

BOOK REVIEW

Review of *English Language Teacher Education in Chile: A Cultural Historical Activity Theory Perspective*, by Malba Barahona (2015). New York: Routledge. 202pp. ISBN 978-1138915954.

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Teacher education is one of the fields within English Language Teaching that has received considerable attention in the last decades (e.g. Freeman & Johnson 1998; Borg 2003; Farrell 2008). However, the issues teachers face during their preparation or their first years of induction and how they construct their identities as EFL or ESL teachers have not seen much consideration (Farrell 2008). Given the explosion of ELT programmes in contexts like Latin America as a result of English becoming an important subject in the school systems in many of its countries (e.g. Porto 2014; Corcoran 2011), research in EFL teacher education becomes an imperative if effective teacher preparation is expected. In this regard, Barahona's work sheds light on this issue by addressing how teachers of English in Chile learn to teach EFL in the last year of a Second Language Teacher Education programme (SLTE).

The book begins with an overview, entitled *English-language education in Chile and the southern cone: an introduction*, in which Barahona positions ELT and SLTE in South American countries like Brazil, Argentina and Chile, portraying the role of English in the education systems of these countries and how teacher-training programmes have been articulated in these contexts. She then introduces the conceptual framework of analysis that she used to examine the activity of learning to teach EFL in Chile, namely Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), which is an offshoot of sociocultural theory that understands culture as a pivotal element in learning and development.

In Chapter 2, *English language teaching education in Chile*, Barahona provides an in-depth description of the Chilean educational system, positioning ELT within the context of different educational reforms, and describing the Chilean standards for initial SLTE. She also describes the shift in the Chilean EFL curriculum from a grammar-translation orientation to a strong emphasis on receptive skills, and later a shift to a balanced distribution of skills and the acquisition of vocabulary in line with Communicative Language

Teaching, and the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR).

She describes the explosion of ELT programmes at public and private universities as a consequence of making English a compulsory subject for the last eight years of schooling, noting that ELT programmes are generally based on applied linguistics principles, following a teacher-training model instead of a reflective one. Barahona says that ELT programmes give the greatest importance to learning English, having linguistic analysis courses in the first half of the programme, teaching skills in the second half of it, and education courses distributed along the programme with school experiences taking an increasing presence in the curriculum with almost no mentoring systems.

In Chapter 3, *Issues in second-language teacher education (SLTE)*, Barahona argues that pre-service teachers' knowledge base lies in 'a dialectic relationship between knowledge and skills about language teaching and socialising and teaching as a lived experience immersed in a community' (Barahona 2015: 35). She also identifies areas of enquiry in the field of ESL/EFL teacher education, which range from the SLTE curriculum to pre-service teachers' knowledge base, the role of the practicum in how trainees learn to teach, and how they construct their identities. She connects Chilean ELT programmes with the three prevailing models of teacher education discussed in Wallace (1991), namely, the craft model, the applied science model, and the reflective model, claiming that characteristics of all three coexist within most programmes in Chile. As for teachers' knowledge base, Barahona says that the greatest efforts in SLTE programmes are given to learning English, and to a lesser extent to developing content knowledge, general pedagogical knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, curriculum knowledge, knowledge of the learner, and knowledge of educational goals and their philosophical bases. She also notes that school-based experiences play a pivotal role in the

construction of knowledge related to teaching and learning, pointing out that the practicum is a particularly valuable experience. With regards to the construction of teacher identity, she highlights aspects that are research trends today like the identity of non-native teachers or the impact of teaching programmes and schools on teachers' identity.

In chapter 4, Barahona begins to present the research on which this book focuses. She discusses the use of CHAT to explore the process of learning to teach EFL, and its suitability as a holistic approach to analysing data from the individuals, tools, and mediated action, thus seeing learning as a co-constructed social activity mediated by artefacts. Her research involved 15 trainees from a private university in Santiago doing their practicum in different schools. In line with CHAT, she considered the views of teacher educators, schoolteachers and administrators as well as observations, interviews self-reflection reports, documents and group discussions. Observations were carried out at the schools and university.

In Chapter 5, *The curriculum as a mediating tool in the activity to learn to teach EFL*, Barahona reports that pre-service teachers value their SLTE programme and the number of hours to learn English, identifying themselves with its structure, and deeming the school-based experiences and discussion seminars in their training as crucially important. However, although teacher educators see the acquisition of English as the backbone of the programme and a way to change the trainees' beliefs on language teaching and learning, viewing school-based experiences as fundamental in the training they offer, they still give more importance to learning English rather than how to teach it. Barahona also suggests that pre-service teachers appropriate various conceptual tools as they engage and interact in the distinct settings of EFL teaching. She identifies different levels of appropriation in the learning process such as reflective-adaptive practice, as trainees not only understand teaching theories, but also reflect on their applicability in their teaching contexts; partial appropriation as they understand or apply theories of practice only partly; and teaching as telling, which refers to trainees' implementing teaching theories without questioning their applicability.

