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Becoming and being language teacher educators: a collaborative reflexive account

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ABSTRACT

In this study we employed reflexivity as a typology and a means to foster our own becoming and being as language teacher educators (LTEs). Specifically, drawing on reflexivity as mutual collaboration, we engaged in duoethnography where we were researcher-participants in each other's narratives, with the capacity to be reflexive beings. We collaboratively inquired into our own and one another's professional trajectories, demonstrating how our journeys of becoming and being LTEs were characterised by our social and linguistic identities, our work and interaction with language teachers, and the research and teaching praxis. Findings and discussion advocate a dialogue in the field, acknowledging the dispositions, challenges, and possibilities that reflexivity can offer for LTEs' trajectories.

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Introduction

While teacher education is a well-established area of practice and research, much scholarly work has focused extensively on the preparation and development of pre- and in-service teachers. Little is known about teacher educators, or so-called 'teachers of teachers', particularly regarding how they learn to become teacher educators and their professional development over time (Dengerink, Lunenberg, and Kools 2015). Since 'teacher educators are crucial players for maintaining – and improving – the high quality of the teaching workforce' (European Commission 2013, 4), more research- and practice-based efforts are needed to explore the work of teacher educators in all disciplines. For example, the European Commission has acknowledged this void in current knowledge and understandings of teacher educators' practice, and established in 2013 an association dedicated to supporting and promoting the work of teacher educators in Europe, called The International Forum for Teacher Educator Development (Info-TED) (Info-TED 2019).

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Similarly, in language teacher education, a growing body of recent research has provided initial insights into the work of language teacher educators (LTEs hereafter) (Barkhuizen 2021; Yuan and Lee 2021). Research has highlighted the multiple roles that many LTEs often hold, such as language teachers, teacher trainers, academic lecturers, researchers, leaders, supervisors, mentors, all of which is related in one way or another to the preparation and development of language teachers (Barkhuizen 2021). Recent work has also explored the psychology of LTEs, making explicit their professional motivation (Banegas and del Pozo Beamud 2021) and their identity development (Song 2021; Yazan 2021). Additionally, research on the pedagogy of language teacher education has revealed that LTEs' practice and development are influenced by a multitude of factors, such as prior experiences in learning and teaching languages (Peercy et al. 2019) and critical reflection on practice (Yazan 2019; 2021). Collectively, this research has emphasised the value and complexity embedded in the work of LTEs.

One emerging area of investigation is LTEs' self-reflection and self-narration in the form of auto- or duo-ethnographies. In the absence of systematic training for LTEs (J. Loughran 2006; Yazan 2019), delving into the lived experiences of these educators, either individually or collaboratively, has provided significant insights into the complexities of their teaching and learning to teach (Peercy et al. 2019; Song 2021; Yazan 2021). However, what remains lacking are insights into how LTEs engage in reflexivity (i.e. self-awareness) within the ethnographic process of researching their own experiences (Consoli and Ganassin 2023a). Considering this argument, the present study adopts a reflexive duoethnography approach, aiming to illuminate the lived experiences of two LTEs as we engage in reflective introspection on our individual processes of *becoming* and *being*. The focal points of this research involve documenting how we, as LTEs and language education researchers, have developed, sustained, and reinforced our sense of professional identity. We reflected on how we established ourselves as applied linguists and then LTEs, our approaches to educating language teachers, and ways in which our research informs our practice. These explorations are conducted within a collaborative reflexive space that we jointly established. This work will contribute insights to enhance LTEs' development and pave the way for informed and effective approaches to empowering future LTEs.

Overview of LTE identity and development

LTE identity refers to how language educators perceive themselves in their professional roles as teachers of teachers, and what beliefs, values, and practices they associate with being LTEs (Barkhuizen 2021; Yuan et al. 2022). It is continually shaped and reshaped by various personal, inter-personal, and social factors, such as LTEs' own educational background, the teaching contexts they work in, their interactions with teachers and other educators, and the theoretical and pedagogical frameworks they adhere to (Yazan 2021; Yuan and Lee 2021). For that reason, teacher educators' identities are not fixed; they evolve through ongoing experiences, reflection, and professional development (Barkhuizen 2021; Trent 2013).

Apart from the above characteristics, recent research has shed light on two factors that arguably add uniqueness to the already complex and intricate nature of LTE identities. Firstly, as LTEs often occupy multiple roles (Barkhuizen 2021; Yuan et al. 2022), the process of establishing an LTE identity may involve continual self-

and other-negotiation, to an extent that this experience could be considered a 'boundary-crossing journey' (Trent 2013, 262). In this process, some LTEs may never completely resonate with the teacher educator identity and choose to sustain their identities as school teachers (Boyd and Harris 2010). Notwithstanding, the journey of becoming LTEs is often filled with inspiring encounters and stories of both personal and professional growth (Yuan et al. 2022).

Secondly, that LTEs primarily work with language – where effective language teaching is the ultimate goal for the teachers they train – highlights the unique role of language in shaping their professional identity. How they view language and the role of language learning, their own language learning experiences, and quite often, their proficiency in the language they teach and train, all significantly shape their identity as LTEs. For teacher educators of English (TESOL), the subject of their work being English, an international language, may present greater challenges compared to teacher educators of other languages. TESOL teacher educators face an added layer of complexity as they navigate the profession, either as 'native' or 'non-native' speakers of English (to use traditional terms), or as multi-lingual/plurilingual speakers of the language (to use less binary terms). In this aspect, research has specifically revealed tensions and challenges among TESOL teacher educators related to feelings of inadequacy in their own language use (Yan et al. 2020; also see Yuan et al. 2022 for a review). Many TESOL teacher educators have also reportedly struggled with 'native-speakerism' (Holliday 2006), feeling unsettled when working with LTE curricula that prioritise native-like competency, especially in pronunciation (Manara 2013), or experiencing rejection when applying for jobs due to being labelled as a 'non-native' English speaker (Yazan 2019). All these linguistically related tensions highlight the complexities of working as LTEs who have language as their primary subject area while simultaneously grappling with different, sometimes conflicting linguistic ideologies in order to establish themselves.

