History-in-Person and Teacher Development: Bringing the Past into the Present

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Beginning at the end: Acknowledgement

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Davin, K.J., Chavoshan, I., & Donato, R. (2018). All your teachers are there when you teach. System, 72, 139-150.
Goals of Presentation

1) Motivation of study and History-in-Person
2) One research study on History-in-Person
3) How can we support change in professional practice?

An observation

Despite our best efforts to demonstrate, model, provide tools, etc. to novice teachers, many novices seem to engage in rather questionable language teaching practices during clinical experiences.

Agree?
If yes, examples?
Talk-in-Interaction is hard to change

One practice that I’ve found difficult to change is **talk-in-interaction**, i.e., using language in context to **organize classroom life**, for **instruction**, and for **engaging students in language use**.

“Talk-in-interaction is the most basic environment for the **development**, the **use**, and the **learning of language**” (Schegloff, 2003).

Why is talk-in-interaction **important**?

Sociocultural theory maintains that learning and development are largely the result of one’s interactions with more knowledgeable others who **mediate** novices’ performance, i.e., guide, assist, and support novices during problem-solving.

**Mediation** is provided with **external tools**, most notably language.

The quality of this **discursive mediation** is **consequential** to what learners can and cannot do.
Why is talk-in-interaction hard to transform?

Talk-in-interaction is hard to plan. It is unpredictable and cannot be scripted.

Talk-in-interaction requires understanding what the learner needs in the moment (here the ZPD is relevant and contingent responses).

Talk-in-interaction requires having a theory of learning that goes beyond input and output.
Previous Language Learning Experiences...

New FL teachers enter the classroom with years of experience as language learners, what Lortie (1975) calls “apprenticeship of observation”.

New FL teachers have personal history-based beliefs about teaching (and talking) that impact their practice (Holt-Reynolds, 1992).

New teachers previous language learning experiences influence conceptualizations of foreign language teaching during teacher education (Borg, 2015).

At the crossroads in teacher education
An observation that resonated

Pre-service teachers images of instruction are based on “largely unarticulated, yet deeply ingrained, everyday concepts about language, language learning and language teaching that are based on their own L2 instructional histories and lived experiences” (Lantolf & Johnson, 2007).

It is said...

We often (begin to) teach in the way we were taught.

(Rather than how we were taught to teach)
The (research)question is however...

IF...
memories of previous instruction function as de facto guides for what teachers do in classrooms (Freeman, 1992),

THEN...
what is needed are analyses of actual practices to demonstrate how these practices might have been influenced by the teachers’ history as language learners (Borg, 2006)

The Concept of History-in-Person

An individual’s history-in-person is the sediment from past experiences upon which one improvises in response to the individual’s position afforded or constrained in the present.

Historical experiences provide resources for individuals and their practices and leave traces in [current] experience.

(Holland & Lave, 2001)
History-in-person as a dialectical process

This perspective holds that an individual’s history is dialectically united with one’s interactions in the world...

History shapes the present....if it is remembered and made relevant by one’s present circumstances and future goals.

Van Compernolle (2019). The Qualitative Science of Vygotskian Sociocultural Psychology

Contrast with...

A portrayal of history as passe´ that is completed and fixed, something that is ‘done with’, finished, and irrelevant in the present.
A Vygotskyan view of History

Vygotsky places HISTORY at the center stage of his whole approach to understanding learning and development.

What does this mean?

Vygotsky lays foundations for a dialectical view of history as an ongoing fluid and dynamic process that is always here in the present, existing in the unending and ever-expanding dynamic layering of social practices in which the past and the present interpenetrate each other.

(Vianna and Stetsenko, 2006)
The Theoretical Model

**Figure 1.1.**
*Relations between history in person and enduring struggles.*
Application of the theoretical model

The model is built around the struggles and contradictions that may occur between individuals (internal) and institutions (external).

Holland & Lave claim that the model explains macrocultural sociopolitical and historical struggles.

But they also claim that model can be applied to every day goings-on in the workplace, households, and academic settings.

FL/L2 Education: two histories intersect...

