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Editors

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Language Teacher Development in ICT in Russia: Mind the Gap

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Abstract

This paper presents ongoing research into teachers' responses to the push towards greater technology use in a Russian Higher Educational. It discusses the state of the art in the language teacher development in the country. It is argued that traditional reflection based teacher development frameworks such as Action Research or Cooperative Development require thorough consideration before implementing in Russia top down due to historically shaped 'one size fits all' language teaching methodology and Soviet authoritarian ideology, which inevitably influence teaching practice. I propose an alternative, a bottom up strategy with the aim of understanding how the concept of perezhivanie can be used as a heuristic tool in the complex settings such as the technologically enhanced language classroom. 'Capturing' teachers' perezhivanie provides insights into teacher responses to top-down initiatives and offers directions how to dialogically shape those responses. I suggest that perezhivanie has a formative power on teachers and therefore can be used in teacher education, training and development programmes.

Keywords: ICT integration, higher education, perezhivanie, teacher development

Introduction

Continuous and sustainable teacher development (TD hereafter) plays an important role in improving educational policies and practices. Ensuring professional growth of language teachers at the tertiary level (teachers hereafter) is increasingly recognized as necessary not only by teachers and teacher educators but also by policy makers, programme designers and educational managers (Padwad, 2008:22). However, there is increasing concern that traditional reflection based TD frameworks do not prove effective in Russian context if applied top down. The present paper explores bottom - up TD by evoking teachers' voices from the language classrooms as an alternative to top-down TD approaches.

This paper has been divided into four parts. Section one set the scene of teachers' engagement with technology in Russian higher education. Section two is concerned with the state of the art with TD in Russia. In section three I discuss perezhivanie as an interrelation of cognitive emotional and contextual factors. Section four considers the possible contributions to the TD to be made.

Teachers' engagement with technology in Russia

The purpose of this section is to provide the background of language teaching at the tertiary level in Russia, and highlights the importance of adjusting traditional teacher development frameworks to the Russian context.

The new Federal Law on Education, taken in 1992 launched a range of reforms to internationalise the system of higher education in Russia (Morgan and Kliucharev, 2012). In 2003 Russia signed The Bologna Agreement (Telegina and Schwengel, 2012) and English language competence became an essential prerequisite to study in programmes of joint

diplomas and international educational modules (West and Frumina, 2012; Rasskazova, et al., 2017).

Another factor that contributed to the improvement of Russia's capacity to deliver high quality, internationally recognised education was the increasing investment into the tertiary education sector owing to the strategic planning (Каспржак [Kasprjak], 2012) before the political and economic crisis starting 2014. 'Fat years' of 2000 - 2012 in the country, when oil prices raised every year, brought the generous sponsorship into Russian universities, which allowed them to renovate their computer systems with modern hardware and software and equip classrooms with audio and video, the IWBs and projectors. Some universities, for instance HSE and MISIS, provide their teachers with a secure space on the institute operated server and the teachers are supported by IT service: a lab specialist and programmer and a lab assistant.

My past experiences working in Russia in a teacher training capacity revealed that experienced language teachers take the technologically enhanced context as a trigger for exploration and change that leads to a potential array of opportunities, which language teachers then try and negotiate. However, even those who do have intrinsic motivation and are keen to explore new tools cannot engage effectively with these technologies for mainly three reasons. This is the 'gap', which teacher educators have to take into account designing their training courses and programmes.

First, teachers have not got the understandings, which will allow them to engage effectively with technologies. It is believed that Russian education is still 'impervious to outside influences' (Morgan and Kliucharev, 2012:3). The isolation is still apparent in relation to all of the aspects of teachers' activity (West and Frumina, 2012:19, Lenskaya, 2008). Much of the current literature (Kuebart, 1989; Muckle, 1996; Gettys 2000) pays particular attention that teacher education in Russia is mainly built in the applied science model, defined in Wallace (1991:8), where 'teachers are taught researched-based theories and then apply them' (Eldridge, 2005:7). Having been trained and educated within this model teacher do not have knowledge base to get engaged with technology e.g. how to forge effective classroom dynamics by 'blending' various interactions (Littlejohn and Pegler, 2007, Walker and Keeffe, 2010).

