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Exploring Authenticity in the Dialogical Self: A Conceptual Assemblage

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ABSTRACT

In dialogical self theory (DST) authenticity has not been a central concern. The humanist notion of a static, higher-order, superordinate, ultimate, and “true” self runs counter to the ontology of DST, and the conceptualization of the dialogical self as unconsolidated, multifaceted, dynamic, and sensitive to situational change. In a climate in which the psychology of authenticity is undergoing revision—and in which the existence of a “true” “inner” self is increasingly questioned—it is these qualities that make DST highly suited to the investigation of authenticity in contemporary life. Four aspects of DST can facilitate the exploration of authenticity: (1) the function of personal positions and their role in shaping and stylizing social positions, (2) how I-positions differ in relation to openness to innovation and the degree to which they are personally endorsed, (3) how I-positions can encompass a shared identity and can express a collective voice, and (4) the emotional tenor of experiences involving authenticity. To illustrate the utility of this conceptual assemblage, a case study of the authenticity experiences of an early-career language teacher is presented. The study demonstrates how, in the dialogical self, authenticity involves the experience of how one is in one’s actions and in one’s relationships.

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Introduction

Messages about the importance of being “true to oneself” abound in human society. From the philosophy of Ancient Greece to the humanist and positive psychology of more recent times, there is convergence in the idea that people can lead a happy life by being “true to themselves” and living in ways that are consistent with a “true” and “authentic” self (Baumeister, 2019). In the study of authenticity, a person’s “inner” or “true” self has an integral role (Goldman & Kernis, 2002). It is embedded in conceptualizations of *trait authenticity*, the “unobstructed operation of one’s true- or core-self in one’s daily enterprise,” and *state authenticity*, the experience of being in sync with

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one's real or genuine self and the perception of being "the true me" (Goldman & Kernis, 2002, p. 294).

Although research on authenticity has been conducted in various fields—ranging from cognitive and organizational psychology to sociology and philosophy—four broad areas of consensus can be discerned: (1) people value "being authentic" in their perceptions of themselves and others; (2) feeling authentic, or being in touch with one's "true self," is an established predictor of psychological well-being; (3) evaluations of the authenticity of oneself and others involves normative considerations; and (4) evaluations of authenticity are supported by general cognitive processes (Hicks et al., 2019). There are also areas in which understandings diverge and knowledge is patchy. Little is known about why value is placed on authenticity or the processes that give rise to the feeling of "being authentic" (Hicks et al., 2019).

Whereas humanist and positive psychology embrace the idea of a true self and view authenticity as the expression of that self in the actions of everyday life (e.g., Goldman & Kernis, 2002; Maslow, 1968; Rogers, 1963), other theories question the notion of a true self as a psychological entity. Reflecting the accelerating complexity of current times and the diversity of the contemporary self, the existence of a true self endowed with absolute or universal qualities has come into question (Gergen, 1991). So too have notions of authenticity. Rather than the defining quality of a metaphysically "true" self, authenticity might be better understood as a perception about one's identity that arises in specific activities, contexts of action, and interpersonal relationships (e.g., Sedikides et al., 2017).

Reflecting ideas originating in the work of Mead and Cooley, and refined in later developments of symbolic interactionist theory, authenticity can be understood as a type of self-appraisal. From a perspective in which the self is viewed as multifaceted and inclusive of social roles and personal characteristics, authenticity can be understood as an *emotional experience* (e.g., Gecas, 1991; Turner, 1976). Rather than a condition or state of being (cf., Goldman & Kernis, 2002), authenticity becomes "what we feel is *real to us* under specific circumstances" (Vannini, 2006, p. 239). As an emotional experience and a dynamically shifting appraisal of how one is in relation to ongoing actions, authenticity can be understood as "temporal, situational, reflexive, relational, deeply personal, and expressive of the person's self" (Vannini, 2006, p. 237).

Drawing on the rendering of authenticity provided by Heidegger (1927), Baumeister (2019, 2022) has taken a similar position. Arguing that the true self is not an actuality but a "guiding idea," Baumeister has suggested that authenticity is not a quality of a person's core identity. Rather, it is a property of a person's actions and derives from his or her experience of acting. Rivera et al. (2019) have similarly argued that the value of authenticity is most evident when viewed as a normative standard in processes of self-appraisal. In their view, a person's perception of authenticity functions as a normative guide and "a cue to evaluate whether they are living up to a shared cultural value of what it means to live a good life" (Rivera et al., 2019, p. 113). Likewise, Chen (2019) has argued that being authentic involves being true to and acting in accordance with the self that is situationally relevant and the conception of the self that is currently salient. Depending on the situational and relational circumstances, self-evaluation (feeling authentic) and self-validating behavior (acting authentically) would therefore vary (e.g., Vannini & Franzese, 2008).

Contemporary conceptualizations of authenticity as a situationally varying experience and a guide for behavior have necessitated a rethinking of the idea of a true self. For a perception of authenticity to be psychologically consequential, there is no *a priori* requirement for the existence of a true self as an ontological entity (Hicks et al., 2019). Rather, a person's true self might exist insofar that it is reflected in situated evaluations of *who* they are, and *how* they are acting (Shlegel & Hicks, 2011; Shlegel et al., 2012; Stichter et al., 2024). With an emphasis on authenticity as involving *knowledge* of the self that is situationally invoked, and *appraisals* that are contextually triggered, it can be better to think of authenticity as a subjective experience and a feeling that is heavily overlaid with the emotional tenor of the situation (Sedikides et al., 2017; Stichter et al., 2024).

Purpose

In dialogical self theory (DST), authenticity has rarely attracted attention (Konopka & Beers, 2016). This is not surprising. The notion of a true or higher-order self to which other selves might be subordinated runs counter to a *decentralized* conception of the self and DST's emphasis on the *democracy* of the self (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). However, when authenticity is viewed as a type of self-evaluation and an experience that is situationally contingent, dynamically fluctuating, and emotionally gated, the situation changes. As a socially situated and fluctuating perception of the congruence of "self and activity," contemporary notions of authenticity align closely with the ontological assumptions of DST.

