts’:

For their homework that evening, the students need to think about the RED and BLUE marks on their *Would* and *Used to* excerpts. The students need to go through their colored excerpts and answer the following questions:

1. What tenses are used in these excerpts?
 - a. When does the author use these tenses?

- b. What purpose does the tense serve?
3. Look at all the instances of *Would* and *Used to* (Blue circles). What is the author trying to do with *Would* and *Used to*?
 4. Is there a pattern?
 5. Think back to our text-based rules we learned for *Would* and *Used to* earlier this semester. Are the authors in these excerpts using *Would* and *Used to* the same way as our text-based rules?
 - a. How are they being used the same way?
 - b. How are they being used differently?

Tell students that they should be prepared to discuss their answers to these questions tomorrow in class.

How Patrick had students ‘distinguish and compare prescriptive text-based grammar from descriptive and contextualized uses of grammar’ is presented in Appendix B. Patrick created a material framework in the form of a chart for students to write the rules from the book, and then to externalize their discourse-based understandings of the grammar form from a particular genre. This chart, in essence, visually represents Patrick’s imagination or recreation of his past experiences as grammar teacher and LA, and a kind of resolution to the *contradiction* he experienced. The chart embodies his ‘teach-for-test grammar and Genre Analysis synergism’, with the left column representing the former and the right, the latter.

As a result of materializing the image of ‘symmetry’, Patrick is able to change⁴ both what he and students do in the classroom, to transform his *identity-in-activity*. He engages students in different kinds of activity, for example, doing discourse/genre analysis, and then comparing their findings about grammar in

use in relation to the rules of the textbook. He himself engages in different activity in the classroom, for example mediating their understandings while they do the discourse/grammar analyses. By ‘playing’ with the *academic concept* of ‘genre’, by designing his curriculum unit and writing his *narrative inquiry*, Patrick uses ‘genre’ as a psychological tool to change his grammar teaching activity in this particular class.

Conclusions

Patrick’s ability to transform his *identity-in-activity* could be attributed, in part, to the linking of the two goal-oriented cultural activities, conducting a *narrative inquiry* and materializing a curriculum development project, and the functions of narrative (Johnson & Golombek, 2011) that were elicited. Patrick’s narrative as *narrative as externalization*, in which he explicitly articulated thoughts and feelings about teaching, enabled him to express, and play with, his frustration as ‘the grammar inquisitor’ and detail his ‘rich experiences’ as teacher and LA. His linked activity of narrative and curriculum design fostered *narrative as verbalization*, as he played with and worked through the *academic concept* of ‘genre’, in a ‘safe zone’, as it related to his specific teaching context. And this linked activity elicited *narrative as systematic examination*, through which his engagement in narrative activity fundamentally shaped what he learned so that he (re)imagined his experiences through the image of ‘synergy’.

Patrick, unlike many novice teachers relying on their *apprenticeship of observation* (Lortie, 1975), already had some rich experiences as an LA and novice grammar teacher upon which to call as he (re)imagined and transformed his *identity-in-activity*. This study, while recognizing actual teaching (especially when mediated by an expert) as the primary source of rich experiences, can nonetheless provide a glimpse into how LTE can initiate such experiences. The linking of Patrick’s activities is notable in that it allowed him, for a specific instructional context, to work through the *academic concept* of ‘genre’ as he identified students’ object for being in his class, his object as a teacher, instructional objectives that could meet both his and

students' objects, and specific texts that embodied the grammar focus; designed instructional activities that met both students' and his objects while materializing the *academic concept* of 'genre'; and articulated his pedagogical reasoning for the activities within the genre-based grammar unit.

Having novice teachers create a curriculum unit for a class is a common activity required in LTE programs, but such a unit is often based on hypothetical contexts, disconnected from other learning-to-teach activities, and not grounded in actual teaching. Having novice teachers create an isolated curriculum unit thus shares Johnson and Arshavskaya's (2011) critique of the microteaching simulation: "the learners aren't real, the subject matter isn't real, and the context in which the microteaching [curriculum unit] is carried out isn't real" (p. 169). Novice teachers need numerous opportunities to make sense of *academic concepts* through actual teaching to push their development (Johnson & Dellagnelo, 2013) and their teacher identity (Kanno & Stuart, 2011). For example, the 'extended team teaching' assignment (Johnson & Dellagnelo, 2013) initiates rich experiences by enabling novice teachers to play with, and work through, *academic concepts* and other aspects of teaching in the practice teach, as well as the other varied activities of the assignment. Another example would be to have novice teachers prepare a curriculum unit in an academic course for a practicum setting in which the teacher will be placed the following semester. Linking experiences of teaching activity across time and space, and mediating them, becomes a way to initiate rich experiences from which novice teachers can begin to imagine.

