

Historical and Theoretical Traditions in Teacher Education in Language Teaching.

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ABSTRACT: This review paper discusses the historical and theoretical traditions in teacher education in language teaching by tracing back to the early 1970s when research was on what expert L2 teacher did in practice; mid 1970s, when research emphasis was on mastery of content, late 1970s, when teacher cognition was looked at a wider context where actual classrooms determined teacher's behaviors, mid 1980s where L2 teachers' work was shaped by prior experiences as students, their practical knowledge, values and beliefs and more recent, where work context shapes teachers' conceptions of their profession.

Keywords: Language teaching, teacher cognition.

I. Introduction

Second language (L2) teacher education sets to prepare L2 teachers to do the work of the teaching profession and the field's understanding of that work of who teaches English, of who learns English and why, of the sociopolitical and socioeconomic contexts in which English is taught, and of the varieties of English that are taught and used around the world. This mission has changed dramatically over the past 40 or so years. Many factors have advanced the field's understanding of L2 teachers' work, but none is more significant than the emergence of a substantial body of research now referred to as *teacher cognition* (in L2, see Borg, 2003; Freeman, 2002; Woods, 1996). This research has helped capture the complexities of who teachers are, what they know and believe, how they learn to teach, and how they carry out their work in diverse contexts throughout their careers. However, over the past 40 years, the ways in which educational research has conceptualized teacher cognition, which has in turn informed the activities of L2 teacher education, has shifted dramatically (Borg, 2021).

In the early 1970s, research in general education sought to describe teaching as a set of discrete behaviors, routines or scripts drawn from empirical investigation of what effective or expert teachers did in practice. This notion was generated within the process-product paradigm. The paradigm linked teaching behaviors to specific learning outcomes and argued that these teaching behaviors if carried out effectively and efficiently on a widespread basis would ensure students learning (Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2019). Attempts to legitimize the teaching profession were based on the assumption that when more research driven knowledge was provided to teachers, their teaching performance would improve (Holmes Group 1986). Teacher education programs generally operated under the assumption that teachers needed discrete amounts of knowledge usually in the form of general theories and methods that were assumed to be applicable to any teaching context (teacher education program), observing and practicing teaching in another (practicum) and eventually developing effective teaching behaviors in yet a third context (usually in the first years of teaching). Thus the true locus of teacher learning lay in on the job- initiation into the practices of teaching and not in the process of professional teacher education (Darling-Hammond, 2021).

This process- product notion is faulted by Smyth (1987). He purports that it ignores and devalues the individual experiences and perspectives of teachers. It creates an abstract, decontextualized body of knowledge that denies the complexities of human interaction and reduces teaching to a quantifiable set of behavior. Wood (1987) also contends that what constitutes teacher knowledge is not determined by teachers themselves or even by partnered or participatory examination of their work, but by researchers who view teaching as discrete behaviors, distance their conclusions about teaching from the contexts within which it occurs and ignore the individual perspectives and understandings of the teachers who carry out the very teaching practices that they have studied.

In the mid-1970s, when research focused on teaching behaviors and the student learning outcomes they produced (Dunkin & Biddle, 1974), teacher education centered on ensuring that teachers had mastered the content they were expected to teach and could deliver it through efficient methods that led to greater gains in student achievement (Hunter, 1982). Teachers' thoughts, judgments and decisions were described as cognitive processes that shaped their behaviors. Teachers were taken as thoughtful people who made rational decisions about what to do in their classrooms; these decisions were based on many sources of contextual reform as well as on principles of learning and teaching (Schmidt & Datnow, 2023). There was a shift from watching what teachers did to asking them why they did what they did, the teachers themselves, their individual perspectives and experiences remained secondary in the process (Freeman, 1996). The emphasis was only on mastery of content.

In the late 1970s teacher cognition was looked at a wider context. It began to explore the actual thought processes that teachers engaged in as they planned and carried out their lessons. It was found out that teaching could not be characterized simply as behaviors that were linked to thinking done before and during the activity (known as pre-active and interactive) decisions but rather that the thought process of teaching included a much wider and richer mental context. Instead ethnographic and second order investigations of practising teachers in actual classrooms showed them constructing explanations of their own teaching and highlighted a certain amount of messiness that seemed inherent in the ways in which they thought about and carried out their work (Calderhead, 2022).

By the mid-1980s, there were emergent views that teachers think about their work as being shaped by their prior experiences as students, their personal practical knowledge and their values and beliefs. The focus of research was on questions about what teachers actually know, how they use that knowledge, and what impact their decisions have on their instructional practices (Shavelson & Stern, 1981). Teacher education continued to focus on content knowledge and teaching practices, but teachers were conceptualized as decision makers and were expected to benefit from making their tacit knowledge and decisions explicit (Clark & Peterson, 1986; Freeman, 1991; Johnson, 1992). Yet, once research began to uncover the complexities of *teachers' mental lives* (Walberg, 1977; Freeman, 2002). Teachers' prior experiences, their interpretations of the activities they engage in, and, most important, the contexts within which they work are extremely influential in shaping how and why teachers do what they do. The positivistic paradigm that had long positioned teachers as conduits to students and their learning was found to be insufficient for explaining the complexities of teachers' mental lives and the teaching processes that occur in classrooms. Rather, an interpretative or situated paradigm, largely drawn from ethnographic research in sociology and anthropology, came to be seen as better suited to explaining the complexities of teachers' mental lives and the various dimensions of teachers' professional worlds. (Schulman & Grossman, 2023). This shift did not occur in isolation but was influenced by epistemological shifts in how various intellectual traditions had come to conceptualize human learning; more specifically, historically documented shifts from behaviorist, to cognitive, to situated, social, and distributed views of human cognition (Cobb & Bower, 1999; Greeno, Collins, & Resnick, 1996;)

More recently the notion of work context has been recognized as central in shaping teachers' conceptions of their profession. It is argued that what teachers know about teaching is largely socially constructed out of the experiences and classrooms from which teachers have come. Furthermore, how teachers actually use their knowledge in classrooms is highly interpretive, socially negotiated and continually restructured within the classrooms and schools where teachers work (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022).