The aim of this article is to illuminate such alignments. The purpose is twofold: first, to map out a conceptual assemblage that can facilitate the exploration of authenticity in contemporary life; and, second, to illustrate its operation. In the first part of the article, a conceptual assemblage is presented. It comprises four elements of DST: (1) intersubjectivity and the possibility of a *collective voice*, (2) the function of *social* and *personal positions*, (3) the existence of *oppositional positions* and fields of tension, and (4) the *guiding function of emotions*. In the second part of the article, these conceptualizations are used as interconnecting lenses through which authenticity experiences in early-career language teaching are explored. The article concludes with an assessment of the contributions that DST can make in understanding authenticity and other aspects of subjective well-being in contemporary times.

A conceptual assemblage for the exploration of authenticity in the dialogical self

Intersubjectivity and the possibility of a collective voice

In DST, the mind of the individual is conceptualized as a cast of characters (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). Endowed with a "voice" and functioning as *I-positions* within a self that is dialogically constructed, the "characters" interact in a mesh of dialogical relations. Emerging from these interactions is a complex and narratively structured identity. Sensitive to contextual changes, the dialogical self is highly dynamic. Innovation takes place through interactions between different I-positions, with the

configuration of the dialogical self a result of tensional relationships between the I-positions that constitute its functional subparts (Valsiner, 2005). Because identities are created through observation of the self in relation to the social world, the manner in which a person responds to the shifting multiplicity of I-positions provides a key to understanding how identities are constructed and maintained (Salgado & Cunha, 2021).

Reflecting James's (1890) notion of the extended self—the idea that the mind of the individual is intertwined with the minds of others in the social environment—in the dialogical self the other is not a separate entity beyond the self or an external reality to which the self relates. Rather, it is “an intrinsic feature of the self as extended to the social environment” (Hermans, 2013, p. 82). Consequently, the dialogical self has internal and external domains. In the internal domain, I-positions reflect aspects of the individual's own identity (internal I-positions). In the external domain, I-positions represent the perspectives of social others (external I-positions).

While the notion of an I-position captures an experiential *I*-quality, it can also extend to positions that encompass an experiential *we*-quality. As Hermans (2003) has explained, “positions can range on a continuum between the experience of I at the one extreme and the experience of we at the other” (p. 105). Referencing Bakhtin's notion of a “collective voice,” groups, communities, and even cultures can be dialogically incorporated within the dialogical self (Hermans, 2013). As Hermans (2003) has made clear, “collective voices are not simply outside the self as an external community, but they are part of the individual self and, at the same time, transcend it as part of the broader historical and social community” (p. 105).

In circumstances in which people form part of a social group and have a shared sense of affiliation—as members of a family, a team, a working group, or a larger collective—I-positions can embody an experiential *we*-quality. In situations in which affiliation or group membership can become salient, the foregrounding of an I-position with a *we*-quality can generate *feelings* of authenticity. From the idiosyncrasies of intimate relationships (a longstanding joke shared by romantic partners) to behaviors that have ritualized characteristics and occur in specific social contexts (e.g., in a research team, a particular classroom, or at the home games of a football team), the foregrounding of an I-position that articulates a collective voice can contribute to the sense that one is acting authentically.

Social and personal positions

An important aspect of DST involves the distinction between social and personal positions (Konopka et al., 2018). A *social position* is a position defined by a social or cultural role. A social position can be I-as-a-teacher, I-as-a-mentor, or I-as-a-colleague. A *personal position* is an expression of personal characteristics and preferences. A personal position can be I-as-empathic or I-as-an-idealist. Social and personal positions provide windows onto the *roles* that people assume in varying situations, and how they *are* in these roles. In combination, social and personal positions shape a person's identities:

The combination of personal and social positions reveals how a person is giving form to the role he or she is playing in society. Saying that somebody is a “teacher” is giving only superficial information about *the way* this person is doing her job. We know more when

somebody is defining herself as an “inspiring teacher,” or as a “teacher with a sense of humor,” or as a “supportive teacher.” Typically, social positions, such as teacher, mother, professional, employer or employee, and other roles defined by social expectations and prescriptions, receive their characteristic expression by their coalition with one or more personal positions. (Konopka et al., 2018, p. 15)

A personal position provides a *response* to the prescriptions reflected in a social position. It creates the space to *stylize* and to *personalize* the characteristics of a social position (Hermans, 2013). By enclothing social roles with idiosyncratic characteristics, personal positions reflect the ways in which people *feel* in their social roles. For a university professor, the I-position I-as-a-dedicated-researcher is a combination of a *social* position (I-as-researcher) and a *personal* position (I-as-dedicated-in-this-role).

Personal positions are not just modifiers of a social position. They can also determine the social position that is foregrounded. For the university professor, the position I-as-a-dedicated-researcher may be frequently foregrounded in the dialogical self. However, when contributing to departmental management, or organizing a conference, the positions I-as-a-reluctant-leader or I-as-shouldering-responsibility might be foregrounded. For a while, the social position of researcher can recede into the background. For a language teacher, a foregrounding and backgrounding of the positions I-as-someone-who-is-passionate-about-French and I-as-a-teacher-who-dutifully-works-with-grammar can function in similar ways (Henry, 2016).

In addition to tensions that can emerge from conflictive I-positions, tensions can also arise when a social position and a personal position are discordant (Hermans, 2013). As it is important to recall, a personal position functions as a *response* to normative expectations associated with a social position, and it provides a means to *personalize* social role behavior. A professor who needs to inform the applicant for a postdoctoral position that he or she has not been successful or a teacher who needs to deal with a disciplinary issue can experience a tension between a social position and a personal position. Yet, a discordant combination should not be seen as a sign of disfunction. Rather, it can be understood as an “expression of dialogicality and differences within the self” (Konopka et al., 2018, p. 15).

Combinations of social and personal positions arise in specific situations and circumstances. When contexts of social action enable personal investment in a social position, the social position can gain its characteristic features through coalition with a personal position (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). In professional contexts, coalitions of this sort can have great significance. The conjoining of social and personal positions can be one of the elements that supports well-being and sustains career investment:

Certainly, it is possible that social and personal positions are *combined productively*. For example, motivation for a particular task or job increases when the person is not only conforming to social role expectations but does the work *on the basis of personal desire, passion, conviction, or call*. In an era when professional work is increasingly fused with private and personal life circumstances, the coalition of social and personal positions becomes particularly salient to both persons and organizations.