Playing and imagining, while commonly viewed as children's activity, are activities that can, from a Vygotskian sociocultural perspective, push novice teacher development. Language teacher educators need to establish socially meaningful, connected activities that enable novice teachers to play, to work through emotions common in the learning-to-teach experience and *academic concepts* introduced in the setting of LTE. In doing this, they may also initiate 'rich experiences' from which novice teachers can imagine, while developing the varied kinds of expertise needed for teaching, and shape their *identities-in-activity*.

Notes

1. Patrick holds an affection for grammar and was/is not afraid to teach it, so his tensions in his class did not stem from a dislike or a fear of teaching grammar.
2. 'I/me' refers to first author. 'We' refers to Patrick and me.
3. In a recent email (4/12/15), Patrick wrote "You completely analyzed my teaching subconscious in such a beneficial way that you caused me to learn something from myself. How many teacher educators can say they did that for a teacher they were mentoring? Hahaha." He viewed this research process as beneficial to his professional development, and is currently conducting another *narrative inquiry* in response to changes he made in his teaching of grammar.
4. Patrick's implementation of this curriculum at the end of that semester is beyond the scope of this paper.

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APPENDIX A

Patrick's questionnaire for his students in the grammar class

1. Do you like learning English grammar?
 - a. If yes, what do you like?
 - b. If no, what do you not like?

2. What is the purpose of learning English grammar?

3. What activities have been helpful for learning grammar in the classroom?

4. What activities have not been helpful for learning grammar in the classroom?

5. Explain the differences/similarities between learning grammar for a test and for communicating with Americans.

6. For what reasons are you studying English? Choose all that apply and rank them in order of importance to you.
 - a. IELTS/TOEFL
 - b. To function on a daily basis in America
 - c. To learn about American culture
 - d. To make friends with Americans
 - e. To write English papers for PhD, graduate, or undergraduate programs.
 - f. To get a degree then return to my country.
 - g. Other: _____

APPENDIX B

Chart Patrick devised to compare rules from book and results from genre analysis

DAY 1 [Analysis] (50 minutes)

Introduction/Warm-up: (10 minutes)

Tell the students that they will begin to analyze contextualized instances of *Would* and *Used to*. Tell the students that they will be comparing the contextualized instances of *Would* and *Used to* with the text-based uses that they learned during the semester.

With a partner, the students need to write down the text-based rules of *Would* and *Used to*. After students have done this with a partner, come back together as a class. On the board, the teacher should make a chart divide it in two sections. On the left, the teacher should write all the text-based rules; on the right, the teacher will write the results of the class' contextualized analysis (to be done later). The board should look something like this once the class is finished giving you all the text-based rules:

Text-Based Rules	Contextualized Analysis
Show habitual actions that happened in the past but are no longer true.	
<i>Used to</i> and <i>would</i> are similar in meaning when they express past actions.	
Only <i>used to</i> can show past location, state of being, or possession. EX: I used to live in Florida. (Location) EX: She used to be a doctor. (State) EX: Tom used to have a dog. (Poss)	

This chart will be used again after the students have performed their contextualized analysis.

Day 2 [Application] (50 minutes)

Warm-up: (10-15 minutes)

Have the students take out their homework from the previous night and have them compare their answers

with a partner. After students are done comparing, ask the students to share their answers to the class. The teacher should keep a running list of all student responses on the board. Once the teacher has collected some of the students' responses, go through the responses with the class to determine which responses are actually contextualized analyses of the excerpts. While going through this list, the teacher should encourage students to argue for their responses as well as facilitate the responses that are to be written under the contextualized analysis portion of the chart..

After narrowing down the list of student responses, the teacher should revisit the chart they made yesterday in class about the text-based rules of *Would* and *Used to*. Students should now be able to fill out the contextualized analysis portion of the chart (with any additional aid from the teacher that is necessary). The contextualized analysis section of the chart should address which text-based rules are used in these excerpts as well as new contextualized analyses that the class discovered through analyzing the texts yesterday. As a class, fill out this portion of the chart. It should look something like this:

Text-Based Rules	Contextualized Analysis
Show habitual actions that happened in the past but are no longer true.	Show habitual actions that happened in the past but are no longer true.
<i>Used to</i> and <i>would</i> are similar in meaning when they express past actions.	<i>Used to</i> is used as a framing device at the beginning of a story to draw the listener into the story and create a connection between the speaker and listener
Only <i>used to</i> can show past location, state of being, or possession. EX: I used to live in Florida. (Location) EX: She used to be a doctor. (State) EX: Tom used to have a dog. (Poss)	<i>Would</i> is used for supporting details after <i>used to</i> has framed the story.

Tell students to keep these contextualized analyses in mind because they will be using them for the next activity.