SLA research in recent years has largely focused on the multifaceted, situated, and dynamic identity of the language learner. Autobiographical language learning histories (LLHs) do not only reflect the learner’s identity but play a part in its formation, and they are thus a valuable source of information as well as a promising tool with which to increase motivation and promote success. My paper will describe the results of a research project analyzing the LLHs of two EFL student-teachers. A close, process-oriented analysis of their narratives, focusing on both thematic and stylistic aspects, reveals a similar transition from early alienation from English as a school subject, to a current commitment to it. Both paths are “redemptive” ones, to use McAdams’ term (2006), as for each, the study of English becomes a means towards the advancement of personal and professional well-being and self-fulfillment. This redemptive process is shown to be connected to cognitive and emotional character strengths displayed by the students, who are further empowered by the telling itself. At the same time, each story is unique. The different levels of emotional commitment, the different learning-styles and different outcomes in the two stories are clearly connected to each student’s particular and changing social, familial, cultural, psychological and economic reality. The degree to which each student has benefitted from her learning process is also linked, I argue, to the amount and quality of causal connections (Pals, 2011) – connections that highlight how past events have influenced the changing self – created by the students within their LLHs. The research suggests that encouraging the narration of LLHs in general, and the creation of causal connections within LLHs in particular, may have a positive effect on learners’ self-image and can significantly strengthen intrinsic motivation, thus enhancing the quality of the learning process as a whole.

Keywords: language learning histories, motivation, narrative identity.