In the present study, we adopt the concepts of *being* and *becoming* to further illuminate the dynamic nature of LTE identity development, not simply focusing on the temporal perspective. While *being* an LTE refers to the present state of identity – how educators perceive and enact their roles based on their current beliefs, values, and practices (Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop 2004) - *becoming* highlights the ongoing and evolving process of identity formation (Clarke 2009; Wenger 1998). *Becoming* an LTE is not a linear or final destination but a continuous journey shaped by experiences, reflection, and interaction with others (Britzman 2003; Trent 2013). This means, as we also argue, that LTEs are constantly traversing between *being* and *becoming* regardless of the stage of their profession. Capitalising on the distinction between *being* and *becoming* enables us to explore how we as LTEs negotiate moments of stability in our professional identities while remaining open to growth and change (Wenger 1998). This dual perspective helps to capture the complexity of LTE identity, emphasising that while educators may embody certain aspects of their professional selves at a given time, they are simultaneously in a process of transformation, adapting to new challenges, roles, and contexts. This approach also allowed us, two LTEs, to document our professional growth during the time when we had opportunities to start and conclude our formal conversations, while our ongoing dialogue continues.

LTEs' own accounts of *becoming* and *being*

An increasing number of LTEs have embarked on self-study journeys to either individually or collaboratively tell their stories of *becoming* and *being*. Yazan (2019) presented an autoethnographic account from being an English language teacher in Turkey to an LTE and researcher in the US. He underwent a shift in language ideologies, embracing a translingual identity and utilising a diverse linguistic repertoire in his work with teacher candidates. Additionally, he developed the Critical Autoethnography Narratives (CANs) assignment to further explore his teacher educator identity in collaboration with his teacher candidates (Yazan 2021). Similarly, Yung (2021) shared an autoethnographic account as a TESOL teacher educator in Hong Kong, where he played multiple roles, including language teacher, researcher, and teacher educator. This account emphasised the tensions that arise between teaching language and teaching how to teach language, and challenges in researching one's own practice and navigating interactions with teachers in practicum schools. Likewise, as a 'non-native' LTE in the US, Song (2021) offered an emotional autoethnographic account of her journey, highlighting her struggles in striving to become a legitimate LTE through her teaching and research efforts and the importance of understanding the emotional aspects of teacher educator identity.

LTEs have also collaborated to produce shared accounts of their professional journeys. In a shared narrative inquiry, Percy et al. (2019) examined the journeys of five co-authors who were LTEs and researchers in US universities. They revealed how personal and social identities intersected with their roles as teacher educators. While the co-authors who identified themselves as 'women of colour' faced challenges in foregrounding their identities, their other White co-authors had more agency in revealing their social identities in professional interactions. A recent duoethnography by Rudolph and Matsuda (2023) offered a unique perspective of LTEs and researchers in different geographical contexts and emphasised the transformative nature of duoethnographies, wherein conversations around language, race, and education expanded not just their understanding of applied linguistics but also themselves as language teaching professionals.

These studies featuring LTEs' individual and collaborative accounts have demonstrated the importance of self-study research in illuminating the learning and development of LTEs. These LTEs' distinct experiences of *being*, *becoming*, and belonging were narrated and converged around themes of language, identity, research, and pedagogy. Specifically, LTEs encountered challenges in redefining and transcending native-speakerism based on their respective linguistic backgrounds and ideologies. Moreover, they navigated alignments and tensions within their personal roles and relationships. In their pedagogies, strong evidence emerged of LTEs implicitly or explicitly enacting their multiple identities and ideologies while conducting their teaching practices. Simultaneously, most, if not all, these LTEs provided positive accounts of how their research informed their practice. Methodologically, these existing studies converge in their use of auto-/duoethnographies as a framework, skilfully leveraging the narrative and reflective nature of these research methods. These points of convergence enrich and personalise our understanding of LTEs and their journeys of *becoming* and *being*.

However, there is a need for exploring the intersection of ethnography and reflexivity, particularly in terms of how LTEs, while sharing their personal and professional stories of *becoming* and *being*, can be reflexive of themselves and each other's ethnographies (i.e.

collaborative reflexivity). Our study aims to contribute to this area by engaging two co-researchers as participants in both duoethnography and collaborative reflexivity. We provide insights into the development of our relationship as fellow LTEs and researchers, and show how this reflexivity influences how we present and interpret our findings. Specifically, we address two research questions:

- (1) How do we establish ourselves as language teacher educators (LTEs)?
- (2) What factors (personal and professional) influence our work and our development as LTEs?