Second, teachers struggle to start because they do not have any experience of doing it: either as teachers or as learners. As with many higher educational contexts across the world (Conole and Dyke, 2004:116-120; Bower and Sturman, 2015), most of the highly educated experienced EAP, ESP or EFL teachers at the tertiary level in Russia came to use technology later in life as 'digital immigrants' (Prensky, 2001), and therefore even the most enthusiastic of them - with strong commitment to change do not know what the technologies can do, a point, reflected in the literature (Ter-Minasova, 2005; Littlejohn and Pegler, 2007; Walker and Keeffe, 2010).

Third and crucial, such engagement with technologies requires teachers to rethink and revise their 'repertoire' in Peters's terms (Peters 2004:470). It comprises five factors: the way the teachers have been trained, their beliefs, habits, experiences and understandings of what good teaching is and what they should be doing. For instance, teachers need to adopt a more learner-centred approach to reach their aims and objectives (Edwards and Usher, 2000), e.g. working in a virtual learning environment such as Moodle, Canvas etc. Readiness to completely change themselves sounds for many teachers as readiness to change the job, and not many are ready and know how to do it on their own (see Fig. 1).

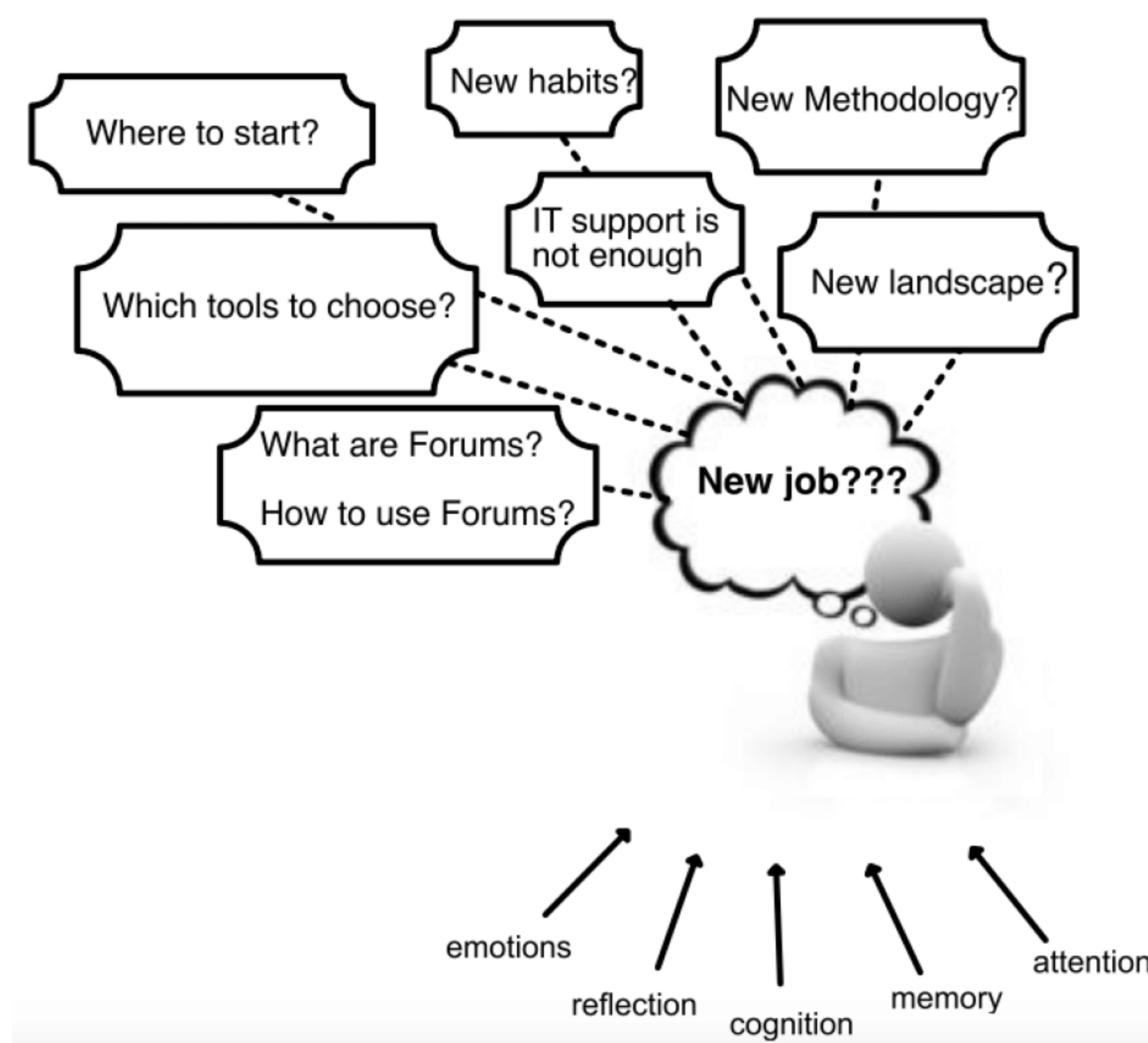


Fig.1 Teachers' responses to technology

Taking all three factors into account it is apparent that teachers need considerable support to assist the transition to a more technologically advanced learning setting. How can teacher educators assist teachers and support in their development?

It is necessary here to clarify exactly what it meant by TD. For Freeman (1989:40) it refers to 'a strategy of influence and indirect intervention that works on complex, integrated aspects of teaching; these aspects are idiosyncratic and individual'. This definition will be used in this paper in its broadest sense: viewing development of teacher identity as a series of transformations, from one stage to another, to raise and shift their awareness of teacher practice to a logical and rational system, which can be described as a 'developed whole' (Vygotsky, 1930/1994; Luria, 1979; Cole and D'Andrade, 1982:20) or 'more empowering teacher identities' (Johnson and Golombek, 2016:13). The new understandings and other changes come about according to the teachers' reciprocal processing of old and new perceptions of their [changing] context (Golombek and Doran, 2014), which in turn are recreated by a dialectical continual interaction of the external and internal.

