

‘My Training Has Failed Me’: Inconvenient Truths About Second Language Teacher Education (SLTE)

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Abstract

This paper is motivated by an email message the author received recently from a practicing, ‘well-qualified’ (BA and MA in Linguistics and a (200 hundred hour) TESL Certificate) ESL teacher in the US who was reaching out because she felt her training as a teacher had failed her. This prompted the author to reflect on two main inconvenient truths related to how language teachers are educated from their perspective in order to give a voice to the voiceless (the practicing teachers). These are: *Inconvenient Truth #1: Theory/Practice Gap*; *Inconvenient Truth #2: No Contact With Newly Qualified Teachers*. The author noted that truths remain ‘inconvenient’ to teacher educators only because many fail/refuse to acknowledge this ‘truth’ exists or even understand why it exists. However, rather than just pointing out these inconvenient truths, the paper suggests possible solutions to each of these so that the lived experiences of learner teachers, newly qualified teachers (NQTs) and experienced teachers can be greatly enhanced.

Keywords: Second language teacher education; Inconvenient truths; reflection; teacher beliefs

Introduction

The following is a part of a message (email) I received from a teacher a few weeks ago (October, 2018) in response to an interview I gave to a group called Master’s in TESOL (put webpage); I present in the teacher’s own words:

I have been in ESL/EFL for over a decade. I did a MA in Linguistics with an emphasis in TESL since my only qualifications while working overseas were a BA in Linguistics and a 200-hour TESL certificate. All of my teaching experience prior to this past year was done abroad so I feel quite like I am a new teacher. The systems are completely different now that I am working in higher education.

I am currently working for an IEP at a private college where my class is comprised of multi-level students, a handful of whom feel they do not belong there. I was hired about a month before starting classes, and was given a sample syllabus and a packet of materials created by another teacher, and told not to use a textbook. I'm fighting every day to keep my head above water.

I also work as an adjunct for a community college. Again, hired weeks before the semester started and only given course objectives and sample syllabi. I scurried to try and pull some ideas together for my two new jobs and talked to as many people as I could to try and figure out why this was so unorganized. I came to the conclusion that this is just the way it is, which you seemed to confirm from what I heard in the podcast episode.

I feel that my training has failed me for the most part. With TESL being part of the linguistics program (not applied linguistics), the majority of what I studied in my program was research based. Therefore, I've had next to no practical classroom-ready type training. I came into this profession out of convenience, but I've stayed because I love helping students succeed. I have no doubt learned a lot over so many years in the classroom, but I was really looking forward to feeling confident about teaching upon finishing my degree.

The reality is quite different. I feel that I lack support and readiness for helping my students. I am planning everything on the fly, staying up until midnight the day before class trying to pull together a coherent lesson. Yet, I feel absolutely defeated after every class. I am lost. It's pretty overwhelming.

The message I received above about a declaration that the teacher's education, which was mostly of the theoretical nature, "failed" her is still an inconvenient truth in the teaching of English to speakers of other languages (TESOL). The teacher sent me this message in desperation about how she could handle her reality of teaching and how she is feeling "defeated" although she seemingly (on paper) is well 'qualified' to teach given her BA and MA in Linguistics as well as a (200 hundred hour) TESL Certificate. In fact, this is just the latest message I have received from practicing teachers in their first years of teaching ESL or EFL revealing that they felt they had not been prepared properly for their career as English language teachers. Yes, an 'inconvenient' truth; 'inconvenient' to teacher educators only because many fail/refuse to acknowledge this 'truth' exists or even understand why it exists. There are many more inconvenient truths that TESOL teachers are faced with but in this paper I will focus on two main inconvenient truths related to how language teachers are educated from their perspective in order to give a voice to the voiceless (the practicing teachers). These are: *Inconvenient Truth #1: Theory/Practice Gap*; *Inconvenient Truth #2: No Contact With Newly Qualified Teachers*. However, rather than just pointing out these inconvenient truths, or tearing down the profession, I want to attempt to suggest possible solutions to each of these so that the lived experiences of learner teachers, newly qualified teachers (NQTs) and experienced teachers can be greatly enhanced.

