



Pre-service language teachers' development of appropriate pedagogies: A transition from insightful critiques to educational insights



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HIGHLIGHTS

- Practicum teachers generate critiques of their own and other teachers' practices.
- These critiques promote the development of insights about appropriate pedagogies.
- Critiques and insights are facilitated by ongoing critical reflection and action.
- Appropriate pedagogy is transformative for both students and (pre-service) teachers.
- Teacher education courses should promote agency and critical reflection in practice.

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how pre-service teachers of Portuguese developed ideas about contextually appropriate pedagogies during their practicum as well as what they perceived as the impact of their pedagogical practices on student learning. The findings suggest that teacher education models which promote conscious critical reflection and teacher agency, and provide space for trainees to engage constructively both with their peers and with students are likely to generate innovative ideas for teaching which are appropriate to the specific contexts within which trainees teach.

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1. Introduction

An increasing number of studies (e.g. Sanchez, 2013; Avalos, 2011; Bolitho, 2016; Mann & Edge, 2013) have recognised the cognitive, emotional and social factors that impact on teachers' sense- and decision-making processes. Such studies also agree that beginning to teach is a particularly complex stage of teachers' professional lives which needs institutional and human support of different sorts (The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2005). As a result, teacher education programmes which constitute an important means of support for

beginning teachers (Diaz Maggioli, 2012; Wright, 2010) are increasingly being required to prepare teachers to be able to foresee eventual challenges in classroom practice and to be imaginative and skilful in addressing these challenges (Avalos, 2000; United Nations Educational, Scientific And Cultural Organization; [UNESCO], 1998). Not surprisingly, therefore, recent literature on teacher education (e.g. Bolitho, 2016; Boon & Lewthwaite, 2015) has emphasised the need to re-examine traditional transmission approaches to pre-service teacher education (PRESETT) and to focus on the processes through which beginning teachers develop knowledge and skills as they build their informed understandings of effective teaching (Wright, 2010). Underlying this is also the need for research which seeks to understand how teachers learn in order to develop teacher education curricula and practices which help beginning teachers to learn how to learn (Torres, 1996). The study

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reported in this paper contributes to this tradition of research by investigating how trainee teachers conceptualise their pedagogical contexts during their practicum and how this shapes their thinking and pedagogical actions.

Stuart and Tatto (2000) report that there has been a worldwide trend towards specifying what teachers will know and be able to do at the end of their initial preparation. This has led to two observable models of PRESETT. On the one hand is the traditional training-transmission model of teacher education (Borg, 2015; Diaz Maggioli, 2012) which is based on a behaviourist view of knowledge. Such a model focuses primarily on the technical aspects of learning, teaching and management (Hayes, 1997) and aims to develop skills that can be individually assessed (Stuart & Tatto, 2000). Johnson (2006) explains that this perspective of teacher education is historically grounded in the positivist paradigm and structured around the assumption that trainees could learn about the subject content they are expected to teach, then observe other 'expert' teachers, practise in the teaching practicum and develop pedagogical expertise in the learned skill. Bolitho (2016) suggests, however, that a weakness of this approach to PRESETT is that methodology is often taught as a theoretical discipline detached from the practical experience that would support trainee teachers in their school practice. Where theory and practice are integrated, training-transmission oriented cultures might continue to promote practicum experiences based on the simple copying of ritual behaviour (Edge, 2011; Maingay, 1988) from more experienced teachers. While this is likely to cause educational stagnation (Bolitho, 2016), there is documented evidence of the value of passing on tried and trusted teaching traditions to next generations of teachers (Edge, 2011; Mann & Edge, 2013). Erkmen (2013), for example, shows how trainee teachers, shadowing an experienced teacher, gain understanding of new techniques through a process of scaffolding which enables them to make informed decisions of what to emulate.

On the other hand, new insights into professional learning have led to a shift from transmission to development-constructivist models of teacher education. These models emphasise the value of the social and institutional contexts in which teachers learn to teach and their prior knowledge, beliefs and experiences (Crandall, 2000; Freeman, 2002; Sato & Kleinsasser, 2004) on their learning and decision making. Goodwin (2010) suggests that the development of quality teachers relies on the development of five main knowledge domains which include personal knowledge, contextual knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, sociological knowledge and social knowledge. These different knowledge domains influence, and are influenced by, experiences in context and they inform both constructivist and socio-constructivist approaches to teacher education. In fact, it is now clear that studying the content and pedagogy of a discipline does not ipso facto translate into appropriate teaching practices. Social construction of good practices which build on all knowledge domains, as opposed to handing down recommended practices, is now being encouraged, resulting in the mapping of research concepts like reflective practice (Griffiths, 2000; Lockhart & Richards, 1994), action research (Edge, 2001) and exploratory practice (Allwright & Hanks, 2009), all of which legitimize teachers' knowledge and highlight the importance of reflective inquiry into the experiences of teachers as mechanisms for change in classroom practice (Johnson, 2006).