In the section that follows I briefly review the literature on teacher development in relation to the Russian context.

Teacher development in Russia

With regard to the research into teacher development in Russia, there has not been much research done in this area (Rasskazova, et al., 2017) because Russian educational system remains rather closed (Morgan and Kliucharev, 2012:3).

This being the case, I draw on literature from academic contexts outside of Russia. Traditional Inquiry based Teacher Development frameworks rely on the teacher reflective practice (Wallace, 1991; Mann, 2006; Farrell, 2007; Mann and Walsh, 2013). There is a number of the well-developed frameworks, which contain reflection at their core: a small scale Action Research (Wallace, 1998), Cooperative Development (Edge 1992, 2011), Mezhirov's ten-step framework of transformative learning (1995:50) among others.

While there is no broad consensus in the literature about it, the term reflection is generally understood to mean an intentional act of mind: conscious forceful intellectual and affective activity (Boud, Keogh, and Walke, 1985:33). Cruickshank and Applegate (1981: 153) define reflective practice as thinking over 'what happened, why it happened, and what else they could have done to reach their goals'.

Although it is very hard to overestimate the role of reflection in the professional growth, if the teachers are not quite settled into reflective practice these frameworks might be insufficient to promote development as teacher reflection can be 'mechanical' and 'recipe-following' (Boud, 2010: 27). Such teachers might be reluctant to explore an issue from their practice, claiming they had not had any of them – the response, which Boud (2006:3) refers as 'uncritical acceptance of learners' experience'. In the same vein, Finlay (2008:1) notes that 'for busy professionals short on time, reflective practice is all too easily applied in bland, mechanical, unthinking ways'.

