

SECOND LANGUAGE TEACHER EDUCATION

Ziyatov Akmal Tursunovich

English teacher of the "Foreign Languages" department

Karshi Engineering and Economics Institute

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Abstract: Second language (L2) teacher education describes the field of professional activity through which individuals learn to teach L2s. In terms commonly used in the field, these formal activities are generally referred to as teacher training, while those that are undertaken by experienced teachers, primarily on a voluntary, individual basis, are referred to as teacher development. It is returned to this issue of nomenclature later on; at this point, however, the reader should understand that the term teacher education refers to the sum of experiences and activities through which individuals learn to be language teachers. Those learning to teach - whether they are new to the profession or experienced, whether in pre- or in-service contexts - are referred to as teacher learners.

Key words: content, second language, L2 teacher education, ongoing debates, tripartite structure;

The shifting ground of terminology has plagued L2 teacher education for at least the past 30 years. The four-word concept has tended to be an awkward integration of subject-matter ('second language') and professional process ('teacher education'). In this hybrid, the person of the teacher and the processes of learning to teach have often been overshadowed. As the relative emphasis has shifted, the focus among these four words has migrated from the content, the 'second language', to the person of the 'teacher', to the process of learning or 'education', thus capturing the evolution in the concept of L2 teacher education in the field.

Until the latter half of the 1980s, the emphasis was on L2 teacher education. Primary attention was on the contributions of various academic disciplines - e.g. linguistics, psychology and literature - to what made an individual an 'L2 teacher'.

By 1990, some in the field had begun to argue that it was important to examine how people learned to teach languages. Thus, the emphasis began to move to the relationship between L2 as the content or subject matter, and teacher education comprising the complementary processes of teacher training and teacher development. The publication of Richards and Nunan's edited volume helped to mark this change in perspective. In introducing this collection the editors noted:

The field of teacher education is a relatively underexplored one in both second and foreign language teaching. The literature on teacher education in language teaching is slight compared with the literature on issues such as methods and techniques for classroom teaching. [1]

Accompanying professional meetings further served to establish the core interest in teacher education in the field and to articulate central issues. Thus, the emphasis moved to the processes of teacher education inherent in the phrase, L2 teacher education, and to examining teacher education in L2s in its own right. Defining the content and processes of teacher education presents a major set of issues. Understanding how people learn to teach and the multiple influences of teacher-learners' past experiences, the school contexts they must enter and career paths they will follow present, among others, an equally critical set of research and

implementation concerns. Linking the two, as must be done to achieve fully effective teacher education interventions, is a third critical area of work. [2]

It is ironic that L2 teacher education has concerned itself very little with how people actually learn to teach. Rather, the focus has conventionally been on the subject matter - what teachers should know - and to a lesser degree on pedagogy - how they should teach it. The notion that there is a learning process that undergirds, if not directs, teacher education is a very recent one. There are many reasons for this gap between teacher education and teacher learning. Some have to do with the research paradigms and methods that have been valued and used in producing our current knowledge. In the case of teacher education, these paradigms raise questions about how teaching is defined and studied in education and how teacher education links to the study of teaching. Other reasons have to do with history. In the case of L2 teacher education, these reasons have raised the issue of how the so-called 'parent' disciplines of applied linguistics - cognitive and experimental psychology - and first language (L1) acquisition have defined what language teachers need to know and be able to do. Still other reasons have had to do with professionalisation and attempts to legitimize teaching through the incorporation of research-driven, as contrasted with practice-derived, knowledge to improve teaching performance. [3]

In general terms, however, it is fair to say that teacher education has been predicated on the idea that knowledge about teaching and learning can be transmitted through processes of organized professional education to form individuals as teachers. This knowledge has been broadly defined as consisting of subject matter and pedagogy. From this standpoint, pre-service teacher education programmes provide teacher-learners with certain knowledge - usually in the form of general theories about language learning, prescriptive grammatical information about language, and pedagogical methods - that will be applicable to any teaching context. Learning to teach has meant learning about teaching, usually in the context of the teacher education programme, and then actually doing it in another context. The bridge to practice has come in observing teachers and in practicing classroom teaching. Teacher-learners then eventually develop their own effective teaching behaviours over time in other classroom contexts during their first years of teaching. There are many problems with this knowledge-transmission view.

Principally, it depends on the transfer of knowledge and skills from the teacher education programme to the classroom in order to improve teaching. Thus, this view overlooks, or discounts, the fact that the teacher learning takes place in on the -job initiation into the practices of teaching. Further, it does not account for what practicing teachers know about teaching and how they learn more through professional teacher education than they receive in-service, during their teaching careers.