(Hermans, 2013, p. 85; emphasis added)

However, in the complexity of contemporary life, there will often be situations in which social and personal positions can be hard to conjoin and will be poorly aligned. Inevitably, situations will arise in which there is a disconnect between what a person is required to do (a social position), and his or her desires, preferences, ambitions and ideals (a personal position).

In clinical work, social and personal positions can provide the therapist with important tools (Konopka et al., 2018). When engaging with a tension or dilemma, the disambiguation of social and personal positions can be a central task. Exploration “of the extent of fit or misfit allows therapist and client to explore conflicts between one’s societal position and personal inclinations” (Konopka et al., 2018, p. 15). Beyond therapeutic work, investigation of the alignment/misalignment of social and personal positions can cast light on authenticity experiences. When social and personal positions are aligned, experiences of feeling authentic and acting authenticity can be generated. Conversely, when positions are poorly aligned, experiences of inauthenticity or “frustrated authenticity” (Henry, 2013; Vannini & Burgess, 2009) are likely to arise.

Oppositional positions and fields of tension

As a theory that highlights the multiplicity of the self, DST acknowledges inner diversity. An important distinction involves open positions and closed positions. Whereas the former reference dimensions of the self that involve familiarity, openness, and the potential for innovation, the latter reference dimensions that involve suppression of aspects perceived as problematic or troubling (Hermans, 2004). Similarly, some I-positions can involve aspects of an identity that are fully endorsed. Others can involve aspects that can be experienced as “not mine” (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). Whereas an I-position of the former type might be understood as an integrated position (i.e., an identity position that is fully and truly my own), the latter could be understood as an introjected position (an identity position that is required of me).

For the university professor, the positions I-as-a-*reluctant*-leader and I-as-*shouldering*-responsibility might be understood as closed or introjected positions. Referencing obligation, they arise from the perception of expectations held by important others (colleagues, and conference participants). For the language teacher, the position I-as-a-teacher-who-*dutifully*-works-with-grammar might similarly be seen as a closed or introjected position. Even though students may not enjoy the complexity of French verb systems, grammar still needs to be taught. Although closed/introjected positions and open/integrated positions might sometimes be disjunctive—as can frequently be the case in working life—conflict can be accommodated through situated processes of foregrounding and backgrounding (e.g., Hermans, 2003). When space for an open/integrated position emerges, a closed/introjected position that has previously been foregrounded can be relegated to the background. However, if an introjected “not mine” position becomes a more dominant part of the dialogical self, tensions can affect job satisfaction and well-being. For the professor who becomes a reluctant conference chair (I-as-*shouldering*-responsibility), and for the language teacher who has to spend time working with grammar if students are to pass an upcoming exam (I-as-a-teacher-who-*dutifully*-works-with-grammar), tension can arise from the consistent foregrounding of an I-position in which the teacher/professor is not fully invested and

that references a closed and less welcome part of the self. In such circumstances, experiences of feeling inauthentic and acting inauthentically are likely to arise.

Emotions as guides

Because the subjective world of a human being is constantly shaped by immediate experience that itself is dynamically changing (Valsiner, 2007), in DST there is need to engage with emotions and to explore the bidirectional relationship between self and affect (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010; Salgado, 2007). In the exploration of dynamical processes within the dialogical self, it is necessary “to understand the message of an emotion [and] how a person relates to a particular emotion” (Konopka & van Beers, 2016, p. 57). The importance of agency has been highlighted by Salgado (2007). Because emotions are embodied elements of human experience, they imply an orientation and direct behavior: Emotions “guide actions and relations with the world, especially the world of others” (Salgado, 2007, p. 63). Moreover, because emotions are highly sensitive to context dynamics, “subjectivity may be properly conceived of as a relational and affective state in constant development” (Salgado, 2007, p. 63).

The sense that emotions can function as a trigger for reflection and a guide for future actions has been emphasized in clinical work inspired by DST. Describing a psychotherapeutic method that involves a deepening of awareness of processes taking place in the self, Konopka and van Beers (2016) highlighted the combined roles of emotion and reflection. As they explained, “emotions tell us whether things are good or bad for us and direct our behavior” whereas reflection “helps us consider their impact and evaluates whether and how we should follow them up” (Konopka & van Beers, 2016, p. 61). Reporting on a case study involving composition work—a method that involves focusing on the present moment and the affective-embodied experience—they explained how “any emotion a person feels or position he or she takes can only be understood in the broader context of other aspects of the self, not as an isolated element” (Konopka & van Beers, 2016, p. 59). In this way, emotions can provide the gateway to the exploration of authenticity in the dialogical self. By focusing on momentary instances of positive and negative affect, it becomes possible to dig deeper and uncover perceptions of authenticity and inauthenticity.

A case study of authenticity in language teaching

Anchored in the observation that “it is scientifically informative and psychologically meaningful to conceptualize and assess authenticity in context” (Chen, 2009, p. 60), and using the four conceptualizations as interconnecting lenses through which authenticity can be examined, a case study exploring the authenticity experiences of an early career language teacher is presented.

Participant and setting

The participant was an early career teacher of English and Swedish as a second language. Adi (pseudonym) grew up in a country in the Global South. On completing her undergraduate degree, she gained a scholarship to study on an international

master's program at a Swedish university. On completion of this program, Adi decided to settle permanently in Sweden. She enrolled in a five-year teacher education program, qualifying as an upper secondary teacher in English and Swedish as a second language. Although she enjoyed both subjects, Swedish was the more challenging. It had demanded far more effort than English.

After qualification, Adi worked at an upper secondary school, and then at a secondary school. Both schools were in a medium-sized provincial community. In the preceding years, the municipality had received large numbers of asylum-seeking migrants from the Middle East and North-East Africa. Like many other communities in Sweden, social and educational segregation were evident. At the school where Adi worked, large numbers of students had migrant backgrounds. Although these students took regular courses in most subjects, for Swedish many received instruction in second language classes. Adi's teaching was divided equally between English (8 lessons per week) and Swedish as a second language (9 lessons per week). For both subjects, she taught classes in grades 7, 8, and 9. On most days, her teaching took place in the mornings and finished at around 1:30.

