Psychology for language learning: Spare a thought for the teacher

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There is a wide body of research that shows how vitally important teachers are to successful learning processes. What they do, think, feel and believe are central to what happens in their classrooms and schools, and, essentially, what happens to their learners. It is perhaps therefore surprising that the field of language learning psychology has focused so predominantly on the psychology of learners with so little attention devoted to teachers in comparison. In this talk, I argue it is time that we take a much closer look at language teachers’ psychology in the same depth of complexity and diversity as learner psychology has been examined. With the notable exception of work on teacher identity, cognition and, to an increasing degree, motivation, teacher psychology remains relatively underexplored. In this talk, I begin by outlining the importance of teacher psychology, the links between teacher and learner psychology as well as the particular challenges facing language teachers during the past decades including increased stress, threats to their sense of self, and record levels of burnout. Reporting on research conducted to understand the daily lives, thoughts, feelings and motivations of language teachers across the globe, I present some of the initial findings and suggest that the field of language learning psychology needs to make understanding teacher psychology in its full complexity a priority. I conclude by considering some of the implications for teacher education and by setting out a possible agenda for future research in the area of language teacher psychology.

Keywords: