

Second Language Teacher Education and Future Directions

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Introduction

As a relatively new profession, language teacher education has evolved and its knowledge base has greatly expanded over the past decade. We have moved from an initial behaviorist view of teacher learning in the 1960s toward a more sociocultural approach to teacher learning today (Freeman, 2016). As Freeman (2016) suggests, the term language teacher education is “a bridge that serves to link what is known in the field with what is done in the classroom, and it does so through the individuals whom we educate as teachers” (p. 9). He goes on to say that the field includes an understanding of the “so-called parent academic disciplines of language teaching as well as the local and national policy environments which often articulate them” (p. 9). In the past few decades, Second Language Teacher Education (SLTE) has taken on a more global perspective and the knowledge base of SLTE has greatly expanded (some may say exploded) to include such topics as teacher cognition, identity, reflection, research, narrative, self-development, philosophy, and expertise, to name but a few. However, despite these developments in SLTE and the growing publications reporting research on SLTE, we still have significant progress to make as we continue to define our goals, conceptual frameworks, and teaching methodologies, and as we respond to the growing demand for qualified language teachers. In this entry, some of the current issues related to SLTE as well as future directions of SLTE based on current trends are outlined.

ELT Dimensions

The term SLTE first appeared in a ground breaking collection on SLTE published by leading scholars (Richards & Nunan, 1990) in the field of teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL). This was one of the first attempts of bringing together leading TESOL scholars to discuss what Richards (1990) called the

The TESOL Encyclopedia of English Language Teaching.

Edited by John I. Liantas.

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DOI: 10.1002/9781118784235.eelt0922

dilemma of teacher education in second language teaching. This collection generated ensuing vibrant discussions about what should be at the core of the knowledge base, or expertise and skills that second language teachers need to possess to be effective. More recently, Freeman (2016) traced the evolution of thinking about knowledge in language teaching (he calls this “generations” of language teaching) from thinking as behavior, to thinking methodologically (the “what”), to thinking synthetically (the “how”), to thinking heuristically (the “who” and “where”), to a vague current view of the purpose of knowledge-for-teaching (the “why” and “how”) (p. 115). Although currently we still do not have consensus about what constitutes the core knowledge base for second language teachers, efforts have been made recently in the field to conceptualize in broad measures what second language teachers need to know. Broadly speaking, Johnson (2009) has proposed that the knowledge base of second language teacher education programs should, at the very least, inform three broad areas: “(1) the content of L2 teacher education programs: *What L2 teachers need to know*; (2) the pedagogies that are taught in L2 teacher education programs: *How L2 teachers should teach*; and (3) the institutional forms of delivery through which both the content and pedagogies are learned: *How L2 teachers learn to teach*” (p. 11).

Richards and Farrell (2011) have discussed in terms of different dimensions of knowledge and skills that are important for teacher learners to acquire in second language teacher education programs in order to be effective teachers. The authors have noted that teacher learning involves not only discovering the skills and knowledge (academic and pedagogical) of language teaching, and how to apply these in teaching, but additionally what it means to be a language teacher in terms of developing the identity of a language teacher in a particular context. In addition, they have suggested that teacher learners need to be sensitive to the norms that operate in the contexts in which they work, as well as reflect on their practice in order to further develop their theories and concepts throughout their first years. Richards and Farrell have also suggested that another important dimension of knowledge includes the acquisition of the discourse of the field of TESOL as well as the ability to use effective classroom language.

More recently, Richards (2016) has pointed out that, although teachers initially learn the theoretical foundations of TESOL, or the content knowledge, in their initial training programs, both disciplinary knowledge (e.g., SLA, methods, sociolinguistics, phonology, etc.) and pedagogical content knowledge (e.g., curriculum planning, assessment, teaching young learners, etc.), we still do not know what content knowledge is really appropriate in the field of SLTE. As Richards (2016) has noted, “The central issue of what constitutes appropriate disciplinary knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge remains an unresolved issue” (p. 23). Perhaps this will be debated more as the profession matures.