Chapter 6, entitled *The conflicted identity of the practising EFL student/teacher in Chile*, highlights the decisive role the school experiences and the teaching practicum have over the trainees' learning to teach. The chapter also reports that at least one of the school-based experiences is harsh or

difficult for the trainees, who acknowledge the inherent complexities of the teaching and learning processes. Barahona uses three pre-service teachers' narratives to illustrate how conflictive the practicum is. In narrative one, the trainee portrays her experience as an overwhelming one as the context provided several obstacles for teaching. In narrative two, the pre-service teacher embraces fully the roles of a language teacher and social agent. In narrative three, the pre-service teacher shows himself insecure of embracing the job of a teacher after graduation due to the complexities he observed during his teaching practice. Nonetheless, by the end of the practicum trainees believe they have progressed considerably in developing classroom management and teaching skills.

In chapter 7, *Learning to be a teacher of EFL in Chile across the boundaries*, Barahona discusses four types of contradictions which arise from the dialectic nature of the activity systems inquired and that are typical of CHAT. The first type, called primary contradictions, is a series of inner inconsistencies in pre-service teachers' beliefs. She draws attention to how student teachers saw English as a means of communication, and how the difficulties of teaching English in English made the participants question the applicability of this belief. They also question the applicability of CLT, learner-centredness, and their perceived role as social change agents. Secondary contradictions are described as the disturbances between the different components of the activity of teaching such as subjects, community, division of labour and tools. For instance, a common secondary contradiction is observed between teacher educators, who know language methodology but not the school contexts, and their trainees who are asked to implement a given language teaching methodology despite the difficulties they perceive to do so. Contradictions at this level are also perceived between mentor teachers and pre-service teachers, between the goals of the SLTE programme and its actual syllabus, and the perceptions of the pre-service teachers' roles. Barahona also identifies tertiary contradictions. These are tensions between the more culturally advanced forms of teaching EFL and the older or dominant form of this activity. She notes that a given method is required from the trainees to teach EFL, yet, the schools prevent trainees from implementing it due to their inner functioning and assessment procedures. Lastly, quaternary contradictions emerged between the activity of learning to teach EFL and neighbouring activities in the settings of the university and the schools.

Barahona suggests that there is a misalignment between the objects of the activity of learning to teach in that trainees see the practicum as a responsibility, schoolteachers see trainees as fully trained teachers, and teacher educators expect trainees to influence the school culture positively using innovative teaching practices.

The final chapter, *English proficiency is not enough to become a competent teacher of English in Chile*, underscores the complexity of learning to teach EFL. Barahona notes that factors such as the school culture, the programme goals, teacher's beliefs and rules have a direct impact on how pre-service teachers appropriate pedagogical tools and enact the curriculum. She also notes that there should be a re-evaluation of how teacher training currently takes place, proposing that linguistic and communicative competence in English is not enough. Barahona says teaching practices can be improved overcoming the disconnection between the university and schools. She suggests middle paths to bring together school experiences and teacher education programmes, and more congruency between teacher educators and mentors proposing the development of mentoring programmes for both teacher educators and schoolteachers.

On the whole, the book does an excellent job unveiling the problems that a group of pre-service teachers of English in Chile face during their school-based experiences and practica, using an appropriate and innovative conceptual framework to analyse the data, namely CHAT. This enabled Barahona to present the results as a set of contradictions emerging at different levels including most of the elements involved in EFL teacher education, proving that teacher training is a complex network of participants, contexts and objects. This book can certainly contribute to countries embarking on the same mission of SLTE.

That said, in the concluding chapter Barahona rightly suggests that English proficiency is not enough in SLTE programmes. However, the value of this book lies in the conflicting nature of language teacher education that it presents, as previously mentioned. Also, she properly recommends that 'mentoring models should be implemented according to the specific demands

that the contexts require' (Barahona 2015: 167). Interestingly, such programmes have in fact been articulated before in Chile. A good example can be found in Schuster, Tagle and Jara (2010) who present a mentoring programme in the south of Chile combining ELT methodology, reflective practices, and mentoring theories in both theoretical and practical phases.

All in all, this book should be a recommended reading for teacher educators in Chile as well as other EFL contexts as it provides an extensive and detailed collection of the factors affecting the construction of teacher identity, pointing out significant issues emerging from the incongruences between teacher educators, school teachers, curriculum, universities and schools. This work interestingly raises issues on how complex and difficult it is to embark on the journey of EFL teacher training.

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