Research design

Teacher identities need to be investigated in relation to “the contingencies that occur during teaching” (Monereo, 2019, p. 5). Reflecting the ethos of constructivist psychotherapy, in which researcher and participant each have “an expert role” (Neimeyer & Stewart, 2001, p. 130) and the approach developed in *composition work*, where the participant is a coinvestigator who composes and recomposes a repertoire of positions that personify “an evolving self” (Konopka et al., 2018, p. 319), understandings of authenticity were coconstructed. Focusing on events observed by the researcher, the participant was encouraged to engage with these situations by shifting between two aspects of herself: “the experiencing ‘I’, which engages life in all of its emotional immediacy, and the explaining ‘me’, which attempts to give a coherent account of these experiences in rational terms” (Neimeyer & Stewart, 2001, p. 134).

Data generation

Interviews were conducted on five occasions. First, an initial interview was carried out. Following the method developed by Henry (2016, 2019), the purpose of this interview was to map the participant's I-positions. In the following week, the researcher then spent four consecutive days observing the participant in the classrooms where she taught. Thirteen observations were conducted (5 in English, 8 in Swedish). Observations were documented in fieldnotes. At the end of each day, interviews were conducted. These lasted between 45 and 70 minutes. Events described in the fieldnotes were used to explore experiences of authenticity. For each event, the aim was to coconstruct an understanding of identity experiences, and to explore feelings of authenticity and inauthenticity. Interviews were audio recorded and verbatim transcripts were created.

Analytical approach

Analysis of the transcripts was guided by the extended metaphor of the dialogical self as a spatial *landscape* in which the exploration of identity involves a process of *excavation* (Konopka & Zhang, 2021). Whereas the landscape metaphor suggests that there are layers of implicit feelings and I-positions that are hidden from view, the excavation metaphor indicates that discovery of these deeper dimensions involves a “geological excavation or sounding” in which the self and the emotions connected with the person’s I-positions “can gradually move to the surface and become visible” (Konopka & Zhang, 2021, p. 172).

A discourse analytical approach was used (Coyle, 2006; Potter & Wetherell, 1995). This included a strategy specially developed for investigating dynamics within the dialogical self (Bell & Das, 2011; Duarte & Gonçalves, 2007; Henry, 2016, 2019). Analyses were conducted in a two-stage process. In a first stage, the transcript from the initial interview was analyzed. Articulations of an identity (I-positions) were identified. In this way the landscape of the participant’s dialogical self could be mapped. In a second stage, excavation work was conducted. From the transcripts of the end-of-day interviews, I-positions were identified in a similar way. Segments in which an I-position had been identified were then extracted and closely analyzed with the aim of identifying (1) internal I-positions and their social and personal components, and (2) external position(s) with which an internal position might be in dialogue. For each identified I-position, a narrative account was created. This involved (1) describing the I-position and its composition (i.e., the combination of social and personal positions), (2) mapping its relationship to other I-positions (internal and external), and (3) identifying the feelings and emotions with which it was connected. Once they had been written up, the analyses were shared with the participant.

Mapping the landscape

Like other secondary teachers in Nordic and Northern European countries, Adi was qualified to teach in two subjects. Although both subjects involved similar pedagogical skills, the experiences of being a teacher of English and a teacher of Swedish were very different. In English, Adi had confidence in her language skills. She enjoyed designing and carrying out lessons. With a strong belief in the importance of structure—“I am the type of person that once I have a lesson plan I am very, I have to see it through. It has to be done according to the stages” (initial interview)—Adi’s lessons were highly organized. There was a balance between teacher-fronted instruction and space for student interaction. In Swedish, her lessons were different. Design was less evident. Lessons lacked a sequencing of activities, and there was little variation. Reflecting on how she experienced her teaching role in the two subjects, Adi also identified differences in her interactions with students:

EXCERPT 1 [Initial interview]¹

I: Do you think that the way that you are in those classes, in these two different classes is different?

T: Yeah, I notice. Yeah, when I have my English classes I feel in a way that it's more flow in the way I communicate with my students. Because I am trying to keep it mostly in English. It's only when they ask me certain words, then I switch over to Swedish. But when I deliver, deliver [laughs], when I have my English lessons it's like okay. It's fine. I can just, there's more fluidity compared to Swedish. In Swedish I have to think if I get asked a question. I have to say it again in my head before I can say the right answer.

I: So, fluidity is a sense of comfort, confidence? Personality perhaps? Not personality, but identity perhaps as well?

T: Yes, they're all fluid in that sense.

I: All these things, yeah. So, it's not just a sort of fluency as a part of fluidity? It is a sort of, is identity fluid to you as well? In the sense of being sort of just at home teaching English? Because English was your first subject, that's the subject that you chose? That English is the language that you are more comfortable with?

T: And it's also, I think, it also has a lot to do with the fact that when I go to my English class, I know that I probably have a bit more knowledge compared to my students. But in Swedish, even though I am the teacher, we are learning new things together at the same time.

As revealed in this excerpt, Adi can experience self-efficacy when teaching English. Reflecting on the importance of lesson design, she describes how she “delivers” a lesson, how the design and the delivery of a lesson merge to create a sense of “fluidity,” and how this is mirrored in her interactions with students: “it's more flow in the way I communicate with my students.” She is confident in handling the language, and comfortable responding on the spur of the moment. As she notes, “I know that I probably have a bit more knowledge compared to my students.”

The experience of teaching Swedish is very different. Adi does not “deliver” a lesson. Lessons do not “flow” in the same way. When students ask questions, Adi describes how she is concerned about the answers she gives. She is not able to be spontaneous, as she is in English. She needs to think things through and to compose a response: “to say it again in my head before I can say the right answer.” Insecure in her language skills, she is concerned about getting something wrong, and having gaps in her knowledge exposed.