Russian tradition of reflective teaching is reasonably short for several reasons: firstly, due to the professional isolation, which language teachers experienced before the collapse the Soviet Union, secondly, as a result of the applied science model I addressed above. Teachers are granted freedom to choose any means to design their modules and at the same time, they have to work within the 'old' educational system with a lot of 'unspoken' rules and regulations from the soviet era. 'Russia's recent education reforms have failed to be fully implemented because, at a certain point, the mismatch between the Soviet-era psychology and training of many managers and new methodologies or practices have reached a breaking point' Lenskaya (2008).

To add, teachers adopt a transitional mode of monologic teaching, which permeated their schooling experience as an 'apprenticeship of observation' (Lortie, 1975). Brought up in a 'one size fits all' Soviet authoritarian ideology and methodology (Zabotkina, 2002; West and Frumina, 2012), living in a country with an unpredictably evolving society and economy in transition they 'do not want to show that they do not meet the expectations or... to reflect on their own teaching practice' (Rasskazova, et al., 2017:6). This might be a reason why teachers tend to be reluctant to appreciate the developmental power of reflective practice.

There have been attempts to improve the situation and promote reflective language teaching in Russia. One of them was a year-long (2002) Russian Education Support Project on Specialist English - RESPONSE (Scholey, n.d; Almabekova, 2010:469). The project was 'aimed at raising the awareness of teaching and learning problems' (Cheremissina and Petrashova, n.d:web page) and its syllabus was based on reflective practice (Almabekova, 2010).

Although the project was generously funded, it was neither institutionalised (Werbner, 2006), nor critically evaluated (Scholey, n.d.), which is a sign in itself. Werbner (2006:18) explained it as following: 'The state department wanted numbers. Big, quantifiable numbers' and this seems to be the first reason why the project failed. Another reason why RESPONSE has not proved sustainable is that contrary to expectations of all stakeholders the project participants tended to express a lack of interest in reflective practice overall (West and

Frumina, 2012:21). Despite the initial enthusiasm of teachers (Almabekova, 2010), they tended to perceive post-lesson reflection as an add on rather than an essential part of their job (Scholey, n.d.:1). This unwillingness resonates with other studies in the field (Zabotkina, 2002; Ter-Minasova, 2005:454); Werbner (2006); Lenskaya (2008); Frumina and West, 2012).

I became interested in this dilemma during a pilot project, which had a small-scale classroom action research at their core (Smirnova, 2012). Along with enthusiasm and intrinsic motivation of the highly experienced language teachers from one of the top Russian universities in Moscow, however, they could not critically evaluate either of the innovations. Their choice seemed rather random with little reflection on whether it is really suitable for implementation in their classrooms and therefore did not help them fully address an action research aim.

The issue grew in importance as the teachers reacted emotionally on any failure and I, as a teacher trainer in the project, was perplexed by how to respond to teachers' expressions of emotion in ways that supported them and helped resolve the issues. The current study was conceived once I noticed that their emotions are always dialectically related to the cognitive issues in the particular classroom situation. My next step was to analyse the literature dealing with the different aspects of teacher's subjectivity in the emotionally charged context of integrating technology (Ball, 2012).

I argue that such transformative processes as integrating technology (see the discussion above) do not always need an active intervention into experienced teachers' thinking. For instance, one of recent trends in further teacher education and development focuses on the narrative inquiry as a means for development (Golombek and Johnson, 2004:311). It echoes Bakhtin's notion of 'otherness', i.e. that every teachers' story represents an interplay of consciousness, but someone else can be narrator's own interior self. Teachers might get new understandings via balancing two forces that form each of their own utterances: centripetal and centrifugal (Bakhtin, 1981:434). The former helps the experienced teachers to be understood, drawing on the shared knowledge base within the ELT professional world, and the latter enables them to put their messages across as a voice or 'the speaking consciousness' (Holquist and Emerson, 1981). These utterances are never being finished (Bakhtin, 1981:7), and therefore always developing, leading to the teacher transformations. Consequently, another opportunity for teacher development emerges from getting new understandings in the telling of the stories, which 'can enable teachers to gain increasing control over their thinking, feelings, and actions' (Johnson and Golombek, 2016:14).

