Second Language Teacher Education

Edited by

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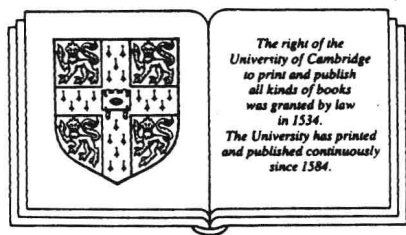
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Preface

This book is an examination of major issues and practices in second language teacher education. It is designed as a state-of-the-art account of current approaches to second language teacher education, as well as a source book for those designing programs and activities in classroom observation, supervision, teacher self-evaluation, teaching practice, and related components of either preservice or inservice teacher education programs.

The field of teacher education is a relatively underexplored one in both second and foreign language teaching. The literature on teacher education in language teaching is slight compared with the literature on issues such as methods and techniques for classroom teaching. Few of the articles published in the last twenty years are data-based, and most consist of anecdotal wish lists of what is best for the teacher. "Minimal attention is paid to the development of teachers in second languages either conceptually or research-wise" (in Lange, this volume, p. 252). Little data have been gathered on the kinds of programs that work and don't work, and there has been a reluctance to subject assumptions behind current approaches and practices to critical scrutiny.

As we move from a period of "teacher training," characterized by approaches that view teacher preparation as familiarizing student teachers with techniques and skills to apply in the classroom, to "teacher education," characterized by approaches that involve teachers in developing theories of teaching, understanding the nature of teacher decision making, and strategies for critical self-awareness and self-evaluation, teacher educators need to reassess their current positions and practices and examine afresh the assumptions underlying their own programs and practices. This book is designed to provide the data for this kind of self-reflection and examination. Its specific goals are:

- to help define the conceptual base upon which the design of teacher education programs in language teaching is based;
- to report on significant and innovative practices in teacher education;
- to describe research issues and research findings in second language teacher education and to identify areas for further research;
- to provide a source of information for teacher educators to use in designing teacher education programs;

– to serve as a text for use in courses on second language teacher education.

The need for such a comprehensive overview of issues in teacher education in second language teaching is prompted by the fact that the field of second and foreign language teaching is constantly being renewed both by different claims as to what teachers need to know, as well as by different approaches to the process of developing this knowledge base in future teachers. In planning this book, we therefore invited a representative group of teacher educators from around the world to address major issues in second language teacher education, in order to provide a focused exploration of issues of both content and process in teacher education. Although the contributors were invited to address a range of diverse issues and practices, including the areas of observation, supervision, practice teaching, and self-observation, and to document successful practices in many different kinds of teacher education programs, a number of themes nevertheless recur throughout the collection:

– a movement away from a "training" perspective to an "education" perspective and recognition that effective teaching involves higher-level cognitive processes, which cannot be taught directly
– the need for teachers and student teachers to adopt a research orientation to their own classrooms and their own teaching
– less emphasis on prescriptions and top-down directives and more emphasis on an inquiry-based and discovery-oriented approach to learning (bottom-up)
– a focus on devising experiences that require the student teacher to generate theories and hypotheses and to reflect critically on teaching
– less dependence on linguistics and language theory as a source discipline for second language teacher education, and more of an attempt to integrate sound, educationally based approaches
– use of procedures that involve teachers in gathering and analyzing data about teaching.

The teacher education program and the teacher educator are seen to be sources of knowledge, experience, and resources for student teachers to use in exploring and developing their own approach to teaching. Such a program needs to be firmly grounded in both theory and practice, informed on the one hand by an understanding of what we know about the nature of classroom second language teaching and learning, and on the other by a scrutiny of classroom data, either in the form of direct or indirect teaching experiences.

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Part I Issues and approaches in teacher education

The chapters in this section of the book provide a context for the collection as a whole by overviewing the major issues involved in designing teacher education programs for second language teachers. They provide a rationale for a range of activities and processes in teacher education, directed both at skills and techniques as well as more abstract principles and theory.

Richards in Chapter 1 outlines the dilemma for teacher educators who wish to derive principles for successful practice from empirical data rather than from speculation and who wish to equip teachers-in-preparation with both low-inference, readily learnable classroom skills as well as higher-level principles and decision-making skills. The dilemma as Richards sees it is that while low-inference techniques and teaching behaviors can be readily taught, their aggregation does not necessarily result in good teaching. Rather, good teaching is a complex, abstract phenomenon comprising clusters of skills, such as those relating to classroom management and lesson structuring. These cannot readily be atomized into discrete skills to be mastered separately. The chapter concludes with the suggestion that a balance needs to be struck between holistic and atomistic approaches to teacher preparation.

