Emotions and agency among L2 teacher students

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In L2 learning, the role of emotions and affective factors has been studied from a number of perspectives in recent years, with the focus on, from the pedagogical perspective, how the teacher may best foster a learning environment that is emotionally supportive, for example (e.g. MacIntyre & Gregersen 2012). But teaching itself is a highly emotional profession. The role of emotions in teachers or teacher students has been investigated to an increasing degree in recent years (Hargreaves 1998, 2005; Zembylas 2005). According to the review of research by Sutton & Wheatley (2003), teachers’ emotions appear to mediate the teacher’s pedagogical thinking and self-efficacy beliefs, among other things. Yet relatively little is known how L2 teachers’ emotions mediate their agency. Agency is here defined as a process whereby the agent gains access and uses resources or tools to act on a goal.

The data in the present study come from a larger data set from a longitudinal study following the university studies of L2 teacher students. The data come from five students, consisting of learner autobiographies, learning assignments and teaching philosophies written at various points of the students’ studies in education starting in year 1, and their language teacher portfolio, completed at the end of their pedagogical studies, mostly in year 4 or 5. The data therefore offer a comprehensive perspective on the development of the students’ pedagogical thinking. The contents of the texts have been analyzed qualitatively, paying attention to emotions and activities in which they are contextualized. The findings suggest that emotions appear to mediate not only the students’ use of resources but also their beliefs about themselves – their self-concept.

Keywords: agency, emotions, L2 teaching.