Therefore, there are seeds of development in the very process of narrative inquiry: the better teachers understand the ways that they can engage with technology, the greater potential for development they have. This preliminary literature review enabled me to look more closely into the subjective factors of teacher development and I address them further.

Emotions and cognition

Although the past ten years have seen increasingly greater exploration of the 'multidimensional role' (Golombek and Doran, 2014:103) of emotions in teacher education and development (see also in Huizen, et al 2005, Roth and Lee, 2007; Holodynski, 2013), the role of emotionality in the field still remains an 'untapped vein' (DiPardo & Potter, 2003:339). Almost no empirical studies look at emotions in relation to the 'triunity' of the cognitive, the emotional and the contextual and few theoretically discuss the relationship

between the three factors (Smagorinsky, 2011; Clara, 2015; Veresov, 2015; Savina, 2000; Davis, 2015; Vadeboncoeur and Collie, 2013).

At the same time, understanding the relationship between emotional and cognitive factors in the meaning making of teaching practice seems critical for understanding the teachers' motivation and professional development but it is a considerably under-researched area to date as acknowledged in the literature (Golombek and Doran, 2014; Ferholt, 2009; Quiñones and Fler, 2011; Adams and March, 2015; Johnson and Golombek, 2016). I argue that this relationship has a contextually dependent nature by referring to Vygotsky's (1987:276), who united the cognitive, the emotional and the contextual in the notion of sense. I am committed to exploring a process of interlinking of these three factors in language teaching to contribute to this area. What is not yet clear is the relation of emotion and cognition to the other factors, e.g. reflection, I discussed above, as well as memory, imagination among other factors (see Fig. 1).

The previous section raised the issues of emotional and intellectual investments and challenges of teaching job, which is reflected in the literature

Language teaching is emotionally charged work (Hargreaves, 2000, 2001; Day and Leitch, 2001; Sutton and Wheatley, 2003; van Veen and Lasky, 2005; Uitto, et al., 2015) and with technology in particular (Ball, 2012). For example, it requires a lot of interaction with students, which is unpredictable, not to mention the issue of resolving the tensions I discussed above. Exhilaration of a successful lesson, where unmotivated students get inspired by the speaking task, stress from being overloaded with marking of writings, and sorrow of cheating students, frustration from the lack of the administrative support - these are a few instances of them in relation to the language teaching with technology.

The issues of emotional and intellectual investments, and the challenge of utilising the technologies effectively is mediated by the teacher's repertoire, which I defined above. Being experienced, teachers might be aware that their repertoire, which they have called on for years (West and Frumina, 2012) does not seem compatible with the principles of flexibility, mobility and variety, necessary for online and blended learning (Edwards and Usher, 2000; Collis and Moonen, 2001) and they have to adopt a more learner centred methodology and a new repertoire along with it.

However, they do not actually have time to make such sea changes in methodology and have to stick to their habitual teaching style and repertoire. As a consequence, the new dynamics, new requirements and expectations can leave them with a sense of being overwhelmed. The teachers might experience a cognitive dissonance, due to the tensions between teacher beliefs about language learning and actions required for implementing technology to facilitate such learning. The tensions are discussed in literature (Russell and Schneiderheinze, 2005; Russo and Benson, 2005) as an inevitable part of the technology integration process. Vasilyuk calls such double bind situation as 'struggle between heterogeneous principles' (1991:181) and Sannino (2010:840) refers to it as a 'critical conflict', clarifying it as 'situations in which individuals face inner doubts that paralyze them in front of contradictory motives unsolvable by the subject [the teacher] alone'.