There is also a difference in Adi's relationship with the students. In English, the teacher–student relationship is markedly asymmetrical. Adi is more knowledgeable and accomplished in her language use. Lessons are carefully designed. Students know what to expect and what is expected of them. In Swedish, Adi's relationship with her students is more symmetrical. Feeling less secure when communicating in Swedish, explaining things, and giving instructions, Adi describes how she avoids the more complex, multistage lesson designs characteristic for English. Rather, things are kept simple. Moreover, Adi and her students share “visible identities” (Alcoff, 2005) that mark a migrant background. No one in the classroom has Swedish as a mother tongue. On multiple levels—as a person with a migrant background and as a language learner—Adi experiences a deeper affiliation with these students. As she puts it, “even though I am the teacher, we are learning new things together at the same time.”

The sense of being different as a teacher in English and in Swedish extends to all aspects of Adi's work. As can be seen in the following excerpt, she understands how

the “flow” that she experiences in English—when “delivering” a lesson and interacting with students—is missing in Swedish. Instead of trusting her own judgment, lessons are planned in accordance with a common template:

EXCERPT 2 [Initial interview]

I’ve noticed that I’m more, what’s the word, I do more challenging topics in English with my students. You know, like compared to Swedish, I follow the *template* that the other teachers follow. And I do it in the way that we have been told when we have our meetings. But in English I’m willing to go out, “Okay this is okay,” “It’s something that can be connected to this.” “But this might be more interesting for the students.” So, I try it out. I am always trying new things in English. Not so much in Swedish. I feel I have to keep to the [template].

In English, Adi says that she is willing to “do more challenging topics” and to embrace innovation: “I am always trying new things.” In Swedish, she says she is more cautious. She carries out teaching “in the way that we have been told when we have our meetings.” Rather than the innovation and experimentation characteristic for English, she says that she will “follow the template that the other teachers follow.” As she explains, it feels like something “I have to keep to.” Interestingly, the differences that Adi notices are noticed by other people too:

EXCERPT 3 [Tuesday]

T: When my principal has come in, and other teachers have come in, and they have seen a difference. And I feel it as well. And it has mostly to do with the fact that I’m more confident there, and I know what I can come up with, sort of like I can spontaneously discuss something that wasn’t planned. For example, what we planned today, it wasn’t planned, when I went back to try to get them to understand what a verb is or what and also ...

I: It just flows.

T: It flows. And I feel more flow there than in Swedish as a second language. You’ve probably noticed that as well.

For Adi, the experience of being a teacher in Swedish is uncomfortable. Insecure about using the language, self-monitoring is a source of stress. Even though lessons are kept simple and follow a standardized design, Adi can experience stress when things don’t work out. The bond with her students, and her investment in their learning and wellbeing, can also be a source of stress, anxiety, and fatigue:

EXCERPT 4 [Wednesday]

T: Being myself, I feel like I’m, on Mondays because it’s all Swedish, I’m like, at the end of the day, I’m like, I just want to get home and take a rest. And I find that I’m not as equally exhausted when it’s all English, and probably because the stress is not there. The stress to get everything done. The stress to make sure that it works. The stress to not think about if I said something wrong, or, yeah. So it all comes into play. ...

I think and that’s what made me frustrated yesterday. Because, you know, most of the time I’m hurting for them. And I want them to succeed. And if they submit things and it’s late and everything, I accept it because I can stay up later tonight and mark this and stuff. And that’s where the frustration comes from as well. It is that you know, I’m trying for them.

I: They don't appreciate that? They don't understand?

T: Yeah, they don't understand that. You know, I am, it almost feels like I'm, you know, I'm their mother. That's trying so hard for their kids, and the kids don't realize it. And so that's kind of the role that I also have in Swedish.

Excavation work: Uncovering I-positions

In excavation work, the aim is to bring to the surface and make visible a person's I-positions, and the emotions to which they connect (Konopka & Zhang, 2021). Analysis of the interview transcripts reveals how, for English, there is a single I-position: I-as-a-teacher-of-English (social position) who-is-competent-and-innovative (personal position). In relational contexts, internal I-positions are in dialogue with external positions (Hermans, 2013). As the analyses reveal, the internal position I-as-a-teacher-of-English-who-is-competent-and-innovative is dialogically constructed in relation to the external position of the students (Figure 1). In the dialogical self, external positions express perspectives on the self and are endowed with a voice (Henry & Mollstedt, 2021). The presence of the other (the students) is revealed by the inner voice of dialogical interaction: "Okay this is okay," "It's something that can be connected to this," "But this might be more interesting for the students" (Excerpt 2).

For Swedish, excavation of the landscape reveals a different dialogical structure. In Swedish, Adi lacks confidence. When responding to students' questions, she needs to rehearse her answers. When planning lessons, she defers to collegial norms. At the same time, she experiences a close affinity with her students. They share a bond that extends beyond the teacher-student relationship. In Swedish, two I-positions can be discerned:

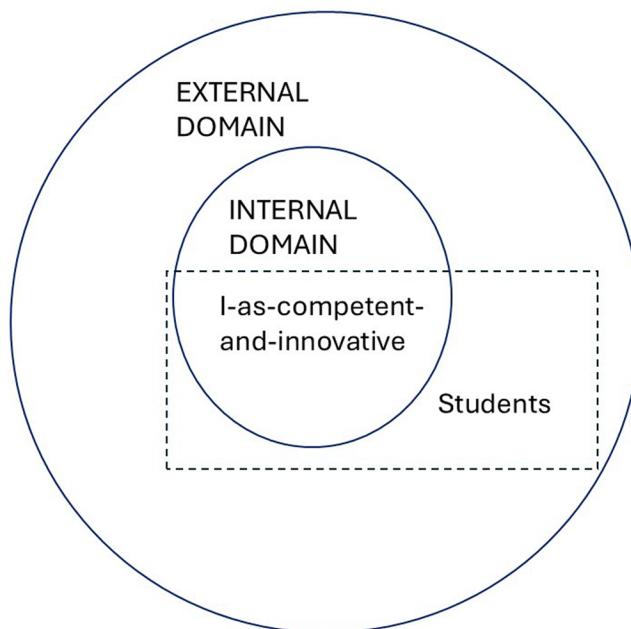


Figure 1. The dialogical self for English.