Methodology

Duoethnography and reflexivity as tools to explore LTE navigation and trajectories

Duoethnography is a collaborative qualitative research method where researchers explore their own experiences, perspectives, and interactions (Burleigh and Burm 2022). Unlike traditional ethnography, it enables a deeper dive into the lived experiences and subjectivity of researcher-participants. Engaging in duoethnography entails an ongoing dialogue, sharing narratives and reflections, prompting researchers to position themselves as the subject of study. This approach encourages them to examine and reconceptualise their interpretations across various contexts (Sawyer and Norris 2012). Sawyer and Norris (2012) proposed key principles of duoethnography, emphasising collaboration and reflexivity. They advocate for avoiding prescriptive methods, embracing diverse perspectives, and viewing differences as strengths. Duoethnography also involves deliberate juxtaposition and challenges assumptions about the past, foregoing the pursuit of universal truths. Recognised as a form of praxis, it requires ethical negotiation and the cultivation of trust to foster open and rigorous conversations. Duoethnography is considered a robust and credible research method due to its capacity to generate rich, nuanced insights through the interplay of multiple perspectives and its focus on the dynamic, negotiated nature of identity (Norris and Sawyer 2012). The method's effectiveness in exploring complex identity issues and generating depth in qualitative research has been well-documented (Banegas and Gerlach 2021; Lowe and Lawrence 2020; Norris, Sawyer, and Lund 2016; Tezgiden-Cakcak and Ataş 2024).

Reflexivity, on the other hand, has long been an essential component in qualitative research where researchers 'engage in explicit self-aware meta-analysis' (Finlay 2002, 209). Consoli and Ganassin (2023, 4) argue doing reflexivity is 'an essential hallmark of quality research' which 'confers greater transparency, methodological rigour, depth, and trustworthiness' to scholarly inquiries. Doing reflexivity in applied linguistics engages researchers with social structure and agency (Pérez-Milans 2016) that orients the investigation of human agency at the centre of the academic enterprise. Reflexivity is an 'ongoing, multi-faceted, and dialogical process' (Byrd-Clark and Dervin 2014, 2–3). By doing reflexivity, researchers are able to do 'greater justice to the often-silenced polyvocal interactions between researchers and participants and the dialogical multiplexity which stems from such interactions and encounters' (Consoli and Ganassin 2023a, 5–6).

Within the seven variants that constitute the typology of reflexivity (Finlay 2002), 'mutually collaborative reflexivity' is directly relevant to our study, deriving from the humanistic stance and cooperative inquiry research. Doing mutually collaborative reflexivity aligns well with duoethnography as a research methodology as both seek to engage co-researchers as participants who have capacity to be reflexive beings. Often it is the case that this reflexivity variant facilitates co-researchers in multiple reflexive dialogues to co-inquire research problems and co-develop their interpretations of the data collected to shape the findings produced. All stages of the research process are thus conducted in a 'collaborative, democratic, inclusive spirit' (Finlay 2002, 219). By combining duoethnography and reflexivity, our research aspires to highlight the interconnectedness of knowledge and self-awareness, demonstrating that the process of understanding oneself is deeply intertwined with understanding others. Through this endeavour, we also aim to produce richer, more nuanced research outcomes and embark on a journey of personal and professional growth and discovery.

Research context and participants

Both of us began our careers as English language teachers in China and Vietnam, respectively. Grace (second author) taught English to school students in China, while Mai (first author) worked as an English teacher at the university level, teaching English skills subjects to English major students. Our paths intersected in 2013 when we pursued PhDs at an Australian university under the guidance of the same supervisor. Grace's doctoral research focused on English language education at the primary level in China, while Mai's centred on the professional development of Vietnamese English language teachers trained in Anglophone contexts. After earning our PhDs in 2017, we remained in Australia, where we continued to build our teaching and research experiences. Grace assumed a government position focusing on languages curricula development and held sessional academic positions at local universities. Meanwhile, Mai worked as a teaching-focused academic in an MA Applied Linguistics programme, teaching courses on second language acquisition and language teacher development. In early 2019, we both secured our first full-time academic positions: Grace as a lecturer in languages at a university in New Zealand, and Mai as a lecturer in Applied Linguistics and TESOL at a university in the UK. These professional experiences, particularly our work with pre- and in-service language teachers, played a pivotal role in the gradual development and maturation of our identities as LTEs.

Over these years, we maintained our connections on social media, e.g. Instagram, where we followed and celebrated each other's life changing moments. Beyond that, since COVID-19, we have started to text each other on the platform to share and exchange work-related topics. These exchanges foregrounded our conversations about LTEs' *becoming* and *being* and inspired us to potentially collaborate on this research agenda.

Materials and methods

Our primary data source was narratives from two hour-long collaborative dialogues (cf. Rudolph and Matsuda 2023) conducted via Zoom, which took place in December 2021 and January 2022, respectively. The dialogues were semi-structured, featuring open-

ended topics, including our perceptions of being LTEs, our views of various learning environments and their effects, and our experiences, observations and reflections as we engaged in teacher education and training (see dialogue guides in Appendix A). In this method, Mai and Grace, both researchers and participants, assumed the role of critical friends. This dynamic allowed us to engage in mutual questioning, share narratives, and exchange perspectives, creating a dialogue that contrasted with the more traditional, one-way structure of research interviews. These dialogues not only facilitated the exploration of our shared topics of interest but also embraced the collaborative and reflexive nature inherent in duoethnography. Through this process, we navigated our research as an ongoing conversation that enriched our understanding through shared experiences and diverse viewpoints.

Following the collaborative dialogues, we reflected on our shared narratives and recorded them in digitally written journals in the form of word files. We stored multiple journals in our co-owned cloud-based Dropbox folder, and each of us asynchronously interacted with and made meaningful connections with the journal content by adding comments next to each other's account. This crucial step allowed us to engage in mutually collaborative reflexivity. We encouraged each other to interact with and navigate our critical friend's narratives, helping us gain a deeper understanding of our own LTE journeys. These digitally written journals also allowed us to further interrogate and re-conceptualise our perceived beliefs and values as LTEs.