Such inner conflicts of their motives might frustrate teachers: on the one hand, they do not have time to question their pedagogical convictions, on the other - they understand from their experience that they have to find and invest time into transformations as new reality requires methodological changes.

Another observation is that teachers cannot envisage how the particular tools could assist them. They are likely not to have experience of either working with technology or observing its implication, even as learners (Morgan and Kliucharev, 2012; Steel and Levy, 2009:1015). It seems to me that in-service IT teacher training, aimed to boost teachers' Pedagogical Technological Content Knowledge or PTCK (Koehler and Mishra, 2009) and to help the teachers with practical skills of 'how to use', does not assist to structure their thinking around ICT. As a result, for instance, teachers randomly post their messages to students in Forums and either have nothing in response or feel lost and overwhelmed by a number of student entries they have to respond and as a consequence might ignore Forums at all (see Fig. 1) and might find themselves bewildered and perplexed when pushed to use the tool.

The issues of limited time and training I addressed above do not allow teachers to engage effectively with technologies. In order to restore their 'comfort teaching zone' (Vasilyuk, 1984, 1991), and recover from 'a sense of loss' (Golombek and Johnson, 2004:311), they probably have to employ emotions and cognition which act as a unity, an inseparable whole and, at the same time, they clash in a real classroom situation (see Fig.2) as a critical conflict as I exemplified above.