Inconvenient Truth #1: Theory/Practice Gap

Learner language teachers enter second language teacher education programs in order to take courses that will help them become teachers of English as a second or foreign language (ESL/EFL) in real classrooms in different settings. In other words, second language teacher

education programs are in existence to deliver such courses so that learner teachers will be able to function in their chosen careers as ‘qualified’ ESL or EFL teachers. Many school administrators hire such ‘qualified’ teachers because they (and others outside teaching) believe that simply put NQTs will put into practice what they have learned in these courses because such courses were deemed to have been important by their second language teacher educators. At least, this is what is supposed to happen.

However, as the opening vignette from a (very well) ‘qualified’ TESOL teacher has demonstrated (again), this is not the case and something is not working in the field of second language teacher education. Indeed, many experienced TESOL teachers may also attest to this dysfunction in second language teacher education after they have had to survive on their own to develop successful teaching careers. We must thus tackle this inconvenient truth in SLTE that there is still a serious disjuncture between what learner teachers are being presented with in teacher education courses and the reality of what they experience in real classrooms when they graduate from their SLTE programs.

If we consider what Freeman (2016: 9) has recently suggested, that language teacher education should be “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” they we are still failing to follow this ideal. Indeed, the opening message above from a ‘qualified’ language teacher is yet more evidence that this is not happening and another indication that a large gap still remains between the contents that are provide in language education programs or ‘what is known in the field’, or what Freeman (2016: 9) calls the “so-called parent academic disciplines of language teaching”, and ‘what is done in the classroom’.

Indeed, in the field of general education scholars have admitted for some time that there is a huge gap between theory and foundational courses and the practices that occur in real classrooms (Robinson, 1998). Mardle and Walker (1980) for example, have noted that teacher education courses (both theory and methods) do little to change the views of preservice teachers. Additionally, they have observed that these courses prove to confirm or even reinforce what the students already brought to the course with them because the beliefs that they bring with them remain at the tacit level. Moreover, some researchers say that the skills learned in the methods courses are highly dependent on the ecological conditions of the specific environment and classrooms that the preservice teachers find themselves (Bullough, 1989).

Although this theory-practice divide has been described as “the Achilles heel of teacher education” (Darling-Hammond, 2009: 8), over the years, some teacher educators have attempted to incorporate particular strategies to make theory more meaningful to teachers with the use of video, microteaching, service learning, including much more teaching practice (TP), and attempting to establish more contact between university and schools in a type of school-based teacher education to name but a few (Avalos, 2011; Cherubini, 2009; Martin, Snow, & Franklin Torrez, 2011). Although some of these were more successful than others, at the very least within the field of general education, there is an admittance of the existence of a theory/practice gap; yet in the field of second language teacher education (SLTE) although Clarke (1994) mentioned its existence, it remains an inconvenient truth to discuss this ‘sacred theory-practice’ (Clandinin, 1995) divide beyond a few exceptions.

Some time ago, Clarke (1994: 18) pointed out that there is something of a dysfunction between theory and practice in language teaching and in order to address this he suggested that teachers should be recast as key agents of change in theories for practice by “turning the hierarchy on its head - putting teachers on top and arraying others...below them.” Unfortunately nearly 25 years on the TESOL profession are still reluctant to acknowledge that the theory/practice divide still exists and even if it is mentioned, it is then downplayed for some other new ideas that seem more inviting to academics rather than practicing teachers. Indeed, as one researcher has suggested, it may in fact be counterproductive to even discuss the theory/practice gulf in TESOL.

However, as Percy (2012: 34) has recently observed, the theory/practice divide is still very real for practicing teachers and they have not become key agents of change as Clarke (1994) had imagined; she continues: “the relationship between theory and practice continues to exist in the ways that ESL teachers make sense of their preservice education, despite our turn in teacher education to understand teaching as socially mediated.”

More recently, Richards (2014) 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 (2014: 23) stated, “the central issue of what constitutes appropriate disciplinary knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge remains an unresolved issue.”

However, what has occurred in SLTE is that courses have been selected not on the needs of learner teachers but based on tradition (e.g., ‘we have always had a course on X’), on bureaucracy (e.g., ‘the ministry or administration makes us teach this foundation course’), or invariably the ideas of a persuasive individual colleague (e.g., ‘I want to teach X’). Unfortunately these (also inconvenient truths) decisions persist in our profession and the needs of academics rather than the real needs of practicing teachers are at the forefront of our profession. Perhaps this will be debated more as we grow older as a profession. So rather than going on about the most appropriate knowledge-base for SLTE programs, in this paper I will tackle the question of how we can we help learner teachers ‘make sense better of their preservice education’ or as Kubanyiova (2018: 5) has recently stated, “how language teachers make sense of themselves, their students and their teaching worlds and how their sense making shapes language learning opportunities for their students.”