Data analysis

Thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006, 2019, 2021) was employed to code the collaborative dialogues and journal entries. This approach allowed for flexibility in conducting an inductive analytic process suited to our study. Our aim was to explore critical framings of meaning-making between the two researcher-participants as we navigated our LTE journeys. The meaning-making process enabled us to engage with the conceptual lens about LTEs discussed in the literature and aligned with our aim to have an in-depth understanding of our own trajectories. Upon completing the transcription of the collaborative dialogue data, each of us individually developed a thematic coding scheme. Subsequently, we met to discuss our codes, focusing on commonalities and consolidating themes. From these dialogues, four interdependent themes emerged, namely language, identity, research, and pedagogy, which were also aligned with the key concepts drawn in some previous studies (e.g. Peercy et al. 2019; Song 2021; Yazan 2019; 2021; Yung 2021). These themes guided our exploration of reflexivity, which we examined through our journal entries. We each carefully examined both of our reflexive entries, added our collaborative notes, and selected sections relevant to these four identified themes. Most of the narratives were originally quoted, with only a few edited for clarity.

Findings

How we establish ourselves as LTEs: tracing our journey of development

During our first collaborative dialogue, we began by sharing our respective involvements in language teacher education. Particularly, Grace shared that she has been

involved in longitudinal online professional development programmes for language teachers in New Zealand. She works closely with in-service teachers of different languages in multiple intersectional roles, including an LTE, mentor, curriculum designer, and a research supervisor. Mai also noted that she primarily works with pre- and in-service teachers of English as a second or foreign language in undergraduate and post-graduate courses. These teachers are from diverse backgrounds, with most being international students and some being local British students. Mai also participates in funded programmes offering online professional development to English teachers in Vietnam.

Following that, we delved deeper into our narratives, retracing our journeys of development, all the while being open with each other about what brought us to the current stage of our academic careers. As we shared our experiences and reflected on our paths to begin our LTE journeys, the two main themes that become a thread throughout our professional stories are *language* and *identity*. We discovered that both of us faced a paradoxical challenge when we first started our academic careers. This challenge revolved around establishing our legitimate positions as applied linguists, which was largely influenced by our linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The following excerpts from our first collaborative dialogue illustrate this struggle:

Mai: 'When I trained to become an English teacher, I anticipated teaching English in Vietnam and was prepared accordingly. However, life took unexpected turns, leading me to my current position in the UK, where I am primarily educating teachers of English. Being a "non-native" English teacher guiding others to teach English in a traditional "native" English-speaking country has presented challenges. When people, including both outside and inside the field, learn about my role, they may wonder why I am here, teaching English native speakers how to teach "their" language. This has brought about conflicts and interesting interactions. On multiple occasions, I have experienced situations where people, upon meeting me for the first time and learning that I am a university lecturer, assumed that I teach an Asian language based on my appearance. Well, to be frank, Grace, when I was job searching, I did once wish my first language, Vietnamese, could be as widely spoken and learned as your first language, Chinese. I thought I could then apply to teach Vietnamese, and it would make me a more competitive candidate'.

G: 'I can completely relate, Mai, but in a slightly different way. When I was searching for an applied linguistics job, as a Chinese, I didn't feel like I fit into any specific frame or category of the "ideal candidate" for an academic position in applied linguistics within Anglophone countries. I vividly remember coming across a job listing for a lecturer in applied linguistics in Australia right after submitting my thesis. I approached a few people who were my mentors at the time, and they were honest with me, saying, "I don't think you'll be able to get that job because there will be hundreds or thousands of applicants". I believe their comments were influenced more by their perceptions of me as a candidate for the job, rather than solely focusing on the level of competitiveness in the application process. I later considered Chinese lecturer positions as well, but this interaction reminded me of the assumptions people might make based on basic demographic characteristics such as

gender and ethnicity. It made me realise the challenges of breaking away from preconceived notions in the academic job market’.

M: ‘Your story has really added new perspectives to my way of thinking about how we are both similar and different as we work in applied linguistics. I used to wish I could be in your position, but now I realise you have your own struggles too when it comes to going beyond language teaching. Yes, having Chinese as a first language may be your advantage, but at the same time in this field, it may limit people’s views of the many more things you could do as well. Of course it’s not the languages that are to blame, it’s people’s perceptions that need to change’. (Collaborative dialogue 1)

These shared experiences shed light on the ongoing identity conflicts that both of us encountered when we initially embarked on our academic careers, largely stemming from a prescribed social identity category: being Asian scholars studying and working in a historically Anglocentric field (Kubota 2016). Despite our relatively extensive experience as English language teachers in our respective home countries, we did not initially feel that this background, along with our education and research experience, granted us legitimacy as applied linguists. We found ourselves held back and constrained. Indeed, our desire for a change in the linguistic status of her first language (Mai), and experience in managing between her own professional aspirations and others’ expectations and preconceptions (Grace), revealed the lasting impact of deeply ingrained linguistic ideologies that favour native-speakerism and linguistic hierarchy (Pennycook 1998; Phillipson 1992). These ideologies had a lingering effect on how we perceived ourselves and our qualifications in applied linguistics, including our role as LTEs.