In Chapter 2 Gebhard, Gaitan, and Oprandy also consider the limitations of prescriptions on how to teach. They propose a multiple-activities approach to teacher preparation through which student teachers are provided with opportunities to investigate their own teaching and the teaching of others, to carry out investigative projects in their own classrooms, and to discuss teaching in a range of contexts. The multiple-activities approach is particularly effective in developing decision-making skills. To be fully effective, however, it is necessary for the teacher educator to be sensitive to interactions between teaching, observation, and investigation, and to make connections between these different activities.

Ellis examines activities in teacher education in more detail in Chapter 3, and provides an analytical framework for describing and developing activities. He distinguishes between *experiential* and *awareness-raising* practices, and illustrates the use of a wide range of activities that focus on different dimensions of teacher awareness and skill.

Despite difference in focus, all three chapters share some underlying

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themes. All three point out the inadequacy of a prescriptive approach to teacher development in which a set of imperatives for practice are imported from outside the classroom. While the shortcomings of the prescriptivist approach are aired most comprehensively by Richards, they are also dealt with by Gebhard et al. and by Ellis. Given the inadequacies of prescriptivism, it is incumbent upon teacher preparation programs to work toward the ideal of the autonomous practitioner, that is, someone who is able to draw on knowledge and skills in making on-line decisions to solve problems that are unique to a particular teaching situation. In practical terms, these three chapters underline the importance of providing teachers-in-preparation with a range of experiences. Each provides a unique perspective on classroom action and interaction, while reinforcing the others to provide a much richer picture than if the classroom were explored from a single perspective.

1 The dilemma of teacher education in second language teaching

Jack C. Richards

One indication of the degree of professionalization of a field is the extent to which "the methods and procedures employed by members of a profession are based on a body of theoretical knowledge and research" (Carr and Kemmis 1983: 12). In second language teaching, teacher education programs typically include a knowledge base, drawn from linguistics and language learning theory, and a practical component, based on language teaching methodology and opportunity for practice teaching. In principle, knowledge and information from such disciplines as linguistics and second language acquisition provide the theoretical basis for the practical components of teacher education programs.

One interpretation of the development of second language teaching in the last twenty years or so is that a substantial degree of professionalization has taken place. Thus, the theoretical basis of the field has moved from the study of phonetics and grammatical theory – once considered a necessary (and sometimes sufficient) basis to launch a student into a career as a language teacher – to include the study of pedagogical grammar, discourse analysis, second language acquisition, classroom-based research, interlanguage syntax and phonology, curriculum and syllabus design, and language testing. Language teaching has achieved a sense of autonomy, with its own knowledge base, paradigms, and research agenda.

Yet if a primary goal of graduate teacher preparation programs is the preparation of effective language teachers, this claim to professionalism may be misplaced. While there has been an expansion of the theoretical concepts, research issues, and subject-matter content which constitute much of the field, few who are engaged in developing this knowledge base or research agenda would claim any direct relation between their work and the preparation of language teachers. Research or theory that deals with the nature of second language teaching per se is scant in the professional literature. While there is a body of practice in second language teacher education – based almost exclusively on intuition and common sense – until recently there has been little systematic study of

second language teaching processes that could provide a theoretical basis for deriving practices in second language teacher education.

To prepare effective language teachers, it is necessary to have a theory of effective language teaching – a statement of the general principles that account for effective teaching, including a specification of the key variables in effective language teaching and how they are interrelated. Such a theory is arrived at through the study of the teaching process itself. This theory should form the basis for the principles and content of second language teacher education, which is thus dependent upon the following sequence: (a) Describe effective language teaching processes; (b) develop a theory of the nature of effective language teaching; and (c) develop principles for the preparation of language teachers.

This chapter examines two approaches to the study of teaching from which theories of teaching as well as principles for teacher preparation programs can be developed. The first, a *micro approach* to the study of teaching, is an analytical approach that looks at teaching in terms of its directly observable characteristics. It involves looking at what the teacher *does* in the classroom. The second, a *macro approach,* is holistic (see Britten 1985a, b) and involves making generalizations and inferences that go beyond what can be observed directly in the way of quantifiable classroom processes. Both approaches can be used to develop theories of effective teaching and to derive principles for teacher education. However, they lead in different directions, and this is the dilemma of teacher education.[1]

The micro approach to teaching and teacher education

The principles of the micro approach to the study of teaching were developed from the study of the teaching of content subjects and were only subsequently applied to the study of second language teaching. In content-matter teaching, there is a long tradition of research into what teacher and teaching variables account for higher levels of learner achievement. This research began by examining teacher characteristics such as the teacher's interests, attitudes, judgment, self-control, enthusiasm, adaptability, personality, or degree of training to see how these factors influenced learning outcomes. Teachers were often evaluated according to how they matched profiles of good teachers derived from the opinions of experts, despite the fact that there was no evidence that teachers having these characteristics were actually successful in bringing

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1 The terms *teacher education* and *teacher preparation* are used synonymously throughout this book.

about higher levels of learning in their pupils (Peterson and Walberg 1979; Ornstein 1985).