The person history – novice teachers’ beliefs about language teaching based on their own learning experiences (+/-) plus

The institutional history – methods courses, compliance issues, marginalization of FL, lack of resources, etc. results in

Local contentious, debatable, or transformative ways of thinking and acting.
The study: research question

To what extent are novice foreign language teachers’ discursive practices shaped and explained by personal and institutional factors that make up what is described as history-in-person?

Participants and Setting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Setting</th>
<th>Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brian</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>Urban High School</td>
<td>AP French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sue</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Undergrad</td>
<td>Urban High School</td>
<td>Spanish III</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data sources linking past to present

**Thought-based Data Sources**
Autobiographic account of language learning experiences.

**Practice-based Data Sources**
Four video-recorded lessons

Brian

Studied in France after 6 years of language study.

Described French as a ‘flood of sounds coming to him.”

His *identity* as a proficient French speaker was *challenged* as he *struggled* to distinguish between words during dictation tasks.

He overgeneralized how instruction was different in France when compared to his learning experiences in the U.S. and wrote that, “[teachers] humiliate students and...they call them dumb and stuff”.
Brian: Thought-based data

**Feelings of Frustration and Humiliation**

“She just spoke to us like we were normal French students and I remember being really **frustrated** because she gave us zero slack and I got a zero out of twenty and she said- ‘Well you made twenty mistakes’. I was like ‘I could've made a thousand mistakes’ but you have to you know, give and take a little bit... and I remember thinking to myself too, that **I was embarrassed for myself** that I thought that two words were one word, etc. etc.”

Brian: Practice-based data

B:  
Il et elle (5.1)  
S:  
soit  
B:  
soit (3.1) soit  
S:  
soit (imitating Brian) (Laughter)  
B:  
oui (.) très *bon pronunciation (.) très belle  
...  
B:  
ils et elles? aient:: (2.1) aient::  
S:  
so you just don’t pronounce the n and the t at the end? aient::  
CT:  
oui (.) comme Fonzie  
B:  
aient:: (falling intonation)  
(imitating a character from a TV series that aired from the mid-70s to the mid-80s )  
CT:  
elles (.) elles sont sont trop jeunes  
B:  
Vous connaissez Arthur Fonzerelli?  
Ss:  
non ((choral response))
Brain: History-in-Person in Action

Brian was often observed to emphasize pronunciation (drilled 7 verbs)

In his reflection on the lesson Brian stated “pronunciation is a real big deal with me.”

Brian’s preoccupation with pronunciation may have been the sediment of his previous experiences as a learner in France where pronunciation created struggles with comprehension, humiliation by the teacher, and a contradiction in himself regarding his own identity as a good language learner.

History-in-person in action

Despite the emphasis on meaningful and purposeful communication in his methods course and the importance of talk-in-interaction, Brian focused on decontextualized pronunciation practice of seven verbs throughout the majority of the class period.

Why? Few institutional constraints and challenges (AP, lenient CT, independence)

Together, these circumstances afforded Brian the freedom to enact his history-in-person without contention.
Sue

Third-year undergraduate majoring in Spanish.

Enrolled in methods course and student teaching.

In contrast to Brian, Sue memories about learning Spanish were quite positive.

Sue: Thought-based data

Based on her memories of learning Spanish, Sue thought that “a foreign language is learned primarily through speaking and listening. ...It is hard to memorize a bunch of words because they are on a vocabulary list, but if the words are words that you need to communicate, then students will be more motivated to learn and remember the word.”
Sue: the past meets the present

Sue’s talk-in-interaction reflected elements of her favorite high school Spanish teacher and language learning history.

Her HS teacher encouraged interaction and conversation using the textbook vocabulary, which is what she tried to do.

However, she accepted student responses in English in her Spanish III class even though approximately 50% of the students were heritage language learners.

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Sue: contradiction and compromise

I am torn because I know you [my professor] want me to do it all in Spanish which I agree is important ... We want them to have meaningful interactions.

However, the Spanish class was taught in Spanish but the students were never asked to speak Spanish as far as I can remember.

