Book Review. *Initial English Language Teacher Education: International Perspectives on Research, Curriculum and Practice* edited by Darío Banegas (2017). London: Bloomsbury, 228pp. ISBN 9781474294423

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The field of initial English language teacher education (henceforth, ELTE) has received increasing attention internationally over the last two decades. This interest has emerged as a consequence of the English language morphing into an international language, fuelled by the driving forces of globalisation, as much as by rising demands to skill an ever greater number of teachers of English in ever more diversified contexts. In this area, the growing bodies of research on ELTE and how teachers learn to teach have broadly converged, suggesting that initial language teacher education is essentially a situated and contextual activity (Barahona, 2015). From this perspective, it is accepted that student teachers´ learning centrally involves assimilating the cultural practices that are valued in the social situations of their development.

One of the latest contributions in the field of ELTE is this book edited by Darío Banegas, *Initial English Language Teacher Education: International Perspectives on Research, Curriculum and Practice.* The book is a collection of research studies undertaken in various parts of the world — Argentina, Uruguay, China, South Africa, Kenya, Spain, Singapore, Brazil, Colombia and the UK. The volume contains 12 chapters from differing global and educational perspectives, perspectives which are framed by an introduction and conclusion by Banegas. The introduction asserts the critical goals of the edited collection, as well as presenting the theoretical underpinnings that inform the work of contributors. Each chapter adopts a similar structure based on objectives, introduction, theoretical perspectives, study design, findings and conclusions. Moreover, each chapter includes a section called *Questions for change* that encourages the reader to reflect on the issues raised in the chapter toward relating these to their own context. In the conclusion, Banegas establishes connections between the different chapters and advocates areas for further research.

The diversity of contexts presented in this volume provide an opportunity to hear voices from less familiar settings, voices which are conventionally underrepresented in the global field of initial language teacher education, especially those from Africa and South America. This is of major significance, as teachers of English learn to teach as they engage in social activities in specific contexts that have their own affordances and constraints. This variety of contexts enables new insights to be drawn into critical themes and theoretical issues that are relevant to all English language teacher educators. Some of these critical themes centre on identity, school curriculum, feedback, and beliefs and engagement. These are variously examined through the lenses of sociocultural theory, interpretive inquiry, narrative analysis, communities of practice, and Cultural Historical Activity Theory. These theoretical underpinnings enrich the analyses and provide complex insights into initial ELTE by focussing directly on situated contexts of teacher learning, with the useful articulation of theoretical analysis intertwined within the particularities of each context. Unsurprisingly, qualitative methods are primarily used to understand the complexities of how teachers learn, including the affordances and constraints in these processes of teacher learning.

The need to address the gap between theory and practice has become a key issue of research interest in the field of teacher education internationally. The book attempts to address this issue across the volume. For example, one early chapter by Chunmei Yan provides insights into how pre-service teachers' engagement can be boosted through implementation of an action research project in a Chinese teacher education program. The intervention attempted to bridge this ubiquitous gulf between theory and practice, encouraging student teachers to make informed pedagogical decisions grounded in theoretical approaches so as to become agents of change in their educational settings. Yan concludes that teacher educators must scaffold learning platforms to strengthen the link between pre-service teachers' engagement and their academic learning. In subsequent chapters (Chapters 3 and 4, by Willy Renandya and Angelina Nduku Kioko, respectively), the theory-practice divide is further encountered, assessed as needing to be urgently

addressed in order to improve the quality of English language instruction in contexts in which learning English is markedly examination-centered. Moreover, these chapters engage with the critical challenges faced by English teachers who themselves lack advanced English language knowledge, which can further erode teacher self-confidence. Chapter 6 by Gabriel Díaz Maggioli, offers a beacon of hope, presenting an action research project that effectively encouraged pre-service teachers to adopt a design approach towards solving problems in the classroom, by affording students opportunities to combine theory with their own experiences. Diaz Maggioli's analysis concludes that improving the quality of theoretical discussions can provide a relatively realistic solution to classroom problems. This accords with a later chapter by Fernada Coelho Liberali, which focuses on how theory and practice can be integrated through the implementation of a *Multicultural Education Project* that fostered teachers' understanding of students' contextual needs from a critical, collaborative perspective.

Another theme present in several studies in this volume is the potential of blended and online programs and platforms as emerging learning environments for teacher learning. For example, Chapter 6 suggests adopting a design mindset for creating online environments that foster future teacher thinking about relatively realistic and practical approaches to classroom integration of technologies. This study reports on an innovative course design which encourages student teachers to more actively participate in teaching activities. According to this study, teachers´ learning is expanded as students move through their individual and collective Zones of Proximal Development, via a variety of scaffolds (modelling, peer mediation, and developing metacognition). This chapter can be very useful for teacher education program leaders who are considering implementing online environments.

