

Towards a model of critical language teacher education

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Drawing on sociocultural practices in language teacher education programs in Australia, Canada, China, and the USA, this article proposes a model of critical language teacher education. The model challenges language teachers to consider not only *what* to teach and *how* to teach it, but also which practices promote more equitable relations of power in different sites of learning and teaching. To this end, language teacher education programs are encouraged to incorporate pedagogical practices that provide for a wider range of identity options for student teachers. This may give both pre-service and in-service teachers a greater sense of legitimacy in the language classroom.

1. Introduction

The study of language teacher education is a relatively new field of inquiry, but there is increasing momentum in this regard, particularly with respect to sociocultural approaches to language teacher education. Johnson & Golombek (2002), for example, have drawn on teachers' narrative inquiry as a form of professional development; Johnston (2002) has brought issues of values to the fore in language teacher education; and Hawkins (2004) examines diverse sociocultural approaches to language teacher education. This article seeks to contribute to this emerging literature by examining language teacher education from the perspective of a diverse set of language teacher educators, working with student teachers in different regions of the world. Furthermore, extending the work of Reagan & Osborne (2002) and Hawkins (2004), it seeks to better understand the sociocultural context in which these language teacher educators are working, focussing in particular on their attempts to engage critically with teacher education practices in their respective programs. I use the term "critical" here in the sense in which it is used by educators such as Luke (2004) and Pennycook (2001), who argue that "critical" work is centrally concerned with incorporating explicit social critique into pedagogy and research, seeking to scrutinize and transform inequitable social conditions and people's understanding of them.

My intention is to propose a model of critical language teacher education, informed by the teacher education practices taking place in six sites with which I have, through my work, become particularly familiar (Kanno & Norton, 2003; Norton & Toohey, 2004; Norton & Pavlenko, 2004). The first three sites to be discussed address innovative practices in the curricula of language teacher educators in China, Canada, and the USA, respectively. I examine the work of Angel Lin (2004), who has introduced a critical pedagogical curriculum in her MA TESL program

at the City University of Hong Kong; Tara Goldstein (2004), who has developed what she calls "performed ethnography" as a teacher education resource in Toronto, Canada; and Sarah Rilling and Rebecca Biles (2004), who have worked collaboratively on innovative uses of technology in teacher education. The other three sites to be examined are centrally concerned with diverse communities of practice in language teacher education, focussing on the practices of student teachers (Pennycook, 2004), graduate students (Pavlenko, 2004), and experienced language teachers (Toohey & Waterstone, 2004).

The practices at each of these six sites offer different perspectives on what it might mean to be a "critical" language teacher educator. Further, it will be evident from the discussion that my use of the term "teacher educator" refers not only to work with pre-service teachers, but also to work with in-service teachers. Indeed, I suggest that the commonalities within these two groups may be more extensive than their differences. Many "pre-service" teachers in language education programs have had much experience teaching, while many in-service teachers frequently take professional development courses to keep up to date with innovative practices in the field. In this article, both pre-service and in-service teachers are referred to as "student teachers" in the context of the language teacher education programs discussed. I conclude the article with a model of critical language teacher education, drawing on the insights from the six sites of practice.

2. Innovations in Curriculum Development

The following teacher educators, working in China, Canada, and the United States, have sought to introduce innovation and social change in their teacher education programs. Their work is a reminder that innovations in

teacher education practices that are centrally concerned with social change require rigorous reflection, thoughtful analysis, and creative action.

2.1 Critical Pedagogical MA TESL Curriculum: Angel Lin, City University Hong Kong

Angel Lin, a teacher educator at the City University of Hong Kong, has introduced an innovative critical pedagogical curriculum in her MATESL program, with mixed results. The challenges she has experienced include student teacher frustration with the academic language of critical pedagogical texts as well as feelings of pessimism and powerlessness. Lin makes the argument that schoolteachers, unlike academics, are situated in contexts in which cultural capital is determined not by mastery over academic language, but by the ability to make learning meaningful for students. In this context, the inaccessibility of some critical texts serves simply to alienate the very teachers who seek insight from these texts. Such frustration, she notes, is exacerbated by pessimism arising from a teaching context which is largely undemocratic and in which labour relations are unfavorable to teachers. Lin's work highlights the tensions arising from the unequal relations of power between teacher educators and student teachers, noting, in particular, the challenges faced by education workers in Hong Kong who are both junior and female.