In our reflexive notes following this interactive account, we each found sympathy in each other’s sharing and engaged in self- and mutual awareness. The following excerpt is taken from Mai’s journal entry:

Talking to Grace about those linguistic and social identity struggles was really comforting to me. It’s something I’ve grappled with since working as an LTE in Australia and the UK, so it was a great feeling to share my stories with someone who understands and, even better, has been through a similar experience. Hearing her stories also made me think a lot about the complexities of working in our respective contexts, where we need to navigate different expectations and untold and unwritten rules as members of minority groups. This makes me feel even more glad that we are where we are today; we have, in some way, managed to ‘break away’ from preconceptions and ideologies, and gain the confidence to support and guide language teachers. I acknowledge that us being from similar backgrounds might have made it easier for us to share these thoughts, but I think what is more important is that together we represent cases of LTEs whose journey of *becoming* requires different levels of self- and other-assurance. (Mai, Reflexive journal entry)

In the same way, Grace was truthful and hopeful about the directions of our mutual conversations. Her sharing of shared interests in LTEs’ *becoming* and *being* affirmed both Mai’s and her navigation, centred around *language* and *identity*.

We went on exploring possibilities of collaboration, which triggered us to talk about our research and practice in nature. It was a critical moment that we probably did not realise, as we had already embarked on a mutually beneficial and collaborative journey to navigate who we are, what we do, why we do what we do, and in what ways we make meaning in our

personal and professional praxis. By reading our interactions repeatedly, I am now utterly rethinking these questions and our responses to the evolving situations we are facing now at work and in life. [...] Thanks to Mai, I felt grateful that I was finally able to express my true and multiple professional identities with someone I trust. Exploring my becoming and being an LTE, Mai interestingly shared similar backgrounds and beliefs/values as I have, that is centred around language and identity. We are both bilingual/multilingual users/speakers, teaching languages, training language teachers/language teacher candidates, and living and working in linguistically and culturally diverse societies. Our LTEs journey and our interactive accounts have allowed us to continue our exploration of the fascinating intersections of language and identity. [...] Our dispositions, struggles, and complex trajectories as we engage with ourselves, others, and the world are so worthwhile and meaningful to our growth and continued navigation.

(Grace, Reflexive journal entry)

Mai found comfort in sharing linguistic and social identity struggles with Grace, given their similar backgrounds. She appreciated breaking away from preconceptions, gaining confidence to support language teachers, and acknowledging their unique journey as LTEs. Grace reflected on their critical moment of mutual exploration and collaboration, leading to ongoing introspection and growth as LTEs. Together our reflexive episodes depict our strong bond as LTEs who share common experiences and challenges. Our candid reflections reveal our determination to navigate complex trajectories and engage with own and each other's professional and personal identities, making our journey as LTEs rich and rewarding. The mutual support and understanding we provide each other arguably contribute to our continued growth and development.

Apart from self and other realisation in relation to our connection with *language* and *identity*, another critical incident that struck us in our journey of *becoming* LTEs involves *research*, specifically the challenges of conducting and writing research while trying to maintain a balance between research and teaching. The following excerpts came from our second collaborative dialogue.

Grace: 'I miss our PhD time when we could take our time to focus on just one thing and complete it at our own pace. Now, I feel the intense pressure and competition in academia, and I don't like it at all. I enjoy undertaking research and having the freedom to do things I like, but achieving that now is even harder'.

Mai: 'Yes, it was wonderful to have the luxury of focusing mainly on our research. Now, with the myriad of responsibilities and demands, especially during term time, I sometimes feel overwhelmed and unsure of what to prioritise. Balancing being a good teacher or teacher educator and a good researcher can be challenging. While it's possible to excel in both, it requires time, effort, and perhaps some strategies. Sometimes, I worry that if I invest a lot of time in teaching, such as planning courses and lessons, my research might suffer. Conversely, if I prioritise research, my teaching might not get the attention it deserves. I feel a sense of responsibility towards the teachers and students I work with, and I want to give them my best. It's a constant struggle, and I'm trying my best to find a balance'.

Grace: 'Perhaps there is no one-size-fits-all solution to this balancing act, but I think what we can do is ensure that there's a strong connection between our research and our work as LTEs. By integrating our research findings into our teaching practices and vice versa, we can create a more meaningful and impactful experience for our student teachers and ourselves as LTEs'. (Collaborative dialogue 2)

This layer of struggle is particularly real and vivid to us as we both work in higher education contexts that emphasise both research and teaching. Our conversation reveals that we connect strongly with both identities as researchers and LTEs, and aspire to do well in both roles. Our subsequent reflexive journal entries demonstrate this ambition.

I have come to embrace the intertwining nature of being an LTE and a language education researcher. The struggles we face when exercising these roles are not our weaknesses but rather opportunities for growth. They fuel our passion to continually explore and expand our expertise in both domains. As a researcher, I can draw on my experiences in the classroom to inform my investigations, making my research more grounded and relevant. Conversely, my research has provided me with valuable insights that I can bring into my teaching practice, enhancing my effectiveness as an educator.

(Mai, Reflexive journal entry)

This mutually reflexive process has allowed me to shed the self-doubt and embrace the complexities of my dual positions as a researcher and teacher educator. Our shared experiences have taught me the value of navigating the intricate intersections between these roles, rather than seeing them as separate entities. I have come to realise that being a researcher can enrich my role as a teacher educator, and vice versa.

