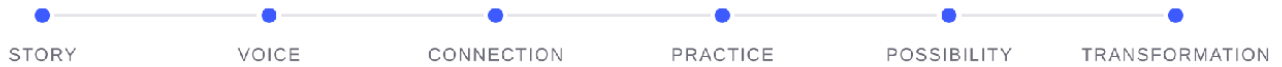


ACTE 2026

IDENTITY

Finding Our Voice, Shaping Our Stories Through Language



CONCEPT NOTE

***LANGUAGE BUILDS.
IDENTITY SPEAKS.***

Prepared for the ACTE 2026 Organizing and Academic Committees

Revised Edition — August 2026

1. Background and Rationale

Language learning extends beyond linguistic accuracy. It is a human and social process through which people communicate, interpret experience, build relationships, and construct identity. Every teacher and every learner bring a personal history into the classroom, and both continue to be shaped by each teaching and learning experience they encounter.

Learning English involves more than mastering a linguistic system. It provides learners with additional possibilities for communicating and participating in new professional and academic environments, imagining future versions of themselves. The learner does not become a different person by learning another language; another language adds new resources through which that person understands, communicates, and represents the self. The same process applies to educators: teacher identity is continually reconstructed through practice, and every classroom experience has the potential to reshape how educators understand their profession and themselves.

ACTE 2026 takes identity as its central concern not as a fixed trait, but as something continuously built, expressed, and reshaped through language. The conference creates a professional space to examine how language learning and teaching shape who we are, how we communicate, and who we are becoming.

This theme is also timely for the Dominican Republic, where national initiatives through different public institutions are investing heavily in English-teacher capacity and proficiency outcomes. ACTE 2026 is positioned to complement, not duplicate, that landscape, addressing the motivational, reflective, and professional-identity dimensions of teaching and learning English that large-scale coverage programs are not designed to measure directly.

2. Theoretical Foundation

Four current, peer-reviewed perspectives in applied linguistics inform this framework. Each is grounded in the most recent published work by its originating authors.

Identity and Investment

Norton (2013) establishes identity as dynamic and connected to learners' changing relationships with their social worlds: language learners participate in different contexts, imagine future possibilities, and acquire access to new forms of communication and knowledge. Darvin and Norton (2021) sharpen this further, distinguishing investment from motivation and showing how learners' commitment to language learning is shaped by the interaction of identity, capital, and ideology, positioning learners as active participants who bring histories, aspirations, and expectations into the classroom.

What possibilities does learning English allow the learner to imagine, access, communicate, and become?

Language and Symbolic Power

Kramsch (2021) argues that language users seek not only to be understood, but to be heard, valued, and taken seriously, and that their language carries genuine symbolic power. Learners do not simply acquire alternative words for existing meanings; they encounter new symbolic systems through which they interpret experience and construct meaning. This directly grounds ACTE 2026's premise that identity is expressed, and recognized, through voice.

How can the English classroom help learners develop the language they need while also helping their voices be heard and valued?

Communities of Practice

Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2020) reframe communities of practice as social learning spaces oriented toward value creation, extending the original theory of learning as participation into a model of professional communities that generate real, measurable difference for their members. Applied to teacher development, this means educators grow professionally not only through formal courses, but through classroom practice, mentoring, and sustained participation in professional networks, the model ACTE 2026 itself intends to embody.

Intercultural Communicative Competence

Byram (2021) establishes that language learning requires more than grammatical competence: it requires the capacity to communicate with people whose cultural frames of reference differ from one's own, without requiring learners to minimize their own cultural identity. English can therefore function as a bridge between local experience and global communication, a point of particular relevance for Dominican learners who navigate English as both an academic subject and a gateway to international opportunity.

3. ACTE 2026 Conceptual Proposition

Central Proposition

Language learning is a process through which people develop new communicative resources while continuously constructing, expressing, and expanding their identities.

Identity, in this framework, is not a fixed category. It is shaped through language, experience, relationships, culture, and professional practice, a process that engages learners and teachers alike every time they meet through language. ACTE 2026 organizes this proposition around six interconnected dimensions of identity, each translating theory into a concrete conference and classroom focus:

ACTE 2026 Conceptual Proposition

Six Interconnected Dimensions of Identity



Language learning is a process of continuously constructing, expressing, and expanding identity.

Figure 1. The six interconnected dimensions radiating from ACTE 2026's central proposition.

4. Conference Purpose and General Objective

ACTE 2026 convenes English language educators, researchers, and institutional partners to examine the relationship between identity, language, and teacher development, connecting theory, classroom practice, and professional community around one question: how does English language teaching help people find their voice and shape their story?

General Objective: To promote professional dialogue, research-informed practice, and pedagogical innovation around the relationship between identity and English language teaching and learning, strengthening educators' capacity to support authentic communication, learner agency, cultural understanding, and meaningful language use.

In pursuit of this objective, ACTE 2026 seeks to:

1. Examine how learners' experiences, aspirations, and relationships shape their participation in English learning.
2. Strengthen learner voice and agency through pedagogical practices that promote authentic communication and confidence.
3. Examine teacher professional identity and how classroom experience, reflection, and collaboration shape educators over time.
4. Explore the relationship between language and culture in preparing learners to communicate across cultural contexts.
5. Connect current research with classroom practice through evidence-informed, practitioner-relevant sessions.
6. Strengthen ACTE as a sustained professional community of practice, not a single annual event.

5. ACTE 2026 Core Statement

Core Statement

Language is more than something we learn. It becomes part of how we communicate, understand experience, build relationships, and imagine future possibilities.

ACTE 2026 celebrates the English classroom as a space where teachers and learners bring their stories, develop their voices, and continue shaping their identities. Teaching English is therefore about more than helping learners communicate in another language; it is about helping them discover what they can say, where their voice can take them, and who they may become. Where language begins, identity speaks.

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