Lin has sought to address these challenges, in part, by developing course assignments that are designed for a wider educational audience. As she notes:

To be honest, I was caught up in this sense of frustration and helplessness myself ... What rescued me from such a depressing mode of thinking and helped me to see the value (albeit limited) of the critical curriculum I put into the course was the publication of the teachers' writings (i.e. their critical project reports in my course) in TESL-HK (a newsletter for English language teaching professionals in Hong Kong) and some of my students dropping by my office telling me how proud and happy they felt about the publication of their writings and the opportunity to voice their views and share them with other English teachers in Hong Kong.

What Lin has sought to do in her innovative curriculum is to encourage her student teachers to see themselves as part of a range of communities, which includes not only language learners but professional colleagues. Through the publication of their writing, the student teachers can imagine different ways of relating to the profession, and gain inspiration from being part of a larger professional community.

2.2 Performed Ethnography: Tara Goldstein, Canada

Another powerful tool in teacher education, according to Tara Goldstein (2004), is what she calls *performed ethnography*. In seeking to prepare student teachers to work across linguistic, cultural, and racial differences in multilingual schools, she has found that ethnographic playwriting and performed ethnography offer a unique set of possibilities for addressing learning and teaching challenges. To this end, Goldstein has written a play called "Hong Kong, Canada," which addresses some of the tensions that arise in multilingual/multicultural school contexts. Material for the play was drawn from a four-year (1996-2000) critical ethnographic case study of an English-speaking Canadian high school that had recently enrolled a large number of immigrant students from Hong Kong.

In her teacher education program, Goldstein draws on this play to help student teachers explore issues associated with identity politics prior to confronting such issues in schools. The play also addresses the complex interplay between speech and silence in multilingual schools and offers the opportunity for student teachers to consider alternative endings to the play. Goldstein cautions that teacher educators need to work actively and critically with student teacher responses to performed ethnography and to draw attention to the linguistic privileges of target-language speakers. She suggests that ethnographic playwriting and performed ethnography will help student teachers engage in conflict resolution and antidiscriminatory education that will, in turn, help to create safe and equitable learning environments for language learners in multilingual schools.

The following excerpt from the script is illustrative of the rich material that can be drawn upon for discussion and analysis.

Sarah: *Hey... were you at the Talent Night on Friday? I didn't see you there.*

Joshua: *No, I couldn't make it. My cousins from Montreal were in for the weekend and my mother wanted me home for dinner. How was it? I heard it was pretty good.*

Sarah: *Yeah. Some of it was good. Like, the teachers' band, "P.E.T. School Boys," they were good. And the dance numbers by the Jazz Dance class were great. But, there were so many people who sang songs in Chinese and you couldn't understand a word of them. And all the people who do understand Chinese--most of our school--went crazy. Clapping, whistling. But, like, if you didn't understand any of the words, it was boring. It made me mad.*

Joshua: *What made you mad?*
 Sarah: *All those songs in Chinese. This isn't Hong Kong. This is Canada. In Canada, people should sing in English. You know what I mean? And I'm not the only one who was mad. Some of the girls from Iran were mad too. Nobody performed in Persian. So how come so many people performed in Chinese?*

(Excerpt from Scene 5)

Ethnographic playwriting and performed ethnography hold exciting possibilities for preparing language teachers to effectively respond to the complexities of working across linguistic, cultural, and racial differences in multilingual schools. Goldstein argues convincingly that performed ethnography provides language teachers with the possibility of entering new communities, trying out new identities, and imagining new possibilities for the language classroom with the use of a relatively safe pedagogical resource.