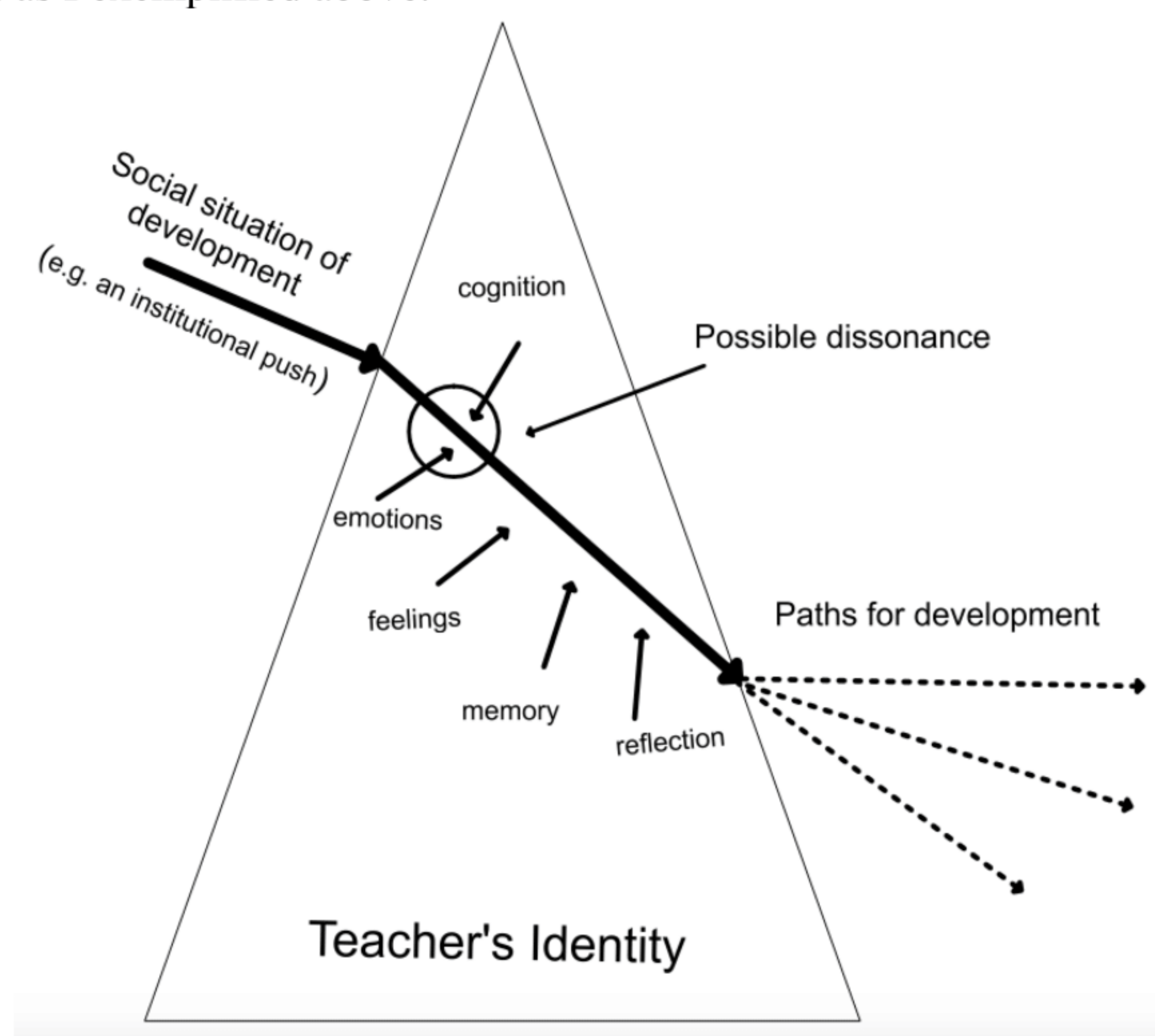


Fig.2 Trajectories of development

Resolving tensions by the means of narrative inquiry

If a teacher becomes consciously aware of the sources of the tensions, they make new meaning of their teaching which helps them make decisions and develop from the whole process. The idea that resolving tensions has an impetus to development is widely supported by the teacher education literature. Johnson and Worden (2014:129) provide a relevant review referencing empirical work (Childs, 2011; DiPardo and Potter, 2003; Golombek and Johnson, 2004; Golombek and Doran, 2014; Kubanyiova, 2012; Reis, 2011; Tasker, 2011).

Taking a broader field, Gonzalez Ray highlights that the meaning making process of the tensions can turn into an important force for cognitive development. Engeström insists on

the term ‘contradictions’ and the process of overcoming them as an inevitable part of development (e.g. in Engestrom et al.,2002) I use the broader term - ‘tensions’ throughout this work as it comprises not only contradictions but also contextual complexities, leading to the tensions.

To reveal the tensions I use narrative inquiry - an effective methodology to capture complex processes. In line with Johnson and Golombek (2002) I think about power of narrative inquiry in three ways: as a sense making process of experience, as a socially mediated experience, and as a practice, capturing emotions, which are embodied in teachers’ narratives.

Regarding the sense making process, I hold the assumption that teachers give meaning to their practice through the stories they tell about their teaching (Lyons and LaBoskey, 2002; Johnson and Golombek, 2002; Wells, 2011). I approach teacher narrative thinking about their job as a cognitive activity that draws together various accounts of their practice into a coherent story, where the story is a very complex, context dependent phenomena, a ‘mode of thought’ (Bruner, 1991:5). It is telling of the stories, which ‘can enable teachers to gain increasing control over their thinking, feelings, and actions’ (Johnson and Golombek, 2016:14).

An increasing awareness of the tensions might drive the participants to recognise a possible cognitive dissonance (see an example above, or in Golombek and Johnson, 2004:311) as well as a call for the need to reintegrate their cognitive expertise (Johnson and Golombek, 2016) and search for new means. Such new and more nuanced understanding of their work might be ‘externalized ‘ (Vygotsky, 1997:106) in a new activity or course design and I am curious to know more about such teachers’ trajectories from their narratives.

