

Second Language Teacher Education and Future Directions

THOMAS S. C. FARRELL

Introduction

As a relatively new profession, language teacher education has evolved, and its knowledge base has greatly expanded over the past few decades. We have moved from an initial behaviorist view of teacher learning in the 1960s toward a more sociocultural approach to teacher learning in recent times (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, 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, teacher identity, reflective practice, narrative research, teacher expertise, and more recently topics such as pluralism and translanguaging in language education, 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 second language teacher education (SLTE) first appeared in a groundbreaking collection on SLTE published by leading scholars (Richards & Nunan, 1990) in the field of teaching English to speakers of other languages

The TESOL Encyclopedia of English Language Teaching.

Edited by Hossein Nassaji.

© 2024 John Wiley & Sons, Inc. Published 2024 by John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

DOI: 10.1002/9781118784235.eelt0922.pub2

(TESOL). This was one of the first attempts of bringing together leading TESOL scholars to discuss what Richards (1990) called the 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. Noted second language teacher educator Donald 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 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)

Although, SLTE still needs to answer these two important questions, we are beginning to make more strides in how we educate and train second language teachers and especially those teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL).

Richards and Farrell (2011) have discussed SLTE in terms of the 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 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 within which they work, as well as reflecting 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.

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) and pedagogical content knowledge (e.g., curriculum planning, assessment, teaching young learners), 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 still current and as yet, major unresolved issue is what Wright (2010) highlighted in his extensive review of SLTE: that the theoretical foundations of SLTE are not relevant to or being applied to the daily realities of these programs. In other words, Wright has pointed out the persistent issue of the theory–practice divide that still exists between the content of SLTE programs and the lived experiences of language teachers. Indeed, as Johnson (2013) 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). Today, it seems that not much has changed and it can be implied that some language teacher education programs may still be at fault for not delivering relevant content that early career language teachers can then implement in real classroom settings (Farrell, 2019a). Farrell (2019a) has called this continuing theory–practice gap problem in some SLTE programs an "inconvenient truth," that still needs to be faced by those who are responsible for setting up SLTE curricula in such programs. Unfortunately, some SLTE courses are still being decided based on bureaucracy (government, province, state decisions); tradition (we have always done it this way); and/or the ideas of persuasive colleagues (I want to teach X).

Farrell (2015a) has maintained that second language teacher education takes a more expansive approach that brings theory closer to practice by firmly linking pre-service preparation to the novice years within SLTE programs. Later Farrell (2019a) expanded on this idea as he called out yet another inconvenient truth in SLTE; that is the lack of contact these programs have with their graduating early career TESOL teachers. Unfortunately, as Farrell (2022) recently noted, what occurs on graduation in many contexts, is that early career TESOL teachers (i.e., novice teachers in their first five years of teaching) have no further contact with their TESOL teacher educators or programs, and although they face the same challenges as their more experienced colleagues from the very first day on the job, they may also have little guidance from the new school or institution about how to deal with such challenges. Thus, Farrell (2015a) called for a *novice-service teacher education* approach to SLTE.

Such a novice-service teacher education approach 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 and programs so that novice teachers can be better prepared for the complexity of real-life classrooms.

More recently, Farrell (2021) further explained that a novice-service approach to SLTE could include and expand on the sole focus of the more traditional pre-service approach (including teaching practice) by also including the first five early career

years of teaching. According to Farrell (2021), such an expansion is based on the assumption that the TESOL teacher preparation and education program is just a beginning and that the knowledge provided at this pre-service level is in a tentative and incomplete state. Thus, learner TESOL teachers will need regular opportunities to update their professional knowledge immediately after they graduate from the program and especially in their early career years in order to be successful. As Cirocki, Madyarov, and Baecher (2019) have pointed out: “Teacher learning is an ongoing, reflective, and constructive process. It begins during university degree programs, or certificate courses, and continues in and outside the classroom throughout teachers’ careers” (p. 2). In this manner, TESOL teacher education can be viewed as a process, rather than a product where graduates get a certificate or degree on exit. In such an approach, according to Farrell (2021), teacher educators continue to mentor as *teacher educator-mentors* acting as *reflective colleagues* as they collaborate with the early career year teachers, along with other school mentors and colleagues, as they are socialized into a new community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Farrell’s (2015a) collection of international perspectives on SLTE gives examples of how various teacher educators have attempted to prepare learner 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 pre-service teachers to explore (e.g., see Farrell, 2017; Cirocki, Madyarov, & Baecher, 2019). Such *real* case studies can thus better inform the curriculum of SLT preparation programs, and pre-service 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 has been 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 sociocognitive 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”; (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 promising structure that may address this challenge is Farrell’s (2015b, 2022) overall holistic framework for language teachers to reflect on their work that entails exploring their philosophy, principles, theories, classroom practices, and critically reflecting beyond the classroom so that they can become and remain effective teachers in their early careers. Holistic reflective practice as presented in this framework is grounded in the belief that teachers are whole persons and teaching, and reflection is multidimensional because it includes the moral, ethical, spiritual, and aesthetic aspects of our practice. This overall reflective approach not only leads to awareness of teaching practices, but also leads to more self-awareness and understanding and thus equips learner TESOL teachers for personal and professional growth throughout their career practice (see Farrell, 2022 for a detailed description of this framework). As Farrell (2019b) has noted, SLTE programs must be able to prepare learner teachers to become adaptive experts within the context in which they teach, and they can accomplish this through the lens of the framework for reflecting on practice. Indeed, 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. In addition, and as can be seen from the contents of this updated entry, the following questions asked by Johnson and Freeman (2001, p. 66) remain unanswered today:

- 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?