(Grace, Reflexive journal entry)

Mai's reflexive episode showcases her positive outlook on the intertwining nature of her roles as an LTE and a language education researcher. She views the struggles she faces in these roles as opportunities for personal and professional development. Mai highlights the mutual benefits of her research informing her teaching practice and her experiences in the classroom enriching her research, which exemplifies her ability to leverage her expertise in both domains. Grace's reflexive account reveals her journey of self-discovery and self-acceptance. Her newfound appreciation for the synergy between research and teaching demonstrates her openness to embracing the challenges that come with these roles. Her reflection showcases her growth in confidence and understanding of the value she brings to both domains, highlighting her commitment to professional growth and learning. Our reflexive episodes exemplify our willingness to engage in reflective practices and our commitment to continuous improvement in our roles as LTEs and researchers. This level of introspection to some extent demonstrates our increased maturity and a proactive approach to honing our skills and contributing meaningfully to the fields of language education and research.

Factors influencing our work and development as LTEs: nurturing next generation teachers through research-informed practice

The past and present negotiations we have experienced as we established ourselves as applied linguists, LTEs, and language education researchers, continued to guide us as we reinforced our LTE identities. Through our duoethnography, we both found that our language teacher education practices are significantly enriched by our experience working with next generation language teachers through research-informed practice. Two of our stories taken from our reflexive entries reflect this theme.

Learning to teach: we're all in this together.

At the beginning of a language teacher education course for pre-service TESOL teachers, Mai wanted to get to know her student teachers by asking them to create metaphors about language teaching and being a language teacher. As a language teacher identity researcher and an advocate of the whole-person approach (Korthagen 2017) to language teaching, M aimed to use these metaphors to delve into her student teachers' inner thoughts and feelings about language teaching (Cortazzi and Jin 1999). Among several inspirational and creative comparisons, one student's metaphor caught her attention: 'language teaching is like blind driving'. The student explained that despite gaining teaching knowledge and skills during her undergraduate TESOL studies, she still felt anxious and lacked confidence in her ability to practice as a teacher, similar to driving without sight.

Mai saw this revelation of language teaching anxieties as a valuable teaching moment. She shared a story of her own experiences during her first year of teaching, when she encountered unmotivated adult learners attending classes after long working days. The students were too tired to participate, preferring casual chatting to group work for communication tasks. Mai, as a novice language teacher, felt helpless and wondered if her lack of experience contributed to the perceived 'failure' of the lesson. After sharing her own anxieties, Mai invited other student teachers to share their teaching insecurities and write them down on notes to exchange with one another. Nearly all students had at least one or two things to note down. This activity created a sense of relief and solidarity among the students. Some approached Mai at the end of the class and expressed gratitude, remarking that they hadn't thought she had ever experienced doubts about her teaching abilities, as she appeared confident in class. Mai assured them that everyone goes through similar experiences, and they were all in it together. In a subsequent section, Mai dedicated time to discuss strategies for managing language teaching anxieties with her student teachers.

This experience helped Mai realise the importance of being relatable and sharing vulnerabilities as an LTE. It also reaffirmed the value of her research interests in language teacher identity (Nguyen et al. 2019; Dao et al. 2022), as they strengthened her teaching practice and fostered connections with her students. Mai's reflexive notes illustrate this.

I didn't plan on sharing my own stories and challenges with my student teachers, but at that moment when one of them talked about their self-doubts and anxieties, I knew I had to say something . . . As an LTE with prior experience in language teaching, this background gives me a lot of advantage. I can share relatable stories and feelings with my student teachers, helping them envision their future potential. At the same time, I feel the insights I have

gained as a language education researcher has usefully guided my teacher education practice. I am glad that I initiated the metaphor activity and decided to begin my language teacher education course with a personalised approach like that, drawing on the concept of teacher identity and assisting my student teachers in establishing their own teacher identity. In return, working with them has continually reshaped and strengthened my identity as an LTE. (Mai, Reflexive journal entry)

Grace subsequently shared her journaling reflexive account of Mai's story and connected it with her own development of being an LTE:

As I was reading Mai's story and her personal account, I put myself into her context to imagine her ways of thinking and doing at each moment with student teachers. Her support of student teachers and her own development through envisioning language teaching using metaphors is truly enlightening. Mai has thrived as a language teacher educator, navigating pedagogical possibilities to accommodate her student teachers' needs and developing a practice informed by her research interest in language and identity. The emotion she shared in her storying reflected her developmental being as she has moved on to become a competent and confident language teacher educator for and with her student teachers. Connected her storying to where we are at in our exploration of ongoing reflexivity, I take it as a fulfilling journey that I learn from my co-researcher and critical friend and her experience of being and also my own account of what I have gained from this sharing and exchange. My brain is stimulated and meditative simultaneously. (Grace, Reflexive journal entry)

Starting as mentor-mentee, now we are mentors to each other.

G's reflexive practice was situated in the context of providing mentoring to language teachers new to online language teaching and teaching Chinese in Aotearoa New Zealand. She proposed a 'mentoring' programme tailored to a mentee teacher who was her co-supervised PhD candidate and had experience teaching Chinese in both face-to-face settings and one-to-one online synchronous settings as part of her research-informed practice, which she was researching in her PhD study. In her notes, Grace explained that 'although this teacher has experience of teaching Chinese on Zoom, she has little knowledge or experience of using multimodal tools embedded in Zoom to teach the structured syllabi to multiple learners in the class for a semester-long course'. It was ascertained that this teacher's experience of using Zoom provides a sound foundation for her to feel much easier and confident in adapting to using other multimodal tools, and her research on teacher agency supports her in reflexive practices without hesitation and resistance. In Grace's view, this mentee teacher's pedagogy needed support as she lacked proper training and professional development on language teaching pedagogy and multiliteracies. Together Grace and her mentee teacher inquired how and in what ways language teachers can be supported to develop their pedagogy and multiliteracies to cater for diverse adult learners' needs. Grounded by the CARR framework (Qi et al., 2023), they engaged in a cyclic process of teaching development, which involved collaborative planning, implementing with peer support, reflecting, re-implementing, and readapting. They conducted weekly online tutorials, with the mentee teacher taking the lead as the facilitator while Grace observed and actively participated as a co-teacher during the sessions. Grace's final reflexive notes indicated her being as a language teacher educator.