In the 1950s, a different dimension was added when research began to examine teaching rather than the teacher. The focus was on what the teacher *does* rather than what the teacher *is*. Systematic analysis of teacher–student interaction in the classroom, as well as other aspects of teacher and learner behavior, led to the development of systems for the coding and analysis of teaching in real time. The focus was on how effective teachers achieved their instructional goals and the kinds of processes they employed. Systematic observation of teachers indicated that

when teachers are visited by observers trained to record their behavior accurately and objectively, appropriate analysis of the records reveals stable differences between the behaviors of teachers who are more effective in helping pupils grow in basic skills, as well as in some affective areas. (Medley 1979: 16)

Effectiveness was generally measured in these studies by higher-than-predicted gains on measures of achievement in math and reading. The emphasis had thus shifted to the behaviors of effective teachers and the relationship between teacher behavior (what the teacher does) and pupil learning. This became known as *process-product research*.

By the 1970s, after a decade of systematic observation of teachers, a number of aspects of effective teaching had been described and used as the basis for models of effective teaching (Joyce and Weil, 1980). Once identified, effective teaching strategies could be incorporated into various kinds of training packages and pre- and posttraining differences assessed (Mohlman, Kierstead, and Gundlach 1982).

One characteristic of effective teaching that was soon identified was the teacher's use of questions. Questioning is one of the most commonly employed techniques in the teacher's repertoire. Elementary school teachers may ask as many as 150 questions per hour when teaching science or social studies (Gall 1970). Researchers were consequently interested in finding out how teachers use questions and what constitutes effective use of questions in the classroom.

Among the aspects of question use that have been investigated are (a) the frequency of low-level and high-level questions (low-level questions require recall of facts; high-level questions require synthesis, analysis, and critical thinking) (Winne 1979); (b) the degree to which students are encouraged to ask questions (Graesser and Black 1985); (c) the amount of wait-time teachers allow after a question (i.e., the length of the pause before which a student is called upon to answer a question) (Rowe 1974); (d) the amount of multiple-response questions used (questions to which at least three or four students may each provide a re-

sponse) (Gallagher and Aschner 1963); and (e) the number of times teachers repeat their own or student questions (Orlich et al. 1985).

The quantity and quality of questioning that teachers engage in is thought to influence the quality of classroom learning (Orlich et al. 1985). For example, higher-level questions are thought to facilitate better learning (Redfield and Rousseau 1981). The use of student questions rather than teacher questions orients instruction toward students. Increasing the wait-time after questions can lead to increased length of student responses, a greater frequency of student questions, a greater degree of student involvement in lessons, and more participation by slower students (Rowe 1974). Multiple-response questions encourage student participation in learning, while repetition of questions wastes class time.

The study of teachers' use of questions during instruction and the effects of different patterns of question use on student learning thus enables effective and ineffective question strategies to be distinguished. This information can then be used to teach teachers how to use more effective questioning strategies. A variety of training formats can be employed to modify a teacher's use of the desired instructional feature.

For example, the Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development developed a minicourse designed to improve teachers' questioning skills. The components are a film, which explains the concepts, and training, which includes modeling, self-feedback, and microteaching. In field tests with forty-eight elementary teachers, there was an increase in redirection questions (those requiring multiple student responses) from 26.7% to 40.9%; thought-provoking questions rose from 37.3% to 52.0%; and the use of probing or prompting questions increased from 8.5% to 13.9%. At the same time, teachers' repetition of their own questions decreased from 13.7% to 4.7%, and the answering of the teacher's own questions by the teacher decreased from 4.6% to 0.7% (Borg et al. 1970: 82).

Other dimensions of the instructional process that have been found to make a significant contribution to student learning include time-on-task and feedback. Time-on-task, or *engaged time,* refers to time during a lesson in which learners are actively engaged in instructional tasks (Good and Beckerman 1978). For example, Teacher A and Teacher B are both teaching the same reading lesson. In Teacher A's class, learners are actively engaged in reading tasks for 75% of the lesson, the remaining time being taken up with noninstructional activities such as taking breaks, lining up, distributing books and homework, and making arrangements for future events. Students in Teacher B's class, however, are actively engaged in reading for only 55% of the lesson. Not surprisingly, studies of time-on-task have found that the more time students spend studying content, the better they learn it. In one study (Stallings