Language teacher education has begun to recognize that teachers apart from method or material they use are central to understanding and improving English language teaching (Freeman, 1992; Johnson, 1992; Prahbu, 1990; Richards & Nunan). The shift is due in part to the fact that practitioners in English language teacher education have begun to recast conceptions of who language teachers are, what language teaching is, and how language teachers learn to teach (Freeman & Richards, 1996; Richards, 1999; Woods, 1996). Teacher educators have come to recognize that teachers are not empty vessels waiting to be filled with theoretical and pedagogical skills; rather they enter teacher education programmes with prior knowledge, personal values and beliefs that inform their knowledge about teaching and shape what they do in their classrooms (Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2023). This notion has given rise to the socio-cultural turn discussed here below.

II. THE SOCIOCULTURAL TURN

The epistemological stance of the socio-cultural turn defines human learning as a dynamic social activity that is situated in physical and social contexts, and distributed across persons, tools, and activities (Rogoff, 2003; Salomon, 1993; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1991). Although rooted in divergent intellectual traditions, several compatible theories have helped explicate this turn. Theories of situated cognition argue that knowledge entails lived practices, not just accumulated information, and the processes of learning are negotiated with people in what they do, through experiences in the social practices associated with particular activities (Chaiklin & Lave, 1996; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Moreover, social activities are regulated by normative ways of reasoning and using tasks and other resources in collective activity, or what Lave and Wenger (1991) have termed a *community of practice*. Thus, the knowledge of the individual is constructed through the knowledge of the communities of practice within which the individual participates.

Socio-cultural theories also argue that the way in which human consciousness develops depends on the specific social activities in which people engage. However, in order to understand human learning, or higher cognitive development, one must look at the social activities that the individual engages in and see how they reappear as mental activities in the individual (Leont'ev, 1981; Vygotsky, 1978, 1986; Wertsch, 1985; for L2, see Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf & Appel, 1994). Learning therefore, is not the straightforward appropriation of skills or knowledge from the outside in, but the progressive movement from external socially mediated activity to internal mediational control by individual learners, which results in the transformation of both the self and the activity. And because social activities and the language used to regulate them are structured and gain meaning in historically and culturally situated ways, both the physical tools and the language practices used by communities of practice gain their meaning from those who have come before (Rogoff, 2022).

Critical social theories support the notion that social activities simultaneously reflect, create, and recreate historically situated ways of knowing, social relations, and material conditions (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Foucault, 1980; Habermas, 1998). Central to these theories is the role that language plays in social practices (Fairclough, 1989; Gee, 1996), in particular, how language is implicated in the ways in which social class, race, sexuality, ethnicity, and linguistic identity are constructed and reconstructed through human relationships, especially in terms of how power and inequity are enacted in both social and institutional arrangements and the ideological discourses that support them (Pennycook 1989, 2001). Knowledge and knowing, therefore, depend on point of view, a sort of social positioning, that is constituted in and emerges out of how the individual is constructed in different social and physical contexts.

Despite the different ways in which these perspectives foreground and background the dynamic between the social, the cognitive, and language, and despite the varied research agendas of the people who use these perspectives in their work, the epistemological stance of the socio-cultural turn supports the notion that humans develop as “participants in cultural communities” and that “their development can be understood only in light of the cultural practices and circumstances of their communities which also change” (Rogoff, 2003, pp. 3–4). Thus, both participation and context are critical to human cognition. The socio-cultural turn stands in stark contrast to the cognitive learning theories of the positivistic paradigm that defined learning as an internal psychological process isolated in the mind of the learner and largely free from the social and physical contexts within which it occurs (Lenneberg, 1967).

Historically grounded in the positivistic paradigm, L2 teacher education has long been structured around the assumption that teachers could learn about the content they were expected to teach (language) and teaching practices (how best to teach it) in their teacher education program, observe and practice it in the teaching practicum, and develop pedagogical expertise during the induction years of teaching. Yet the emerging body of research on L2 teacher cognition has begun to construct a very different characterization of how teachers learn to do their work (Borg, 2003, Freeman, 1996, 2002; Freeman & Johnson, 1998a; Golombek, 1998; Johnson & Golombek, 2003; Woods, 1996). This research depicts L2 teacher learning as normative and lifelong, as emerging out of and through experiences in social contexts: as learners in classrooms and schools, as participants in professional teacher education programs, and later as teachers in the settings where they work. It describes L2 teacher learning as socially negotiated and contingent on knowledge of self, students, subject matter, curricula, and setting. It shows L2 teachers as users and creators of legitimate forms of knowledge who make decisions about how best to teach their L2 students within complex socially, culturally, and historically situated contexts. And most significantly, it exposes an epistemological gap between how L2 teacher educators have traditionally prepared L2 teachers to do their work and how L2 teachers actually learn to teach and carry out their work (Johnson, 2023).

III. Conclusion

The review paper has discussed the historical and theoretical tradition in teacher education in language teaching by critically looking at the early 1970s when L2 research was based on process – product paradigm, mid 1970s when it was believed that cognitive processes shaped L2 teachers' behaviour in class, late 1970s, when actual classrooms determined teachers' behavior, mid 1980s, when teachers' work was shaped by prior experiences and in recent years where teachers' knowledge about teaching is socially constructed out of the classrooms from which teachers have come.

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