Possible Solutions

In order to consider possible solutions to the issue of theory/practice gap I will first briefly discuss what is involved in teacher learning in SLTE (Freeman, 2001) and then highlight the importance of teacher learning as reflection can be a bridge between theory and practice in SLTE. Richards and Farrell (2011) have talked 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. This paper will consider teacher learning in language teaching according to four conceptualizations: skill learning, cognitive process, personal construction, and reflective practice (Richards & Farrell, 2005).

Teacher-learning as skill learning

Teacher-learning as skill learning sees teacher-learning as the development of a range of different skills or competencies, mastery of which underlies successful teaching. Some would suggest then that teacher learning involves creating lists of the most important competencies language teachers should possess, a position strongly supported by administrators and policy makers, and a 'good' language teacher is recognized as someone who shows these 'correct' competencies summarized from the standardized lists mastery of these competencies as an indication of successful teaching, and the role of teacher education is to model these lists/skills and provide opportunities for learner teachers to master them (Richards & Farrell, 2005). However, the validity and reliability of such an approach to teacher learning has been called into question as it is very difficult to describe 'effective teaching' in all contexts (Barnett, 2004).

Teacher-learning as a cognitive process

Teacher-learning as a cognitive process views teaching as a complex cognitive activity and focuses on the nature of teachers' beliefs and thinking and how these influence their teaching and learning. This approach to teacher learning assumes that language teacher behaviors and instructional decisions are guided by teacher thinking while they are teaching (Clark & Lampert, 1986). In teacher education it encourages teachers to explore their cognitions and how these influence their actual classroom practices. However, this approach has also been shown to be problematic because it is difficult for teachers to have insights into their beliefs (ie. beliefs change moment to moment (Senior, 2006)) and it is also difficult for teachers to access their thinking as they teach because too much is happening simultaneously during lessons (Eraut, 1995). In addition, teacher cognition research is research on teachers by academics, for academics; in other words the results rarely get back to the practicing teachers.

Teacher learning as personal construction

Teacher learning as personal construction comes from educational philosophy and is based on the belief that knowledge is actively constructed by teacher learners and not passively received (Richards & Farrell, 2005). Thus learning is seen as involving reconstruction, reorganizing and even relearning of prior knowledge, and it is through these processes that knowledge is internalized (Roberts, 1998). As Roberts (1998: 24) suggests, this constructivist approach to teacher learning "will see an intervention (such as a classroom experience, a lecture on learning theory, or a peer observation) not as a model or as a 'bolt-on' additional bit of content, but as an experience which we select from and then construe in our own way." Change, Roberts (1998: 24) notes, happens as we "accommodate new information, as confirmed or challenged by our interactions with other people." Such a view to teacher learning in SLTE has led to an emphasis on encouraging self-awareness of the individual teacher's personality and personal contribution to learning and to understanding of their classrooms. As Bullough (1989) has noted, a teacher's behavior while teaching is the result of (mostly implicit) cognitive, affective, and motivational sources in the teacher that are not often reflected on.

Teacher learning as reflective practice

Following on from teacher learning as personal construction is teacher learning as reflective practice (which in my view also incorporates personal construction) is based on the assumption that teachers learn from experience through systematic and focused reflection on the nature and meaning of their practice (Richards & Farrell, 2005). I believe that reflective

practice is one of the most important aspects of teacher learning as it can help learner teachers integrate theory and practice (Farrell, 2007a, 2015b, 2018c). As Wright (2010: 267) has acknowledged, 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.”

However, although there is general agreement that reflection for teacher learners is an indispensable element in SLTE, there still is no agreement on what constitutes reflection or reflective practice and programs have not yet figured out how to provide reflective practice in any coherent manner throughout a teacher’s education (Bailey & Springer, 2013). As Bailey and Springer (2013: 120) have pointed out, 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.” Recently, Farrell (2018b) has noted that one of the reasons for the confusion about operationalizing reflective practice in TESOL is that most of the existing approaches, blossomed since the 1990s, are restrictive and thus a more holistic approach to reflection should be adopted through the framework for reflecting on practice in SLTE. This holistic five-phase model encourages teachers to explore their philosophy, beliefs, values, theories, principles, classroom practices and beyond the classroom (Farrell, 2015b). Recent implementations of this comprehensive, yet effective framework have proved promising for novice ESL teachers (Farrell & Kennedy—forthcoming).