I noticed my LTE identity changes over time: from a teacher mentor to a collegial teacher peer. Throughout the process, I negotiated and reflected on how I might better support my mentee, which is different to 'How I might mentor her', only because of our experiences. This

also implicates a change of mindset that I am not superior to others, but here to share my knowledge and hopefully be helpful to support the other teacher who is a colleague of mine. It is also a reflective account of 'being there and being together' - referring to the mentor-mentee relationship and the engagement of leadership within that relationship. In our case, I would prefer it as a 'mentor-mentor' relationship, where we serve as mentors to and learning from each other. The collegiality is truly appealing as I am in pursuit of this practice. We practise *ako* - that is learning to teach and teaching to learn in Māori knowledge. I intentionally deconstruct my multiple roles in this mentee's experience - as her PhD co-supervisor, as her more experienced colleague, as someone hiring her to teach - and reconstruct my identities as her professional colleague and peer. We share distributed leadership, which is that neither of us is dominant in any decision making. We offer each other choices and consider pros and cons individually and make decisions accordingly. In the end, I take a step back to allow more leadership and autonomy for my colleague to plan her classes and reflect on her experiences. (Grace, Reflexive journal entry)

After reading Grace's story and reflexive notes, Mai was deeply inspired and was eager to share her own reflexive response to Grace's journey of being an LTE.

Throughout our year-long duoethnographic process, I have always admired Grace's insights into various teaching and learning issues, as well as her awareness of different research frameworks. She doesn't just apply them in her work; she truly 'lives' them. Her account of working with a language teacher on their research to enhance practice demonstrates her skilful integration of research findings in her teacher education work. Moreover, she adeptly incorporates local philosophies and introduces new local knowledge under new perspectives. I am deeply inspired by her approach and practice. (Mai, Reflexive journal entry)

Mai's account showcases her growth and confidence as a teacher educator, drawing on her background as a language teacher identity researcher to inform her teaching practice. Similarly, Grace's case shows her transformation from a teacher mentor to a collegial teacher peer, highlighting her shift in mindset and encompassing distributed leadership. Her approach to the mentor-mentor relationship and collegiality is reflective of her dedication to learning and growing alongside her mentee as an LTE. Collaboratively, our stories of being LTEs have demonstrated the significance of reflexivity and how our individual and collaborative reflections exemplify the depth and complexity of our identities and teacher education practices. We acknowledge potential bias and subjectivity in expressing mutual admiration and inspiration for each other's journeys. We hope, however, that this has added a personal touch to our reflexive accounts, creating a meaningful and enlightening narrative for readers.

Discussion

Our findings show that our journeys as LTEs are marked by continuous becoming and being, which have been shaped by negotiations between language and identity, research and pedagogy, all of which interact with our individual and collaborative reflexivity.

At the beginning of our careers, we both strived to overcome *language* and *identity* struggles. Our stories resonate with other LTEs who reported feeling inadequate based on prescribed linguistic identity (Song 2021; Yazan 2021; Yuan et al. 2022). Despite these challenges, our LTE journeys are not limited to a prescribed path, but are shaped by our unique backgrounds, experiences, and values. Our experience as Asian scholars studying and working in an Anglocentric field has influenced our perspectives and approaches.

Putting aside societal expectations, we now see these aspects of our identities as strengths that enrich our praxis. During this endeavour, we also recognise that we are not superhuman beings (Yuan et al. 2022) but rather, vulnerable professionals continually navigating the complexities of the language teacher education landscape in search of good practices, acknowledging that what constitutes ‘good’ practices can differ in diverse teaching environments.

It is also important to note that we see ourselves in this endless learning process and we grow with other stakeholders, such as our peers (Mai and Grace in this reflexivity), students, and colleagues. Our LTE identity is influenced and reshaped by our learning journey, exploration and adaptation to new environments, and interaction with others and the world. Our storying of *becoming* and *being* in this research reflected the four interconnected themes, *language, identity, research* and *pedagogy*, which are all core concepts featuring LTEs. The tensions and challenges between language and identity, research and pedagogy, through our inquiry and reflexivity has reconfirmed what LTEs have constantly encountered and dealt with in their everyday practice (Yan et al. 2020; Yuan et al. 2022). Our struggle with ‘native-speakerism’ (Holliday 2006), feeling unsettled or abandoned when working with LTE curricula and ‘native-speaking’ student teachers and colleagues in the applied linguistics field, has been appealing. Over years of reflections, going through being rejected and labelled as ‘non-native’ (Yazan 2019), our reflexivity through duoethnography has underscored the dynamism and complexities of working as LTEs, re-shaping our identities as we constantly make connections with others, information around us, and the linguistically and culturally diverse society.