Another current and major unresolved issue is what Wright (2010) highlighted in his extensive review of SLTE is that the theoretical foundations of SLTE are not being applied to the daily realities of these programs. In other words, Wright has pointed out that one of the persistent issues that remains to be solved in SLTE is the theory practice divide that exists between the content of SLTE programs and the

lived experiences of language teachers. Indeed, Johnson (2013) has recently noted the “disjuncture between a teacher’s own instructional histories as learners and the concepts they are exposed to in SLTE programs epitomizes the persistent theory/practice divide that remains a major challenge for SLTE programs today” (p. 75). Johnson goes on to state that it is the responsibility of SLTE programs to present concepts they think are important to teachers, “but to do so in ways that bring these concepts to bear on concrete practical activity, connecting them to everyday concepts and the goal-directed activities of everyday teaching” (p. 76). Thus, language teacher education programs may still be at fault for not delivering relevant content that novice language teachers can implement in real classroom settings (Johnson, 2013), even though this was pointed out 10 years ago by Tarone and Allwright (2005). At that time, Tarone and Allwright (2005) suggested that, “differences between the academic course content in language teacher preparation programs and the real conditions that novice language teachers are faced with in the language classroom appear to set up a gap that cannot be bridged by beginning teacher learners” (p. 12).

Part of the reason for this is that most SLTE preparation programs vary so much in their nature, content, length, and even in their philosophical and theoretical underpinnings, so Johnson (2013) attempted to link the theory/practice divide that she noticed was present in many SLTE programs with a microteaching simulation through an extended team-teaching project that required teams consisting of three or four teachers to teach a lesson in a real ESL course with the idea of, “moving them toward greater self-regulation of theoretically and pedagogically sound instructional practices” (p. 76). This, she suggests, is a more realistic view of microteaching than is usually the case because the students are in real classrooms.

More recently, Farrell (2015a) has suggested that SLTE take a more expansive approach to second language teacher education that brings theory closer to practice by firmly linking preservice preparation to the novice years within second language teacher education programs. Farrell called this approach to teacher education *novice-service teacher education*. Such novice-service teacher education begins in second language teacher preparation programs and continues into the first years of teaching in real classrooms. It includes three main stakeholders: novice teachers, second language educators, and school administrators, all working in collaboration to make for a smooth transition from the SLTE programs to the start of teaching. Thus, the knowledge garnered from this tripartite collaboration can be used to better inform SLTE educators/programs so that novice teachers can be better prepared for the complexity of real classrooms.

Farrell’s (2015a) recent collection of international perspectives on SLTE gives examples of how various teacher educators attempted to prepare teachers for their real world of teaching in different contexts. These second language teacher educators noticed that their current programs were limited in some way because they were not meeting the needs of their teacher learners in various contexts, and decided to implement innovation within their SLTE programs so that their students would be better prepared for the realities of their lived teaching experiences. Some of these innovations included the merging of existing programs so that

theory and practice could be covered more equally. Others decided to get real information from their graduate teachers in their novice years about any difficulties the graduates had encountered that prevented them from implementing what they had learned in their teacher education program and courses. These accounts then turned into case studies of real experiences that were used to inform current teacher learners about the realities of different contexts of teaching and so they could begin to reflect on their identity and what they believe about teaching and learning. SLT educators can similarly build up a corpus of such first years' stories from a variety of different contexts, and these case studies can be cycled back into SLT preparation programs for preservice teachers to explore. Such *real* case studies can thus better inform the curriculum of SLT preparation programs, and preservice teachers can use them as Wright (2010) has noted, to reflect on their beliefs and narratives, and "into the professional contexts of teaching and learning for which [they] are being prepared" (p. 273).

Future Directions

One of the main themes that has emerged from Farrell's (2015a) volume is that reflection and reflective practice was at the core of the majority of innovations. Indeed, Wright (2010) has acknowledged that the goal of SLTE is to produce "reflective teachers, in a process which involves socio-cognitive demands to introspect and collaborate with others, and which acknowledges previous learning and life experience as a starting point for new learning" (p. 267). Such an approach to SLTE does not view reflection as something to be managed in teacher education, or as Freeman (2016) called it: "reflection-as-repair" (p. 208). Rather, as Freeman (2016) has noted, reflection in teacher education is based on two premises: (1) "Improvement in teaching comes when teachers can turn actions that are automatic and routine into ones that are considered," and (2) "This shift from automatic to considered actions supports a more professionalized view of teaching" (p. 221).