A reflective approach to SLTE views teacher learners as active mediators of their own learning 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 between theory/practice gaps present in many SLTE programs. However, another sub-inconvenient truth in SLTE is that learner teacher beliefs and their prior experiences, which are held tacitly, are not reflected on by teacher educators who remain focused on providing theories without concerns of how they are being interpreted by learner teachers. So it is vital for teacher educators to engage with teacher learners’ previous experience and beliefs because of the ‘competition’ with the received knowledge they are presented with in the SLTE program (Richards, 1998). As Richards (1998: 71) has noted, the belief systems of preservice teachers “often serve as a lens through which they view both the content of the teacher development program and their language teacher experiences.” Thus teacher education courses need to provide their learner teachers with activities that can help them in the skills of reflection do that they can become more aware of their tacitly held beliefs and past experiences. Such reflective activities can include: *case-based teaching, metaphor analysis, critical incident analysis, concept mapping* and *teacher identity development* again to name but a few.

Case-Based Teaching

A case is a freeze-frame of a classroom situation that allows time for reflection (Schön, 1983) and a case study starts with the identification of an issue and then the selection of a case-method procedure for reflecting on it. Case materials can be written and videotaped and provide a detailed means for helping teachers develop a capacity to explore and analyze different situations and dilemmas (Farrell, 2018c). For example, in a Singapore context, Farrell (2006b, 2007b) used case-based teaching in two ways as a means of promoting reflection among learner teachers. In an investigation of the problematic experience of a

novice teacher in their first year of school experience, Farrell (2006b) concludes that an appropriate way of preparing novices for the transition from course to classroom reality is for learner teachers to work with cases constructed from the narratives of novice teachers (Farrell, 2007b). He recommends moving away from a concern with language teaching methods on SLTE courses to the development of the skills of anticipatory reflection during the course. This process, he argues, will raise novice teachers' awareness of what they might experience when they make the transition from SLTE to novice teacher in the first year of teaching. He proposes linking this learning experience to classroom observation, journal writing and group discussions, developing capacities for reflecting on both teaching and the contexts in which it occurs.

Metaphor Analysis

Metaphors are indications of the way teachers think about teaching and also guide the way they act in the classroom and thus when teachers begin to unpack the meaning of the metaphors they hold, they can begin to understand what they really believe about teaching and can start to transform themselves as teachers (Clandinin, 1986). Again in a Singapore context, Farrell (2006a) describes how he used metaphors to elicit learner teacher beliefs during teaching practice. This is also an example of a teacher educator working directly with learner teacher's prior knowledge. The longitudinal nature of the metaphor work Farrell describes is offered as a way of helping prepare learner teachers to accept new pedagogic ideas. Images are elicited over a period of time in order to explore any changes through a process of critical reflection (guided by the teacher educator) on learner teachers' journal entries. The awareness gained assists decisions on whether or not new models are appropriate for the learner teachers' teaching situation.

Critical Incident Analysis

A critical incident is any unplanned and unanticipated event that occurs during class, outside class or during a teacher's career but is "vividly remembered" (Brookfield, 1990: 84). Incidents only really become critical when they are subject to this conscious reflection, and when language teachers formally analyze these critical incidents, they can uncover new understandings of their practice (Farrell & Baecher, 2017). In addition teacher education programs can better prepare novice teachers by inviting learner teachers to anticipate such incidents as one way of bridging the theory-practice gap that exists between teacher education programs and the reality of teaching in real classrooms (Farrell, 2016). Thus, by reflecting on such incidents, teachers can gain insight and those who work with teachers may be better able to understand their thinking. Farrell (2008a) for example, explored the use of critical incidents on a practicum period and observed that the learner teachers focused almost exclusively on 'negative' incidents and suggests that they might also benefit from examining 'teaching highs' (i.e., when they have been successful). Farrell observes that the awareness raising process enabled the learner teachers to be more realistic about teaching and to recognize some of its uncertainties and complexity.