I-as-a-teacher-of-Swedish (social position) who-is-linguistically-insecure (personal position), and I-as-a-teacher-of-Swedish (social position) who-is-connected-to-her-students (personal position). As internal I-positions, they are in dialogue with different external positions. For the first I-position (I-as-a-teacher-of-Swedish-who-is-linguistically-insecure), dialogue involves two external positions: the students, and the other teachers of Swedish. For the second I-position (I-as-a-teacher-of-Swedish-who-is-connected-to-her-students), there is dialogue with a single external position: the students (Figure 2).

Excavation work: Uncovering dynamics

With the I-positions revealed, we can move on to examine authenticity experiences. In contemporary psychology, appraisals of authenticity involve the degree to which one is acting in accordance with a *conception* of one's true self (Stichter et al., 2024). Authenticity is a subjective feeling (Sedikides et al., 2017). It can be understood as an evaluative, emotional, and dynamically changing response to practices and actions (Konopka & van Beers, 2016; Konopka et al., 2018). In the dialogical self, authenticity experiences can arise when characteristic aspects of personality (personal positions) converge or diverge with social roles (social positions). When there is convergence, authenticity can be experienced. When there is divergence, there can be a sense of inauthenticity.

Reflecting on *how* she is as a teacher of English and as a teacher of Swedish, Adi recognizes that she can feel comfortable, "at home," and "herself" in both classrooms. However, the experience of being authentic can take different forms. In English, a sense of authenticity derives from a congruence between the social position (I-as-a-teacher-of-English) and the personal position (I-as-competent-and-innovative; see Figure 1). Successful "delivery" of a lesson accords with Adi's conception of who

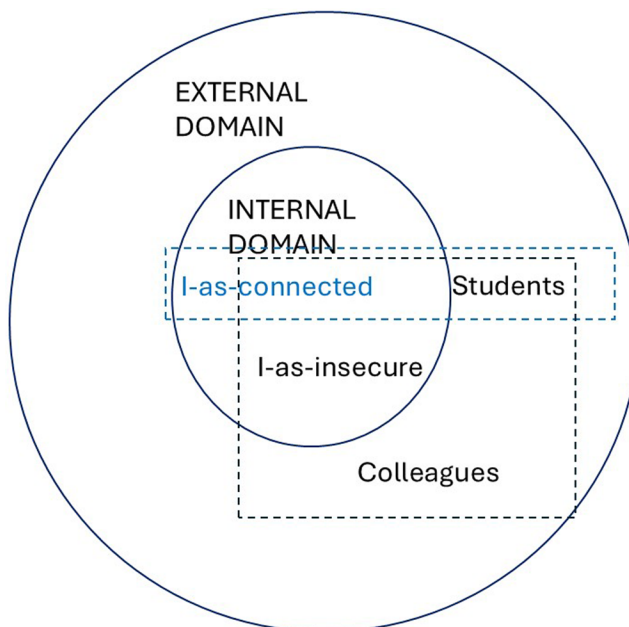


Figure 2. The dialogical self for Swedish.

she is (i.e., her conception of a true self). As she says, “I am the type of person that once I have a lesson plan I am very, I have to see it through. It has to be done according to the stages” (Interview 1). The harmony between the social position (her role) and the personal position (how she is in this role) functions to generate the experience of being authentic.

In Swedish there is a similar sense of harmony between the social position (I-as-a-teacher-of-Swedish) and the personal position (I-as-connected; see Figure 2). One of very few teachers at the school with a visible identity marking a migrant background, Adi experiences a strong affiliation with her students. As someone similarly involved in grappling with Swedish, she sees herself engaged in a learning process with her students. In a similar way, the harmony between the social position (her role) and the personal position (how she is in this role) creates the feeling of being authentic. However, when teaching Swedish, Adi also describes how she can feel uneasy, vigilant, and on her guard. In her Swedish classes, there is no feeling of flow, rhythm, or “fluidity.” Here, there is a tension between the social position (I-as-a-teacher-of-Swedish) and the personal position (I-as-insecure; see Figure 2). Insecure in her ability to give precise responses when interacting with students, and lacking the confidence to plan her own lessons, the tension between the social position (her socially prescribed role) and the personal position (how she is in this role) creates the feeling of being inauthentic.

In the interviews at the end of each day, Adi would often revisit and explore her shifting perceptions of authenticity. The sense of being able to feel authentic in both English and Swedish, but in different ways, was a topic to which she would frequently return:

EXCERPT 5 [Monday]

T: Authenticity also takes time, doesn't it?

I: Yes.

T: Because that's the way I felt when I started doing Swedish. I didn't feel authentic at all. Of course, the relationship with the students was there. But it was never any authenticity in the subject itself. And that's why English for me there's a little bit more. I don't, I feel it's a little bit more now in Swedish, but I think it will take a while before I can walk into a Swedish class and feel the same way that I do when I walk into an English class. So, it's not there yet. Even though they can be authentic, both of them, but it's not really on the same level.

Reflecting on experiences of authenticity in English and in Swedish, Adi describes how “they can be authentic, both of them.” Identifying how feelings of authenticity are anchored in the subject, she describes how she can enter the English classroom and immediately feel a sense of authenticity. There is a meshing of the social position (I-as-a-teacher-of-English) and the personal position (I-as-competent-and-innovative).

For Swedish it is different. As Adi recognizes, there “was never any authenticity in the subject itself.” As she realizes, “it will take a while before I can walk into a Swedish class and feel the same way that I do when I walk into an English class.” Reflecting an inherent tension between social and personal positions, the I-position I-as-a-teacher-of-Swedish-who-is-linguistically-insecure can be understood as an *introjected position*.

Introjected positions are formed in relation to expectations held by others, and perceptions of the evaluations that these others can make. When an introjected I-position is foregrounded, there is a sense of being under the scrutiny of others. For Adi, this accentuates the feeling of lacking authenticity.

As we have seen, feelings of authenticity are tied up in the appraisal of *actions*. Authenticity involves how Adi feels she is, when she is teaching English, and when she is teaching Swedish. However, feelings of authenticity can also arise from appraisals of how she is *in her relationships*. As Adi says when reflecting on Swedish, “of course the relationship with the students was there.” In her explorations of authenticity, Adi would often reflect on these relationships.