A further chapter, by Manzur and Zemborain, explores the evolution of student teachers' f as they participate in an online course in Argentinian Patagonia. The affordances that this online course offers seem to go beyond the development of technical capabilities of teachers, with an online program working to mediate the construction of the identities of these future teachers of English. Through the examination of three student teachers' narratives, the authors became aware of the close link between student teachers' visions of language teaching and learning and their own experiences as language learners. The results of

this study suggest that the online platform allowed student teachers develop their professional identities reflecting on their experiences and constructing knowledge for teaching English. Another study, by Reyes Torres, endorses the potential of engaging student teachers in meaningful reflection, through provision of a space for in-class discussions, as well as via social media. In this case, it is argued that equipping pre-service teachers with opportunities to reflect leads to the production of knowledge, framed primarily through their own experiences and sociocultural backgrounds. Moreover, it is suggested that an instructional design which integrates reflection cycles—including via social media platforms—can allow future teachers to conceptualize learning as an attempt at meaning-making (as opposed to a process of transmission of knowledge).

Teachers´ identities constitute another prominent theme across the studies. This is not surprising; as over the last decade research on identity has gained popularity as it has become clear that teachers' subjectivities influence directly their practices and teaching decision-processes (Barkhuizen, 2017). As mentioned above, Manzur and Zemborain (Chapter 7) examine how future teachers' identities are developed as they undertake teaching activities, and how their identities are shaped by the characteristics of the online course. In this case, the development of three student teachers´ identities is examined in detail, centring on their discursive constructions. Manzur and Zemborain highlight that teachers´ identity is a complex construction developed as the result of the integration of five dimensions: *being, becoming, knowing, doing* and *belonging*. This development emerges as teachers engage in meaningful learning experiences which can take the form of online and/or face to face interactions. Further exploring the topic of identity, Villacañas de Castro, in Chapter 11, presents a project in which a group of student teachers from Spain create video identity texts where they examine how their own history as learners has influenced their identity as EFL teachers. This chapter is insightful in the way it conceptualises teachers´ identity as emancipation from oppressed practices.

The contribution by Cuesta Medina, Edlund Anderson and McDougald (Chapter 8) does not deal directly with the theme of identity. Instead, it focuses on the perceptions of teacher educators with regard to student teachers´ self-regulation in Colombia. Results of this study suggest that teacher educators believe that student teachers possess insufficient self-regulatory strategies and

argue that student teachers need to develop strategies that allow them to plan their learning and teaching trajectories successfully. In doing so, teachers could be able to more effectively and realistically manage complex and demanding teaching tasks, being empowered to design learning based on their own capacities and on an understanding of the possibilities and limitations of their context. Cuesta Medina, Edlund Anderson and McDougald conclude by providing several recommendations for integrating an inquiry-based learning approach as a way of fostering teacher self-regulation strategies relatively explicitly—not only for future teachers—but also for students in primary and secondary level. From this perspective, self-regulation and self-efficacy are concepts that are closely related to teachers´ identity and reflection. In this respect, the chapter offers new insights into core issues in initial English language teacher education.

Recent research in ELT has indicated that reflection should be at the centre of language teacher education (Farrell, 2017, 2018). This is also demonstrated in Banegas´ volume, as this perspective emerges naturally in most studies reported, albeit in differing ways. However, as some authors argue, it is not only elevated levels of teacher reflection that can lead to improved teachers´ practices, but also the capabilities possessed by teachers to critically examine their context (and transform it).

The final chapters are useful examples of how such a critical perspective on ELTE can be illuminating. Villacañas de Castro examines the potentiality of critical awareness as a tool to mediate teachers´ autonomy. This study explores the possible routes by which student teachers can be skilled to evaluate their teaching practices and become more autonomous educators. This chapter further argues that there is an imperative to promote a range of developmental activities (such as the production of identity video texts) as an effective strategy for student teachers to emancipate themselves from their oppressive experiences as learners. These perspectives offer useful insights as to how critical pedagogy can be effectively implemented in initial language teacher education. Finally, Coelho Liberali addresses the primary issues that have emerged as a result of globalisation, centred on the changing function of the English language and the potentialities of critical pedagogy to empower teachers. Coelho Liberali uses experiences in Brazil to highlight how English language teachers need to be critical and learn how to create new possibilities in this complex world.

In reflecting on this volume, it is apparent that its contribution rests on its determined focus on initial ELTE (as opposed to more familiar discussions situated in post graduate programs). This is important as in much of Latin America, and other EFL contexts, teachers of English are trained in undergraduate teacher education programs. *Initial English Language Teacher Education: International Perspectives on Research, Curriculum and Practice* offers new and important perspectives, as have been summarized here. These perspectives are refreshing in their insight and their diversity as teachers´ learning experiences from settings such as Africa and Latin America are revealed. The powerful issues of identity, reflection, and critical pedagogy are woven through the contributions to this volume, providing insightful understanding that must inevitably provoke consideration about core issues in English language teacher education internationally.

Initial English Language Teacher Education: International Perspectives on Research, Curriculum and Practice is highly recommended for reading by English language teacher educators internationally, and particularly by those in Latin American and African contexts (and those who want to understand these contexts).

References

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