Concept Mapping

Concept maps are "a visual representation of knowledge" (Antonacci, 1991:174) and show relationships between concepts in a type of network where any concept or idea can be connected to any other and are a useful indication for teachers of what students know about a topic (Farrell, 2018c). Farrell (2009) describes how, by using concept mapping, he was able to assist graduate students in Canada to become more aware of their beliefs, and how these

develop during a program. This process of concept mapping is a way of revealing beliefs and concepts formed in previous learning and life experiences, among these being SLTE programs. The activity elicits learner teachers' expectations about the coming course, and thus provides the teacher educator with valuable insights into the assumptions and beliefs they bring to the course. The increasing sophistication of learner teachers' thinking as the course progresses is visible in their maps, and it is significant that the early representations are, to some extent, residues of previous SLTE courses followed by participants. Such mapping process helps to evaluate both what learner teachers' know and how they conceptualize it – a representation of cognitive processing, which includes critical reflection. Farrell (2009) maintains that group discussion – reflecting aloud – is a vital part of the process of clarifying concepts.

Teacher Identity Development

Reflecting on teacher identity can also be an important lens for exploring the theory/practice divide in SLTE (Percy, 2012). As Percy (2012) points out, learner teachers are encouraged to question what is theoretical and what is practical to help them uncover how they construct their teacher identities, especially their origin, formation and development. Chik and Briedbach (2011) for example in a German context, report how pre-service TESOL teachers explored their language learning histories as a means of examining their teacher identity formation and its subsequent development, and as a result stated that the teachers gained an increase in their self-knowledge as they became more aware of their various teacher role identities. This new awareness led them to further examine how they could better negotiate the now articulated teacher identity roles as they move forward in their teaching careers and even reaffirm their decision to become teachers.

Inconvenient Truth #2: No Contact With Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs)

Another inconvenient truth regarding teacher learning in second language education is what happens (or does not happen) to NQTs beyond the formal period of the teacher education program when they have commenced teaching in an educational institution. Unfortunately, what usually occurs is that on graduation, many NQTs suddenly have no further contact with their teacher educators or programs, although they must face the same challenges as their more experienced colleagues from the very first day on the job, but often without much guidance from the new school/institution. This was also the case for the 'qualified' TESOL teacher in the opening vignette as she also had no contact with any of the programs she 'qualified' from and that is the reason she reached out to me as she said above (and this well worth repeating):

I feel that I lack support and readiness for helping my students. I am planning everything on the fly, staying up until midnight the day before class trying to pull together a coherent lesson. Yet, I feel absolutely defeated after every class. I am lost. It's pretty overwhelming.

Indeed, one would wonder what may have occurred if this teacher could reach out to her previous teacher educator(s) in order to seek the advice and support that she so clearly needs to be able to succeed as a TESOL teacher. So we must ask why there is limited contact (if any) between SLTE programs and the learner teachers who graduate from them regarding their experiences of teaching especially during their first years.

So then we can ask the question: what are the benefits of having continued contact with our graduates in their first years once they enter the varied contexts and workplaces they find teaching employment? A significant amount of research has been conducted worldwide in the field of general education examining the early years experiences of novice teachers and document such the their 'reality shock' of teaching in 'real classrooms' and as a result, many must fight to survive in a 'sink or swim process' during those first years of teaching (Varah, Theune & Parker, 1986; Veenman, 1984). Although a lot less research has been conducted on the first years experiences of NQTs in TESOL, of this research, similar misfortunes have been also documented (e.g. Artigliere & Baecher, 2017; Farrell, 2016, 2017a,b). These misfortunes include unreasonable workload demands that include unpaid marking, unpaid increased hours outside of school time on trips, lack of support from administration and poor quality induction programs, as well as large class sizes, and unorganized curricula with many TESOL teachers left to cope on their own to survive (Johnson, Harrold, Cochran, Brannan, & Bleistein, 2014). In the field of general education, these first years 'transition traumas' have been well documented and attempted measures that include encouraging more university-school partnerships (Struyven & Vanthounout, 2014), not many in TESOL have actually considered the lived experiences of early career TESOL teachers and SLTE programs still have limited information about how their graduates are faring in their induction years, or even what their work lives involve (Baecher, 2012). As Mattheoudakis (2007) has observed, "The truth is that we [TESOL] know very little about what actually happens" (p, 1273) to ESL teachers in their early career years in teaching. With few exceptions, what usually happens is that NQTs graduate from their SLTE programs and go teach without any follow-up from their SLTE programs and their teacher educators have limited knowledge of even where they are teaching. As Peercy (2012: 34) has observed, there is "a need for more research that examines what aspects of their preparation teachers construct as valuable or not valuable, as well as what contributes to differences in these understandings."