2.3 Gender and Technology: Sarah Rilling and Rebecca Biles, USA

Another innovative course for an MA TESL/TEFL program has been developed by Sarah Rilling in a USA institution. In a recent research study, she and Rebecca Biles (Rilling & Biles, 2004) describe a graduate technology course that examines the relationship between gender and technology from their respective positions as instructor and graduate student. Their action research project was based on the premise that a technology course is an ideal site for student teachers to learn how gender can affect teacher-student and student-student interactions and that insights from such a course will help student teachers create safe learning environments for their ESL students. In their recently published chapter, "Explorations of language and gender in a graduate technology course", Rilling & Biles (2004) outline the technologies used in the course, such as Syllabase, E-chatting, and Tapped In, describe the prompts Rilling used to promote discussion on gender and technology, and summarize the responses Biles made to each of these learning opportunities. Two central concerns for both Rilling and Biles were the extent to which technology could either enhance or compromise the safety of the learning community, and how issues of gender and language learning/teaching could be productively examined. They found that the course successfully helped students to increase their computer skills while simultaneously providing greater insight into gender, technology, and the language learning classroom. As they said,

In a language learning classroom, self expression is important because it allows teachers and students to learn from their classmates' experiences and ideas. Self expression raises

critical questions and highlights commonalities in human experience. Creating different types of spaces for ESL learners to discuss issues and explore language could motivate a variety of students. These spaces might be used for authentic discussion, role play, and simulations – spaces where students could explore both their own and alternate persona.

Rilling and Biles note further that a particularly significant finding was the realization that the virtual world, while being an imagined reality, nevertheless evoked emotions that were real. The challenge for the language teacher educator is to ensure that this imagined community remains a safe community, in which student teachers can explore ideas, negotiate difference, and take risks.

3. Communities of Practice in Teacher Education

While the pedagogical practices of Lin, Goldstein, and Rilling & Biles highlight the challenges and possibilities of incorporating innovation in language teacher education programs, the pedagogical practices of Pennycook, Pavlenko, and Toohey & Waterstone provide insight into the challenges and possibilities of working with diverse student teachers, whether novices, graduate students, or experienced practitioners. These diverse communities offer important insights for a model of language teacher education as critical practice.

3.1 The Teaching Practice as Praxicum: Alastair Pennycook

In recent work, Alastair Pennycook (2004) reminds us that a great deal of language teaching does not take place in well-funded institutes of education, but in community programs, places of worship, and immigrant centres, where funds are limited and time at a premium. Of central interest in his work is a consideration of the way in which teacher educators can intervene in the process of teaching practice observation to bring about educational and social change. Pennycook's quest is for critical moments in the teaching practice—"a point of significance, an instant when things change". He draws on Simon (1992 p. 49) to develop the term "praxicum" as a way of referencing teaching practice as "praxis", i.e. "that continuous reflexive integration of thought, desire, and action".

In his review of a student teacher, Kath, in a teaching practice experience in Sydney, Australia, Pennycook identifies three such critical moments in Kath's class. These critical moments arise from the actions of a disruptive male student; the use of practice dialogues for calling technicians; and the recognition of nonstandard English in the classroom. Each of these critical moments, Pennycook argues, raises larger questions of power and

authority in the wider society and provides an opportunity for critical discussion and reflection. In this spirit, in his after-class discussion with Kath, Pennycook examines these critical moments with respect to complexities of gender politics, authentic language, and the ownership of English. As he notes,

Having finished our talk and wished [Kath] well in the rest of her teaching, I reflect that we seem to have covered three critical moments: turning the discussion of the difficult student into a broader consideration of gender, culture, power, and rights; looking at how consensual dialogues not only fail to prepare students for the world outside but also potentially construct passive, consensual roles for them in the face of more powerful others; and the notion that it may not be the so-called standard versions of English that are the most common or useful for students.