EXCERPT 6 [Initial interview]

I feel like in Swedish, because my identity I share with my students, I have more understanding. And I feel like I'm more motherly. Because I can, I'm able to tell them, “go back into line,” “do this,” “do that,” “think about how this will be for your future.” For me, that's always what I'm going through with Swedish. English not as much. It is not something that I do like when I step into the classroom. It's something, “okay this is.” It just happens naturally, if you understand what I mean.

Here, the sense of an “identity I share with my students” characterizes how Adi experiences herself in her Swedish classes. While a sense of being “motherly” arises rarely in English, she says that it is “always what I'm going through with Swedish.” Both a feeling and a way of acting, it is something that “just happens naturally.” Articulated as a dialogue between an internal and an external I-position, being “motherly” involves the voicing of imperatives: “go back into line, ‘do this,’ ‘do that,’ ‘think about how this will be for your future’” (Excerpt 6).

The sense of having an identity she shares with her students is important. It counterbalances the sense of inauthenticity she feels when designing lessons, carrying out teaching, giving instructions and providing explanations. It means that the introjected position (I-as-insecure) can be counterbalanced by the integrated position (I-as-connected). The counterbalancing of these introjected and integrated positions reflects the feeling that, even if teaching can be demanding and stressful, it can also be rewarding.

Although the experience of acting authentically in her relationships enables Adi to remain resilient when teaching Swedish, she is also aware that the I-as-connected position needs to be actively managed. In the next excerpt (a reflection prompted by an extended individual interaction with a student in her English class), Adi engages with authenticity and role management:

EXCERPT 7 [Thursday]

I would see myself as more in the English class, maybe not just with Ida [student], but with the other students, that I am still a teacher even if I sidetrack from whatever we are discussing, or whatever they're asking for help, or which subject it is. In English. But in the other, probably I put my teacher status on hold. And then just for that short minute, identify as like “we are all foreigners here” and we share this with each other. And then after that I can put my teacher cap back on. And then I, “OK, *that's enough now. We need to continue.*” I am like that a lot in Swedish, I've noticed. And it's not because I do it on purpose. It's because it just happens. ... So that's how I see my identity. It's more shared

with my Swedish students than in an English class. However, very strange, I am more confident in delivering the lessons in English than I am in Swedish. So, it's two very different things.

As we can see in this excerpt, the opportunity to give expression to an identity she shares with her students is highly affirming. Managing her roles, Adi describes how she puts her “teacher status” “on hold,” and how she interacts in a different way. Even though these shifts are not planned—and sometimes not even purposefully enacted—Adi realizes that she is “like that a lot in Swedish.”

In situations like these, the sense of feeling authentic is not adequately explained by the alignment of social and personal positions. In these momentary instances, the teacher I-position seems to be entirely backgrounded. It is a different and momentarily emergent position that comes to the fore. For the “short minute” that such situations pertain, established patterns in Adi’s dialogical self are disrupted. Neither the I-as-connected nor the I-as-insecure positions are foregrounded (Figure 2). Rather, it is a position that articulates a collective voice that is located within the internal and external domains of the self (Hermans, 2003) (Figure 3). Transcending dialogical relationships between internal and external I-positions, the collective voice articulates the idea that “we are all foreigners here.”

Reflecting the dynamics of identity transformations in the dialogical self (Henry, 2016), a position that articulates a collective voice can emerge from and return to the background from one moment to the next. In the following excerpt, we can again see the emergence of a position that articulates a collective voice. In this situation, the class have been reading from a book about the experiences of migrant families. Two boys, who have already had their turn to read, plead to continue:

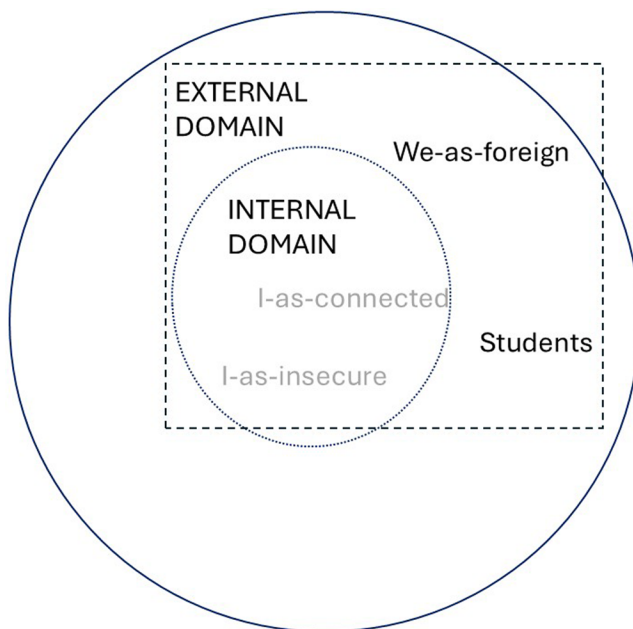


Figure 3. The emergence of a transcendent position and the articulation of a collective voice.

EXCERPT 8 [Tuesday]

I: You've chosen the story and it's a great story and it speaks to their experience in a really optimal way. That particular point in time, when these two boys were, "Please no, no, we want to continue," and they, you could see that they wanted to. How are you then? How were you in terms of how you saw yourself? How you felt?

T: As a teacher?

I: Yes.

T: Probably not. More as someone willing to bend a little. So it's not really the structured teacher that I usually am. So when that happens, I'm usually Adi. Just me. "Okay, we will do this." ... And that's what, I don't know if I said this yesterday or last week when we spoke, in the same book the father was going to hit him with the slipper, and everyone laughed at the same time. Because we recognized that. And then they started looking at me, and they said, Adi, *do you think it's OK to hit children?* And then I just smiled and I. *But we know why we laugh. Because we recognize this.* And they were like, "Ah but!" And it didn't really become a big thing. I think if, maybe if I was Swedish, I probably wouldn't even have laughed at that point in time. But then sharing that spot, being able to recognize that in itself, I think, yes.

I: It's kind of, sort of a connection not on a surface level, but sort of a deeper connection? Microlevel connections? They're laughing at the same time.