I would also like to add the following questions that second language teacher educators may also want to consider:

- Whose needs are being served in SLTE programs, second language teacher educators (i.e., academics), or learner teachers?
- How are specific courses (e.g., methods courses, applied linguistics courses, education courses, and other idiosyncratic courses) decided in specific language teacher education programs, and who decides these?
- Are second language teacher educators setting up their learner teachers for a school culture where they are teaching that prohibits implementation of some of what they have learned in such courses outlined in the previous question?
- How can second language teacher educators better support their learner teachers once they “graduate” and begin their early career years?
- How can second language teacher educator-mentors continue to encourage *reflection* begun in their teacher education programs so that early career teachers can make their own informed decisions about their practice based on such reflection?

In order to be able to address some of the difficult questions posed above, we need to hear the voices of more language teacher educators and learner teachers alike about their lived experiences on both sides of the desk. Farrell’s (2017) TESOL volume captures these voices when both the learner teachers and their teacher educators realized that their traditional presentation and delivery of coursework and practicum experiences did not seem to deliver what their learner teachers needed in real-school settings. One of the striking features of this collection is that these reflective teacher educators have begun to ask their teacher learners what *they* think about the contents of their particular teacher education courses. The results of such reflections on the reality of SLTE programs produced an incredible array of innovative approaches where the programs focused more on enabling learner and novice teachers to begin theorizing *of* and *from* their practice.

Although much has been accomplished in a relatively short period of time in the growing field of SLTE, we still have a long way to go when preparing our teacher learners for the realities they will face during their early career 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 and still 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 early career years (Richards, 2016; Farrell, 2021).

As mentioned above, the current theory–practice gap evident in some second language teacher education programs has begun to attract 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. In addition, some second language teacher educators also seem to be adopting the role of reflective practitioner as they attempt to tackle the theory–practice gap evident in of their programs today. Although there still seems to be some disjuncture between theory provided in SLT preparation programs and practice enacted in real classrooms, which needs to be more aligned, many second language teacher educators are beginning to reflect more on their own practices and programs so that they can provide the best education for their learner teachers (Farrell, 2017, 2021). 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). This research is becoming ever more robust today with some new and exciting publications in SLTE as we continue to develop and evolve into a fully recognized teaching profession (Cirocki et al., 2019; Mann & Walsh, 2019; Selvi & Yazan, 2021; Maggioli, 2023; Tajeddin & Farrell, in press, to name but a few).

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 Practice for Language 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; The Novice Years of TESOL Teaching

References

- Bailey, K., & Springer, S. (2013). Reflective teaching as innovation. In K. Hyland & L. Wong (Eds.), *Innovation and change in English language education* (pp. 106–22). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Cirocki, A., Madyarov, I., and Baecher, L. (2019). Contemporary perspectives on student teacherlearning and the TESOL Practicum. In A. Girocki, I. Madyarov, and L. Baecher (Eds). *Current perspectives on the TESOL Practicum: Cases from around the globe* (pp. 1–20). Amsterdam, Netherlands: Springer.
- Farrell, T. S. C. (Ed.). (2015a). *International perspectives on English language teacher education: Innovations from the field*. Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Farrell, T. S. C. (2015b). *Promoting teacher reflection in second language education: A framework for TESOL professionals*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Farrell, T. S. C. (Ed.). (2017). *Voices from the TESOL classroom: Participant inquiries in preservice teacher education classes*. Alexandria, VA: TESOL International Publications.
- Farrell, T. S. C. (2019a). "My training has failed me": Inconvenient truths about second language teacher education (SLTE). *TESL-EJ*, 22(4), 1–16.
- Farrell, T. S. C. (2019b). Reflective practice in L2 teacher education. In S. Mann & S. Walsh (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of English language teacher education*. London, England: Routledge.
- Farrell, T. S. C. (2021). *TESOL teacher education: A reflective approach*. Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press.
- Farrell, T. S. C. (2022). *Reflective language teaching*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Freeman, D. (2016). *Educating second language teachers*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.
- Johnson, K. E. (2009). *Second language teacher education: A sociocultural perspective*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Johnson, K. E. (2013). Innovation through teacher education programs. In K. Hyland & L. Wong (Eds.), *Innovation and change in English language education* (pp. 75–89). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Johnson, K. E., & Freeman, D. (2001). Teacher learning in second language teacher education: A socially-situated perspective. *Revista Brasileira de Linguística Aplicada*, 1(1), 53–69.
- Johnson, K. E., & Golombek, P. R. (2016). *Mindful L2 teacher education: A sociocultural perspective on cultivating teachers' professional development*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Mann, S., & Walsh, S. (Eds.). (2019). *Routledge handbook of English language teacher education*. London, England: Routledge.
- Maggioli, D. (2023). *Initial language teacher education*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Richards, J. C. (1990). The dilemma of teacher education in second language teaching. In J. C. Richards & D. Nunan (Eds.), *Second language teacher education* (pp. 3–15). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Richards, J. C. (2016). *Key issues in language teaching*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Richards, J. C., & Farrell, T. S. C. (2011). *Teaching practice: A reflective approach*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Richards, J. C., & Nunan, D. (1990). *Second language teacher education*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Selvi, A. F., & Yazan, B. (Eds.). (2021). *Language teacher education for global Englishes: A practical resource book* (1st ed.). Abingdon, England: Routledge.
- Tajeddin, Z., & Farrell, T. S. C. (Eds.). (in press). *Handbook of language teacher education: Critical review and research synthesis*. Amsterdam, Netherlands: Springer.
- Wright, T. (2010). Second language teacher education: Review of recent research on practice. *Language Teaching*, 43(3), 259–96.