Possible Solutions

Although I mentioned above that there are a few exceptions to the lack of contact with NQTs and the programs they have graduated from, two promising recent exceptions that deserve mention include one where three teacher educators in the US involved three recent graduates of their MA-TESOL program in order to bridge theory and practice from 'the ground up', by entering into cycles of dialogue and reflection about the usefulness of how theory was delivered and perceived by their learner teachers (Macknish, Porter-Szucs, Tomaš, Scholze, Slucter, & Kavetsky, 2017). As a result they realized that they would need to deliver theory in more manageable segments for better understanding. In addition they also recognized that they should not only tell teacher learners to reflect on their practice but also better demonstrate how to reflect through more explicit modeling of reflective practice (Macknish, Porter-Szucs, Tomaš, Scholze, Slucter, & Kavetsky, 2017).

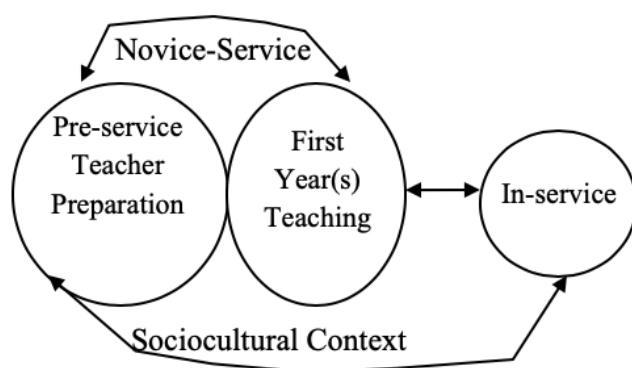
In addition in another study, two teacher educators in Singapore, Linda Hanington and Anitha Devi Pillai, realized that their learner teachers did not notice that the approaches (in this case process approaches to learning) that the teacher educators were using to teach their course were the very ones they were trying to get them to use when they begin their teaching (Hanington & Devi Pillai, 2017). They reflected that if they wanted their students to notice that they were in fact modelling a methodology they wanted them to practice when they became teachers, they would have to make the links more overt for them for this realization to take place. In other

words teacher educators cannot just assume that learner teachers will get this connection and as a result the learner teachers better understood the implications of theory in practice.

Of course, both of these promising approaches above outlined above raise the important question should teacher educators model theories and practices they are presenting to their teacher learners as being useful for their teaching careers? If no, why not and if yes, how can teacher educators better make model these for their teacher learners? In order for this to happen though SLTE educators must become more familiar with the world of ‘real’ second language classrooms so that they will be able to notice that there is a mismatch between the contents of their teacher education programs and the lived experiences of the learner teachers in their courses. This means that SLTE educators must maintain some kind of contact with their NQTs after they have graduated.

One way of maintaining contact as between SLTE educators and programs and schools as Farrell (2015a) has suggested, is to think not in terms of the usual pre-service teacher education, but also in terms of ‘novice-service teacher education’, that contains some kind of bridging period for NQTs. This novice-service teacher development can actually begin in second language teacher preparation programs and continue into the first years of teaching when NQTs need feedback from a critical friend to survive in real classrooms in particular sociocultural contexts, and can even continue onto in-service teacher development programs so that SLTE educators are fully informed about how NQTs progress into their mid-careers and what their particular needs are during that period as well. Figure 1 outlines this basic model of novice-service teacher education.

Figure 1: Novice-Service Teacher Education



Thus, novice service teacher education acts as a bridging-phase between the usual pre-service program experiences, and the first years of real teaching as well as into in-service development periods. This process also includes the sociocultural context in which NQTs are teaching in as well as during their in-service development. In order for this to be successful SLTE educators will have to maintain closer contact with their NQTs than they typically do, or are required to do, after they have commenced teaching in schools. Indeed, establishing more SLT education-school partnerships are also important for SLT preparation programs, because in order to establish an effective knowledge-base for second language teacher education, SLT educators

must have an adequate understanding of schools and schooling and the social and cultural contexts in which learning how to teach takes place (Freeman & Johnson, 1998).