With regard to use of narrative as a socially mediated experience, sociohistorical factors, integrated into narrative discourses (Gee, 1985), enable both actors: my participants and me, a researcher, to create ‘the co-constructed experiences developed through the relational inquiry process’ (Clandinin, 2006:47) as we immersed in the same ‘small culture’ in Holliday’s (1999) terms. Since we have shared working experience I am not only emotionally invested, empathise with the participants but also genuinely care about the tensions, they have to deal with.

Thirdly and crucially, narrative inquiry is an effective framework to bring emotions to the surface: “teachers’ narratives embody emotions such as frustration, fear, anger, and joy, and they center on the caring emotions and actions of trust, dialogue, feelings” (Johnson and Golombek, 2002:5). This is evidenced in the teachers’ accounts (Verity, 2000; Mann and Walsh, 2013:304 ff.; Golombek and Doran, 2014; Farr and Riordan, 2015). What is more, a longitudinal study of Swain (2013:196) evidenced ‘the centrality of emotion and its connections to cognition’ in narratives.

Conclusion

The discussion presented in this paper suggests that coping with the complexities of technologically enhanced context involves teachers into the dynamic process of sense and meaning making to overcome the tensions they face and develop. Emotions help the teachers index dissonance between the ideal and their multi-layered reality and get so adapted to the situations that to be able to act in them.

Although our emotions capture daily rigours and rewards of the job, they cannot be considered as a unit to analyse the development for at least two reasons. First, the list of

‘higher’ emotions is highly restricted; second, teachers experience the same event quite differently, i.e. even if they express similar emotions they are likely to have different subjective senses. In line with this, cognition alone cannot serve thinking and meaning making processes as cognition is purely a conscious process therefore it does not capture subconscious motives teachers have related to their activity.

At the same time, emotions and cognition play the central role in human consciousness. Therefore, in search for a unit of analysis of teacher development, I propose to take both cognitive and emotional factors, and, in line with the ecological psychology, add the context to the triunity, which comprises the notion of perezhivanie. Through ‘perezhivanie’ of the tensions of their job, revealed by narrative inquiry, teachers ‘reframe and recontextualize whatever understandings they have constructed in their own professional settings’ (Golombek, 2015:481).

I suggest that perezhivanie has a formative power on teachers and therefore a heuristic value for teacher education and development. When a teacher trainer gets informed by the relationships within the triunity of cognitive, emotional, and contextual factors, the trainee experiences, the former gets more nuanced understanding of the ‘subjective stance’ (Gonzalez Ray, 2015) of the latter. As holding themselves accountable to the trainees, the former becomes attuned to influence this system of relationships in the technologically rich environment and scaffolds teaching activity in new and challenging teaching conditions as technology integration, facilitating teacher development process this way.

While ecological, mutualist and dialectical type of thinking around human beings in their environments, which constitutes the basic ecological psychology, underpin the notion of ‘perezhivanie’, it is not an accepted full psychological concept (Veresov, 2016). What is more, due to its highly polysemic nature ‘perezhivanie’ is difficult to translate from the Russian into English. To develop the notion theoretically, the present study aims to pin it down for the western audience via empirical data analysis. Wenger (2001) calls it as an emergence of a new theory when ‘we give language to what we are observing in the world’, which echoes D’Andrade’s (1984) idea that defining a notion is uncovering the theory. This way employing perezhivanie presents both theoretical and methodological challenges, yet allows me to examine subjective experience within sociocultural frameworks and, most importantly, to grapple with the affective nature of the language teaching job.

To sum up, I argue that in order to understand the impact of technology on teaching and learning processes, and how implementing technology may foster TD, I need to understand teachers’s perezhivanie as an emotional and cognitive response to the complexities of their context. As soon as perezhivanie is driven and mediated by consciousness (Vygotsky, 2001; Ferholt and Nilsson, 2016), exploring ‘perezhivanie’ as a unit of analysis of consciousness opens a window into the complex processes of technology integration in HE. I hope that my ongoing analysis of the data should bring further clarity to the formative role of perezhivanie in TD.

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