At the heart of these research orientations is the assumption that the ethnocentricity of North-generated pedagogical ideas and practices may not always be appropriate in contexts in the global South. A number of studies (e.g., Bertoncino, Murphy, & Wang, 2002; Copland, Garton, & Burns, 2014; O'Sullivan, 2002) have suggested that a range of challenges, such as large under-resourced classes, faced by educational systems in developing world countries

might significantly affect the implementation of pedagogical practices promoted elsewhere. As a result, there is a growing need for teacher education programmes to train teachers capable of generating innovative ideas that are grounded in the realities of their specific working contexts (Kuchah, 2017). Drawing from studies which emphasise the need for pedagogical approaches to emerge from, and respond to, changes in society, the immediate environment, the learners and the teachers (Kuchah, 2016; Bax, 2003; Holliday, 1994; Rubdy, 2008), this paradigm shift sees the developing teacher as a decision maker, autonomous professional and a reflective practitioner (Stuart & Tatto, 2000). Kumaravadivelu (2001) proposes three pedagogic parameters - *particularity*, *practicality* and *possibility* - for re-orienting language pedagogy. The *pedagogy of particularity* stresses the need for practitioners to become aware of the specific backgrounds and needs of their learners; engaging in a continual cycle of observation, reflection, and action is thus a prerequisite for the development of context-sensitive pedagogical knowledge. The *pedagogy of practicality* seeks to equate the importance of practitioners' and academics' theories by empowering teachers to 'theorize from their practice and practice what they theorize' (Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p. 59). Kumaravadivelu (2001, p. 541) argues that 'no theory of practice can be useful and usable unless it is generated through practice it is the practicing teacher who, given adequate tools for exploration, is best suited to produce such a practical theory'. The *pedagogy of possibility* links language teaching and social transformation by drawing from 'the socio-political consciousness that students bring with them to the classroom' (Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p. 59). Central to Kumaravadivelu's ideas is the perception of practitioners as active sense makers capable of generating knowledge from their understanding of the macro and micro contexts in which they interact with colleagues and learners.

In this respect, schools and classrooms have been seen as communities of practice (Haneda, 2006; Wenger, 1998) where individual teacher knowledge can be co-constructed through continuous engagement with peers and students. Studies that have looked at mentoring (e.g. Harrison, Dymoke, & Pell, 2006; Hennissen, Crasborn, Brouwer, Korthagen, & Bergen, 2010; Sundli, 2007) have mainly focused on the role and contribution of mentors to trainee identity formation and professional learning. Those that have examined trainee teachers' learning processes (e.g. Cajkler & Wood, 2016; Cheng, Tang, & Cheng, 2012; Erkmen, 2013; John, 2000; Tang, Wong, & Cheng, 2012; Vujčić, Boneta, & Ivković, 2015) have observed varying models of professional intuition, thinking and learning. These models are reflected in what Edge (2011) refers to as the interacting roles of copying, applying, theorising, reflecting and acting. Erkmen (2013), for example, shows how trainee teachers shadowing an experienced teacher gain understanding of new techniques through a process of scaffolding which enables them to make informed decisions of what to emulate. Vujčić et al. (2015) and Cajkler and Wood (2016) highlight the impact of a research-based reflective approach to practice on student-teachers' development of (self-) reflective competencies. The process through which these competencies are developed are initiated by trainers and mutually constructed with trainees and their mentors. While mutual construction of pedagogical knowledge around practical lessons might be a useful way of helping future teachers' observation and reflection skills, there is a danger that trainer-guided reflections might lead to illusory consensus and uncritical acceptance of others' opinions (Vujčić et al., 2015). Studies by Tang et al. (2012) and Cheng et al. (2012) examine the professional learning of trainee teachers from a constructivist perspective and show how factors such as hands on experiences in the field, social interactions with peers and critical reflections on the theory-practice praxis help them develop a conception of

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