Since the 1980s, teacher education has moved from this view of knowledge transmission to one of knowledge construction in which teacher-learners build their own understandings of language teaching through their experience by integrating theory, research and opinion with empirical and reflective study of their own classroom practices. To understand this change from knowledge transmission to knowledge construction, It is briefly reviewed the research in general education which is relevant to L2 teacher education. This background then frames the debate of key issues which follows. [4]

For many reasons, there has tended to be very little substantial research in teacher education, both in education generally and in the field of language teaching. From the 1960s to 1980s, the process-product paradigm which dominated educational research focused researchers on how specific classroom or curricular processes generated particular learning outcomes or products. In language teaching throughout the 1970s, process-product research combined behaviourism to stress a view of teaching that focused on activity and technique. Effective classrooms were those in which teachers successfully applied learned behaviours to condition their students' mastery of language forms. Teacher education, if it was thought of at all, was viewed as a technician undertaking of transmitting knowledge to modify teachers' classroom behaviours and thus improve student learning. Indeed, most teacher preparation in language teaching concentrated on literature; little attention was paid to classroom pedagogy. Thus, L2 teacher education was in many senses an invisible undertaking, unframed by its own theory and undocumented by its own research. The questions at stake are substantial:

What is the nature of teaching and of teachers' knowledge?

How is it most adequately documented and understood?

How is it created, influenced or changed through the interventions of teacher education?

Thus there have been two ongoing debates in teacher education over the past two decades. First, there has been the issue of how to study the process itself and the content being learned through it, which has raised issues of an appropriate variety in research paradigms, methodologies and what is valued as formal knowledge. Second, there has been the question of participants and settings, and how these influence or even shape what is taught and learned in teacher education. Zeichner in a review of teacher education research in general education notes:

Although there were hundreds of studies reported which sought to assess the impact of training teachers to do particular things, very few researchers actually looked at the process of teacher education as it happened over time and at how teachers and student teachers interpreted and gave meaning to the pre-service and professional development program they experienced. The same can be said, if not more so, for teacher education in L2s. [5]

As mentioned in the first section, confusing nomenclature has been the Achilles' heel of L2 teacher education. The clearest instance is the co-mingling of the terms teacher training, teacher development and teacher education. Like any form of education, teacher education is based on the notion that some type of input is introduced or created, which then has an impact on the learner. Further,

input can be examined for what it is, its content, and for how it is introduced or created, the processes used, and for the impacts or outcomes it generates. This tripartite organization of what is taught, how and to what effect can serve as a basic organizing frame to examine educational input.

However, it is important to note that some research on classroom teaching has raised complications with casting content and process - or subject-matter and teaching method - as independent of one another, by pointing out that from the students' perspective the content or the lesson and how it is presented are often largely inseparable.

Nevertheless, this tripartite structure of content, process and outcome continues to be a useful way of thinking about input in teacher education. In the case of L2 teacher education, content and process combine to create two broad strategies for input: teacher training and

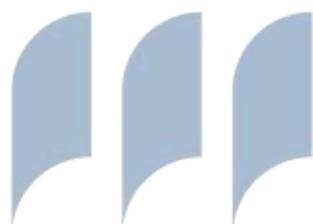
teacher development. In teacher training the content is generally defined externally and transmitted to the teacher learner through various processes. Outcomes are assessed on external, often behavioural, evidence that the learner has mastered the content. In a typical postgraduate teacher education programme, for example, the faculty defines the curriculum which teacher-learners must master. Often this content will include course input on language (through the study of phonology and applied linguistics), on learning (through second language acquisition; SLA), on teaching (through methods and testing courses) and so on. The content may be presented through conventional processes - such as lectures, readings and the like - or through more participant-oriented processes - such as project work, case studies and so on. The assessment of impact is usually measured through some form of demonstration - such as exams, academic articles or portfolios. In short-term teacher training courses, the same broad typology holds. [6]

There has been an assumption in teacher education that the delivery of programmes and activities is the key to success. In this view, learning to teach is seen as a by-product of capable teacher learners and teacher educators, and well structured designs and materials. Thus, in a broad sense, teacher education has depended largely on training strategies to teach people how to do the work of teaching. Underlying these aspects of delivery, however, lies a rich and complex process of learning to teach. Focusing at this level on the learning process, as distinct from the delivery mechanisms, is changing our understanding of teacher education in important ways. This shift is moving L2 teacher education from its concern over what content and pedagogy teachers should master and how to deliver these in preparation and in-service programmes to the more fundamental and as yet uncharted questions of how language teaching is learned and therefore how it can best be taught. We know that teacher education matters; the question is how, and how to improve it.

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