By locating these critical moments in a wider social context in which there are ongoing struggles over language, identity, and power, Kath can better understand her teaching practice experience. Pennycook makes the case that while the analysis of critical moments may not change the world, it does provide a window on central issues in teacher education.

3.2 Imagined Communities and Language Teachers: Aneta Pavlenko, USA

Aneta Pavlenko's (2004) study of pre- and in-service ESL and EFL teachers enrolled in one TESOL program in the USA provides insight into the way in which theory can provide empowering options for graduate students of language education. Pavlenko found that a discursive analysis of the students' positioning in their linguistic autobiographies suggests that the traditional discourse of linguistic competence positions students as members of one of two communities, native speakers or non-native speakers/L2 learners. Pavlenko thus introduced the student teachers to more contemporary theories of bilingualism and second language acquisition, in particular Cook's (1992, 1999) notion of multicompetence. In doing so, she opened up an alternative imagined community for her student teachers, that of multicompetent, bi- and multilingual speakers. This option allowed some teachers to construct themselves and their future students as legitimate L2 users, rather than as failed native speakers of the target language.

The comments of Ikuku, a female Japanese student, and Meredith, a female American student, illustrate the power of theory to provide a larger set of identity options for student teachers:

Ikuku:

Every day, I learn a new insight about English and sociocultural aspect of the language,

which knowledge empowers me. For instance, I hesitated to see myself as a bilingual person until recently, and I kept thinking that my English was not good enough and ultimately I should be able to speak or write like native person until I learned the concept of multicompetency by Cook.

Meredith:

Although I can communicate well in these three languages [Italian, French, and Spanish], I have never liked when people refer to me as "fluent" in them or "bilingual." These terms make me very uncomfortable, and I have always corrected those who use them in regard to me. For me, these terms could only be used for those who were able to communicate equally well in their first and second languages. I felt that these could never apply to me because it requires growing up with two languages, or spending many years in the target language environment, to reach that level. Although my understanding of these terms has now changed, and I realize that a bilingual can know very little of a second language, I still don't feel comfortable using them to describe myself. And although I have always rejected these terms, I have never known what to replace them with, until now. The term multicompetent, as described by Cook, seems to accurately fit the way I perceive my language abilities. . . . It is a term that accurately and positively describes the majority of second language learners, and a term I can finally be comfortable with.

What is particularly significant about the power of theory is that, as student teachers negotiate a wider range of identity options for themselves, they may also re-evaluate the identity options available for the language learners in their own classrooms.

3.3 Teacher/Researcher Communities: Kelleen Toohey and Bonnie Waterstone

The relationship between theory and practice is also central to the teacher education research of Kelleen Toohey and Bonnie Waterstone, but has a very different focus from that of Pavlenko's study. In Toohey and Waterstone's study, the challenge for the student teachers was how to translate their own practice into a wider theoretical framework.

In their study, "Negotiating expertise in an action research community," Toohey & Waterstone (2004) describe a research collaboration between teachers and researchers in Vancouver, Canada, with the mutual goal of investigating what practices in classrooms would make a difference to the learning opportunities of minority-language children. While teachers were comfortable discussing and critiquing their educational practices, they expressed ambivalence about translating their practice

into publishable academic papers. Like the student teachers in Lin's study, the teachers in the research group felt little ownership over the academic language characteristic of many published journals. Marcy, one of the teachers, raised the concern that a paper that is "too journalized up" would no longer be appealing to teachers, while Donna, another teacher, noted as follows:

I had an interesting ... just driving home last week when we were talking about my question and I don't tend to talk in really academic type language. It was interesting because Kelleen very helpfully reworded what I had said her way. (Whole group laughs) Those aren't my words. And yes, it sounded great and wonderful but I won't be using those words now. I might, maybe next year, but right now they are not my words.

Toohey and Waterstone draw on this experience to suggest that writing which respects both teachers' and researchers' ways of knowing might artfully blend narrative with analysis and tell dramatic stories of classroom incidents enriched by a consideration of theoretical insights. The crucial question in collaborative research, Toohey and Waterstone argue, is not, "Is power equitably shared amongst participants?" but "What should participants *do* with the diverse sources of power they have?" The acknowledgement of different sites of expertise renders collaborative research a powerful tool in teacher education.