Such a reflective approach to SLTE views teacher learners as active mediators of their own learning (together with appropriate theories and practices garnered from teacher education courses) where they are encouraged to systematically explore their beliefs and classroom practices so that they take responsibility for their own development throughout their careers (Farrell, 2015a). In this manner, language teachers will be better placed to make their own connections across the theory/practice gap present in many SLTE programs. However, as Bailey and Springer (2013) have indicated, it still remains a challenge for SLTE program administrators to be able to develop "programmatically feasible forms of support for reflective practices that do not detract from a sense of personal initiative, autonomous choice, and ownership by teachers" (p. 120). One new and promising structure that may address this challenge is Farrell's (2015b) overall framework for language teachers and especially preservice and novice teachers to reflect on their philosophy, beliefs, values, theories, principles, classroom practices and beyond the classroom so that they can become and remain effective teachers. This

framework will go a long way to answering the “element of unstructured diffusion” (Bailey & Springer, 2013, p. 116) that can occur when reflective teaching is adapted at a grassroots level so that it can become more programmatically feasible with administrative support in all contexts.

In the future, second language teacher educators may need to reflect and reconsider their roles and ask if they are providing programs and courses that are appropriate for their teacher learners in their particular contexts. Thus, questions asked by Johnson and Freeman (2001) over 15 years ago remain important for second language teacher educators today (p. 66):

- Are we willing to reconsider what we take as the core of what we tell teachers they should know and be able to do in language teaching?
- Are we willing to allow teachers themselves to have a full voice in our professional discourse?
- Are we willing to accept and work to describe the messiness inherent in the day-to-day work of language teaching?
- Do the choices and decisions we have made about the content, pedagogies, and institutional forms of delivery in our teacher education programs reflect the above?

Although it remains a serious issue for second language teacher educators worldwide to tackle in the coming years, there are some positive signs in development within the TESOL’s own publications with the coming publication of a volume on the voices of second language teacher educators and learner teachers (Farrell, 2017). Many of the chapters in this new collection show that second language teacher educators have taken a more reflective stance, as they have begun to realize that the traditional presentation and delivery of coursework and practicum experiences do not seem to deliver what their learner teachers need in real-school settings. The teacher educators have realized that they should reflect on how to provide more authentic learning and teaching experiences for their teacher learners, in order to better prepare them for the contexts they will teach in. Such a view to teacher learning can move us away from having teacher learners just memorize the contents of foundational courses for exam grades that are not internalized or even useful for practice, toward an approach that considers teacher learning as theorizing of and from practice. In order for this to happen, language teacher educators must be willing to critically reflect on their own practices to take notice of the theory/practice divide that still exists in SLTE programs and listen to what their teacher learners are saying about the contents of their programs to make informed decisions about their programs based on the needs of their teacher candidates and not their own needs.

Although much has been accomplished in a relatively short period of time in the growing field of SLTE, we still have a ways to go when preparing our teacher learners for the realities they will face during their teaching careers. Indeed, SLTE needs to be more mindful of how teacher education programs are designed and how they best serve teachers (Johnson & Golombek, 2016). For example, one of the major unresolved issues in SLTE is what teachers need to learn and know in their

preparation programs so that they can be adequately prepared to succeed in their first year(s) (Richards, 2016). As mentioned above, the current theory/practice gap evident in many second language teacher education programs has begun to get the attention of some SL teacher educators as more novice teachers of English to speakers of other languages report back to their initial teacher education programs, and as teacher educators become more reflective about the content of their own programs and courses. However, we are beginning to learn more about the lived experiences of our teacher candidates as more novice teachers report back to their initial teacher education programs and as teacher educators become more reflective about the content of their own programs and courses. In addition, second language teacher educators also seem to be adopting the role of reflective practitioner as they too attempt to tackle the theory/practice gap evident in their programs today. Although there still seems to be somewhat of a disjuncture between theory provided in SLT preparation programs and practice in real classrooms that needs to be narrowed, second language teacher educators are beginning to reflect more on their practice (Farrell, 2017). As Wright (2010) has pointed out, “there is a growing and healthy ‘practitioner research’ culture in SLTE, in which teacher educators are examining the effect of the learning experiences they initiate” and the self-initiated innovations by teacher educators in different contexts worldwide (p. 288).

SEE ALSO: Action Research and Teacher Inquiry; Communities of Practice; Critical Friends: How to Develop Effective Critical Friends PD Groups; Curriculum Development; Joining the Field: TESOL and Professional Organizations; Journals; Observations; Online Professional Development; Professional Development and Online Technology; Professional Development for Intensive English Program Teachers; Reflective Teaching; Supervision of Early-Career Teachers; Teacher and Institutional Beliefs, Vision, Belonging, and Identity; Teacher Assessment and Evaluation; Teacher Autonomy; Teacher Characteristics and Teacher Role; Teacher Identity; Teacher Qualifications, Professionalism, Competencies, and Benchmarks; Teacher Resistance and Resilience; Teacher Stress and Coping

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