At the same time, there are several native speakers in the class so I am worried that if I spend more time [with] the non-native speakers, the native speakers will zone out... I want you to know that I am not ignoring what you’re saying, I am trying to achieve a compromise between the two positions (i.e., my professor and my cooperating teacher).
Sue: local contentious practice

Sue’s contradictions, her practice, and her struggles resulted from

- Her history as a learner, her history-in-person
- The history of the class that she had inherited, i.e., institutional struggle, and
- The teaching practices that were promoted in her teacher education program (institutional and professional history).

Brian and Sue: contrasting cases

Sue faced school-based constraints that forced her to struggle with the relationship between her beliefs, her history-in-person, and the clinical circumstances in which she found herself teaching.

Brian’s school-based experience provided affordances that allowed his historical challenges learning French to be addressed in his present clinical circumstances.
So what can we do as Teacher Educators?

Re-visit the past to transform the present

Freeman (2002) states that “...teachers’ mental lives are storied or narrative webs of past and present experiences”
Why embrace (unplug) the (hi)story?

Teachers have agency and not categorically prisoners of their own history as learners.

Reflecting on historical learning experiences along with current or future practice is a way for teachers to improve their own practices, discursive or otherwise, by investigating their own lived experiences as learners.
What’s the (hi)story?

Harnessing the power of the past

Beliefs formed in one’s past and brought into one’s present provides a powerful source of teacher learning (Phipps & Borg, 2009) and a recognition of contradictions (Golombek & Johnson, 2004).
The history-in-person essay

1) The History-in-Person essay prompt

2) The essay reflections/analyses of the first-year teaching assistants in a graduate literature program (Spanish, French, Italian) written during the second week of a methods class.

The history-in-person essay: authoring the teaching self

Describe one POSITIVE and one NEGATIVE learning experience you have had when acquiring another language.

The experience can be in the classroom, with a particular teacher, or during a learning experience outside the classroom.

The experience may be one moment in time or over a longer period of time.

How might these experiences INFLUENCE your work as a teacher of a foreign language. In other words, how might your positive and negative experiences affect your teaching?

Negative (hi)stories

Zero speaking
All fill-in-the-blank activities
Drill the rule, nothing more - “a big junk of information”
Dated materials
Teacher never cracked a smile
No consideration of student difficulties
Only corrected workbook exercises in class
Writing was reduced to following MLA formatting and grammar
Class was only ‘a proof’ about how much we had learned at home.

Positive (hi)stories

- Learned how to manage a conversation
- Learned from integrated tasks and personalized readings
- Had the freedom to ask questions and express difficulties
- Encountered a native speaker who was patient and explained
- Learned from a teacher who was playful but not superficial
- Received support for using the target language in class
- Was made aware of progress in the language
The type of teacher I want to be: 4 themes

- Develop communicative confidence in students.
- Develop coherence in one task rather than a series of discrete tasks.
- Be comprehensible rather than give a ‘bunch of information.’
- Develop a connection with students, learn student names and interests, monitor their progress and difficulties (look at their faces), pay attention to student ideas rather than just their grammar.

Themes connected to future learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concepts based on past experience</th>
<th>Future pedagogical concepts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communicative confidence</td>
<td>Willingness to communicate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be comprehensible</td>
<td>Learn through language use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establish a connection</td>
<td>Relational pedagogy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn from students and monitor</td>
<td>Dynamic Assessment in the ZPD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connect with student ideas</td>
<td>Meaningful interactions</td>
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</tbody>
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One noteworthy comment

“Now, as I write this short essay about the consequences of positive and negative experiences on my teaching, I look even deeper into my memories. Those details that I had perhaps ignored now appear and make me think about what is good and what is not so good when it comes to teaching.”

Concluding comment

Our teacher candidates come to us with a HISTORY that...

EXPLAINS their current identities as teachers, their struggles, and their practices, while, at the same time, remaining ALIVE and IN PERSON and available as a source for transformation of their thinking and their work as teachers.
Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards.
— Soren Kierkegaard

THANK YOU for listening

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