Thus, novice-service teacher education includes the three main stakeholders: NQTs, second language educators and school administrators all working in collaboration to make for a smooth transition from the SLT preparation program to the first years of teaching. The idea is that the knowledge garnered from this tripartite collaboration can be used to better inform SLT preparation educators/programs so that NQTs can be better prepared for the complexity of real classrooms.

In such a manner SLT educators will be able to continue to monitor their NQTs' development during the first years so that they can develop case studies of what really happens during these formative teaching years. This information can be fed into the case-based teaching approach outlined above in inconvenient truth #1 above and they will be all the more real if they are generated by the NQTs themselves, because as Elbaz (1988) has noted, there seems to be a gap between what teacher educators/researchers produce (and interpret) as reconstructions of novice teachers' knowledge and experience and the novices own accounts and interpretations of what they experience. So, novice teachers should be encouraged to tell their own stories of the various issues, challenges they were faced with in their particular setting during their first years. Farrell (2006b) has suggested the use of a story structure framework of *orientation-complication-result* as one way of imposing some order on these stories/experiences so that novice language teachers can have a sense of structure when reflecting on their experiences. As Jalongo and Isenberg (1995: 162) have noted, this type of story framework can offer both pre-service and novice teachers a "safe and nonjudgmental support system for sharing the emotional stresses and isolating experiences of the classroom." Shin (2012) also discovered that the participants reported that sharing their stories had let them reflect on their teaching practices, and that they found such sharing empowering. SLT educators can then build up a corpus of case studies on NQTs' first years' stories from a variety of different contexts and these case studies explored by learner teachers in SLT preparation programs. Such 'real' case studies can thus better inform the curriculum of SLT preparation programs, and pre-service teachers can use them as Wright (2010: 273) has noted, to reflect on their beliefs and narratives, and "into the professional contexts of teaching and learning for which [they] are being prepared."

Conclusion

Although much has been accomplished in a relatively short period of time in the newish field of SLTE, the reality is that we still have a long way to go when preparing our learner teachers for the realities they will face during their teaching careers. There is still a disjuncture between theory provided in SLT preparation programs and practice in real classrooms that needs to be narrowed. I have suggested in this paper by pointing out two inconvenient truths about our SLTE (*Theory/Practice Gap; No Contact With Newly Qualified Teachers*) that we focus SLTE courses on teacher learning as reflective practice by providing activities in SLTE programs such as *case-based teaching, metaphor analysis, critical incident analysis, concept mapping* and *teacher identity development*. In addition I have proposed that the lack of contact between SLT educators and NQTs and the schools in which they teach can be bridged by considering the idea of *novice-service language teacher education* to include teacher preparation (the usual pre-service) and the first year(s) of teaching. I have also suggested

greater SLT educator/program-school-novice collaboration so that SLT educators can not only help NQTs but also learn more about, and eventually influence, the cultures of the schools their students are likely to be placed in the future. As Kubanyiova (2018:2) has noted, the task of language teacher education in the age of paradox should involve “educating ‘responsive meaning makers in the world’: teachers who do not shy away from the politics of the social worlds in which their practices are located, but who are, at the same time, committed to growing their capacity of ‘knowing what to do’ in the particular moment of an educational encounter.” I agree with her wholeheartedly and although I think it is also the responsibility of each NQT to try to make sense of their own world of teaching, I also believe that language teacher educators can help them more while they try to make sense of their lived experiences. We can do this providing them with the tools of reflection that will enable them to ‘look/see’ more closely at their worlds and how they want to interact with students, colleagues and administrators while they develop as language teachers. Thus, we SLT educators need to examine our own worlds of educating learner teachers, and as Wright (2010: 289) states, “to continue to question our practices and the assumptions behind them” so that we can reflect on whose needs we are fulfilling: our own needs as academics or our learner teachers’ needs to succeed—while also remembering that I wrote this paper from the NQTs’ perspective or to give voice to the voiceless. Thankfully, as Wright (2010: 288) has also 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” (see for example Farrell, 2015a, 2017). However, because I continue to receive messages of despair such as the one in the opening of this paper with, there is still more we can do in TESOL to refine what we is presented in SLTE programs so that we can equip NQTs with the reflective skills necessary to be able to face the various challenges they inevitably face in their early careers as language teachers.

About the Author

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