Additionally, our shared concerns for balancing between our dual roles as LTEs and researchers add another layer of complexity to our developmental journey. Through duoethnography, we were able to reinforce our own and each other’s beliefs about the possibility of connecting research and pedagogy in meaningful ways in language teacher education (Nguyen et al., 2022; Qi et al., 2023). Indeed, our teacher education practices were characterised by interactions and practice (with language teachers) that were highly research-informed. Both of our accounts of practices demonstrate the positive outcomes arising from language teaching researchers practicing what they research, contributing to the collective endeavour of strengthening the research-practice nexus in language education (McKinley 2019; Sato and Loewen 2022). Moreover, our research backgrounds and experience have enabled us to work meaningfully with our language teachers, adding depth to our advice and lessons, and further strengthening our legitimacy as LTEs. As we frequently switch roles between being LTEs and researchers, we have been able to cultivate a deeper understanding of the complexities and challenges faced by language teachers, along with the strategies and approaches that best support their professional growth. The balancing act of managing research and teaching and teacher education is still a challenge, but the insights we have gained about research and pedagogy through this collaborative reflexivity meaningfully empower us to continue doing research-informed practice (e.g. Qi et al. 2023; Qi 2023) and practice-informed research (Nguyen et al. 2022; Nguyen et al. 2023; Qi et al., 2023).

Finally, our collaborative accounts of two LTEs’ stories demonstrate the power of being there for each other and being together, promoting togetherness as a strategy for moving forward in language teacher education (Peercy et al. 2019). Our interactive interviews and

journaling findings have enabled us to advocate for duoethnography and reflexivity as means to self- and other-renewal. Through collaboratively exploring our own and each other's journeys of *being* and *becoming*, we have found new meanings in past experiences, resolved self-doubts, sought and found comfort and empathy in each other's stories and experiences, offered and received emotional encouragement and support, and ultimately, reimagined ourselves as LTEs. Moreover, our reflexivity exercised between us and enacted in our teaching practice with our (student) teachers has highlighted humanness with voices given to participants who are also co-researchers (Consoli and Ganassin 2023, 2023a) and the commitment to promote change through conducting duoethnography (Sawyer and Norris 2012). In this regard, our reflexivity journey continues beyond this research and contributes to sustaining and shaping our identity as LTEs over time.

Conclusion and implications

We recognise both the benefits and limitations of self-study, as discussed by Sanjakdar and Premier (2023), J. J. Loughran (2002), and Vanassche and Kelchtermans (2015). While teacher self-study and critical reflection are effective for professional development, validating expertise, and contributing to the ontology and epistemology of teacher education, there are inherent challenges. We were mindful of maintaining rigour and relevance in our dialogues to achieve our research aims and explore the tensions and struggles we face as LTEs (Vanassche and Kelchtermans 2015). Our conversations, built on personal and professional trust, evolved into collaborative dialogues and digital journaling informed by reflexive practice. However, despite the strengths of reflexivity and critical reflection in enabling us to navigate tensions when discussing *language*, *identity*, *research*, and *pedagogy*, varied interpretations are inevitable when different researcher-participants use this method to highlight particular aspects of practice (J. J. Loughran 2002). This variability can limit the consistency and generalisability of the findings. Thus, while we advocate for utilising self-study and reflexivity to enhance understanding of LTEs, we must acknowledge the limitations of our approach and suggest that other LTEs remain mindful of these challenges.

To conclude, we see the potential of duoethnography in both research and practice spectrums. Specifically, our collaborative inquiry advocates for the incorporation of auto- and duo-ethnography and reflexivity in LTEs' development and language teacher education practices. The collaborative duoethnography procedure described in the present study could be replicated by pre- and in-service language teachers in teacher education courses or programmes, where pairs or trios of teachers work together to gain new insights into their own experiences and identities as educators. This heightened self- and other-awareness could in turn assist them to better understand the needs and challenges faced by their (student) teachers, thereby providing more effective and meaningful support. In a longer term, collaborative ethnography could be adopted by language teachers at any stage of their career to develop longitudinal reflexive practices for their own growth and benefits, both professionally and personally.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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Appendix: Collaborative dialogue guides

Continuing our social media interactions (e.g., Instagram chats), we believed that it would be interesting and worthwhile to start a heart-to-heart and truth-telling conversation as we reflected on our LTEs trajectories. Each of us jotted down a few potential questions in a Word document in our shared Dropbox folder for us to refer to as our conversation carried on.

Your perceptions as language teacher educators

- (1) Who are you? What kind of LTE programmes are you most familiar with? (e.g. pre-/in-service teacher education degree programmes, teacher professional development programmes) How do you see your roles in your profession? What are your teaching philosophies/approaches as language teacher educators?
- (2) What are your social and professional identities? In what ways do you see them interact with each other?
- (3) What kind of research work do you do? How does your research influence/inform your approach to LTE?
- (4) How do we see ourselves as a teacher educator in a digital age?

Your identities and actions and your view of the impact of online environments

- (1) How do your defined identities interact with your pedagogical practices? Justify in a few examples from your teaching practices.
- (2) What are the online teaching environments you have encountered for language teacher education? How do you think these online environments support language teacher education and language teacher educators?
- (3) To what extent and in what ways is your identity influenced by an online teaching environment?
- (4) What effect does an unexpected, sudden curriculum change (e.g. moving teacher training online) have on the planning and practices of a teacher educator? How does it affect your emotions and sense of self-efficacy?

Your observation and reflection based on perceived feedback from your education and training programmes

- (1) Can you share some examples/observations of how the online environments impacted on the growth of teachers (e.g. pre- or in-service) in your language teacher education courses and/or training or PD sessions?
- (2) What kinds of feedback have you received from the teachers you have worked with, particularly in relation to the online environments?
- (3) How would you suggest future online language teacher education/PD workshops and the impact on those pre- and in-service teachers' own teaching practices?
- (4) Do you have any other comments to add?