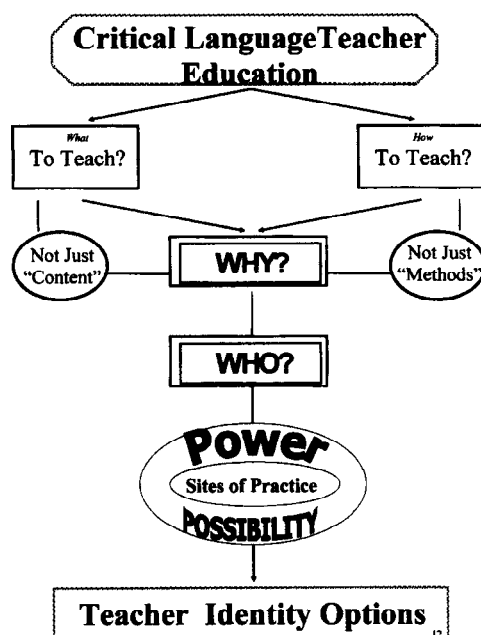
4. Towards a Model of Critical Language Teacher Education

The research addressed in this article has helped me to develop what might be called a model of critical language teacher education. The common theme in the curriculum innovation of Lin, Goldstein, and Rilling & Biles is that teacher educators need to help student teachers relate to their practice from a position of strength rather than weakness, and to utilize diverse resources to effect educational and social change. To this end, they need a wider range of identities than that of "student teacher". Angel Lin's student teachers, in writing for a community of peers, entered a wider community that was affirming of their experience and expertise, encouraging them to imagine different ways of relating to the language teaching profession; Goldstein's performed ethnography, which enabled student teachers to enter their own student communities in creative and productive ways, had profound implications for practice; Rilling & Biles' technological innovations created nothing less than "virtual worlds" for the student teachers, in which risk-taking was encouraged and creativity celebrated.

The work of Pennycook, Pavlenko, and Toohey & Waterstone provides a different lens through which to examine language teacher education, given that each of these researchers is working with a different

community within the field of language teacher education. While Pennycook is working with student teachers and Pavlenko with graduate students, Toohey & Waterstone focus their research on experienced teachers. Although each community of practice offers unique insights for language teacher education, what they have in common is an understanding of language as a site of power and possibility, best understood within a theory of language as "discourse" (Kress, 1991; Fairclough, 1992). Pennycook's "critical moments", Pavlenko's linguistic autobiographies, and Toohey & Waterstone's collaborative research all suggest that language is at the very centre of struggles for legitimacy. While teachers of language may often feel illegitimate, that very language can also serve to construct more powerful identities for both experienced and less experienced language teachers.

Drawing on the insights of the language teacher educators discussed in this article, and reflecting on my own experience as a language teacher educator in Canada, I am proposing a model of critical language teacher education, and inviting comment and critique from the broader field of language education.



The model suggests that when student teachers enter language education programs, the two central questions they ask are as follows: "What do I teach?" and "How do I teach it?" The research examined in this article suggests that teaching is not just about "content" and that teaching is not just about "methods". We have to ask the question, "Why do we teach *what* we teach?" and "Why do we teach the way we teach?" Of central interest is who the student teachers are, what histories they bring with them to the

classroom, which communities they desire to be part of, and what learners they will have to teach.

The model suggests that learners, teachers, student teachers, and teacher educators are part of wider sociocultural communities in which there is frequently unequal access to power and possibility. The challenge for language teacher educators is to better understand

the communities of practice in which student teachers work, and to provide a wider range of identity options for both pre-service and in-service teachers. This will in turn give student teachers a greater sense of legitimacy in the language classroom, thereby enhancing the process of language learning and teaching. The challenge is worthy of our best efforts.

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