T: And in that moment, it was not like teacher-student, it was like we are all [laughs]. When things like that happen, and I really like when things like that happen, it makes me happy because I'm able to connect with my students on that level. Something that probably wouldn't have happened in a normal, maybe in my English class.

In this moment, Adi describes how she did not experience herself as a teacher. Rather, she was "someone willing to bend a little." In such situations, she says, it is "Adi. Just me." Reflecting a shared sense of identity that involves experiences from heritage cultures, Adi explains that "in that moment, it was not like teacher-student. It was like we are all [migrants]." The shift from an I-position (I-as-a-teacher-who-is-connected-with-her-students) to a transcendent position that gives articulation to a common "not-Swedish" experience is apparent in the way in which Adi describes the situation. Indicating the presence of a collective voice, Adi makes clear that "we know why we laugh. Because we recognize this." In this inner dialogue, the voice has an experiential we-quality. It articulates a collective sense of togetherness: "Okay, we will do this." Reflecting on this situation, and her shifting identity experiences, Adi describes a sense of joy and fulfillment: "I really like when things like that happen, it makes me happy." It is a sense of authenticity that arises from an affiliation that is deeply grounded in a shared experience common to them as migrants. Transcending the type of connection that she mostly experiences in her Swedish class, it involves being "able to connect with my students on *that* level."

Discussion and conclusion

In research investigating innovation within the dialogical self, authenticity has not been a central concern. The humanist notion of a static, higher-order, superordinate, ultimate or true self runs counter to the ontology of DST and the conceptualization of the dialogical

self as unconsolidated, multifaceted, dynamic, and highly sensitive to situational and relational changes (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). However, in a climate in which the psychology of authenticity is undergoing revision (Hicks et al., 2019), it is these qualities that make DST highly suited to the investigation of authenticity and the influences on behavior that stem from perceptions of being and acting authentically and inauthentically.

This article has explored alignments between contemporary theories of authenticity (Hicks et al., 2019) and a dialogical conception of the self (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). Drawing on these insights, an assemblage of DST concepts has been presented. Four concepts that can facilitate the exploration of authenticity are identified.

The first involves the function of personal positions and their role in shaping and stylizing the characteristics of a social position. When there is congruence between a social position and a personal position, authenticity can be experienced. However, when a social position and a personal position are discordant, feelings of inauthenticity can be generated.

The second involves an understanding of how I-positions can differ in relation to openness to innovation (open and closed positions), and the degree to which they are personally endorsed and perceived as one's own (integrated and introjected positions). In the dialogical self, the foregrounding of open and integrated positions is associated with experiences of authenticity. Conversely, the foregrounding of closed and introjected positions is associated with the sense of lacking authenticity or a feeling of frustrated authenticity.

The third conceptualization involves the manner in which I-positions can encompass a shared identity and how they can express a collective voice endowed with a we-quality. In working life—particularly in professions that involve extensive social interaction—experiences of authenticity can be associated with the emergence of an I-position that transcends the dialogical relationships between internal and external I-positions. Articulating a collective voice, this is a position that suggests togetherness, affiliation, and authenticity in one's social relationships.

The final element in the assemblage is emotions. The key to uncovering and understanding experiences of authenticity and inauthenticity extends beyond reflection. It involves the investigation of emotions and the ways in which emotions connect to the situated experience of being, or not being, “oneself.”

To illustrate the ways in which this assemblage can be used in empirical work, a case study of the authenticity experiences of an early-career language teacher was presented. Unlike methodologies generally used to explore identities and identity development in professional contexts, the method used in this study was inspired by two important ideas. First, the exploration of authenticity needs to take the form of an enterprise jointly conducted by researcher and participant (Konopka et al., 2018; Neimeyer & Stewart, 2001). Second, because the dialogical self functions as a multi-layered landscape, I-positions need to be uncovered and the emotions connected to them need to be brought to the surface. This requires excavation work (Konopka & Zhang, 2021). In situations of uncertainty and conflict, excavation work can be important. In the absence of work that can uncover I-positions and the emotions with which they are connected, conflicts can remain unaddressed. Mask positions—positions that seek the temporary resolution of tension and gloss over contradictions—can arise (Hermans, 2018; Monereo, 2022).

Through excavation work, the current study has demonstrated how authenticity involves an experience of how one *is* in one's actions and relationships, and how this

develops through reflexivity. The feeling of being authentic involves an openness to the process taking place within the self, and an evaluative and emotional response to ongoing actions. It is though such openness that a person can experience being authentic in one situation and inauthentic in another.

Although authenticity has rarely been considered in DST, Konopka and van Beers (2016, p. 71) made the point that an authentic self is not a type of identity that is constructed by selecting “the right positions.” Neither is it “an ideal self that would have found its ‘best positions.’” Rather, they suggested that “an authentic self is fluid, grounding itself in directly felt embodied experience.” Similarly highlighting fluidity and fluctuation, the current study suggests that authenticity in the dialogical self can be understood as an emergent and shifting experience that is generated (1) when social dialogical self personal positions are closely aligned, (2) when open and integrated positions are foregrounded, and (3) when shared positions emerge.

Traversing scientific and clinical domains, and with relevance for a spectrum of investigative fields that range from professional practice to therapy and counseling, DST is well-suited to offering insights into areas of psychology that involve the development and support of long-term subjective wellbeing (Hermans & Meijer, 2019). DST provides a uniquely flexible framework with which to investigate phenomena such as happiness, thriving, life-satisfaction, well-being, sustainability in working life, and—as suggested here—authenticity.

However, although the value of DST lies in its ability to account for the temporal and situational dynamics of identity, the complexity of the theory and the array of different concepts can be confusing. Navigating the intricacies of DST can be challenging. To support the extension of DST into the realms of positive psychology and healthy functioning in social and working life, the development of conceptual assemblages suited to the investigation of central phenomena is important. By mapping out a conceptual assemblage for the investigation of authenticity, this article takes one step along this road.

Note

1. The interviews were conducted in English. Text in italics is translated from Swedish. Underlined text indicates dialogue articulated by an I-position (Henry & Mollstedt, 2021).

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