

The Pennsylvania State University

The Graduate School

College of the Liberal Arts

**LANGUAGE TEACHER COGNITION:
TRACING THE CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF SECOND
LANGUAGE TEACHERS**

A Dissertation in

Applied Linguistics

by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

May 2011

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ABSTRACT

Long before deciding to become second language (L2) teachers, novice teachers have subconsciously developed conceptions of teaching cultivated by their experiences as learners in both general and language education classrooms. This ‘apprenticeship of observation’ (Lortie, 1975) can foster deeply held beliefs about teaching that are carried with them as they enter L2 teacher professional development programs. Their beliefs develop from what they experience as participants in the ‘public’ side of education, but they do not experience the ‘private conversations’ in the minds of teachers. Novice teachers, then, are not aware of the conceptualizations that serve as the foundations for why teachers do what they do. The challenge for L2 teacher professional development programs is to move students of language teaching beyond their learning histories and tacit notions of teaching and mediate the development of theoretically and pedagogically sound, explicit conceptualizations of L2 teaching that may become the ‘psychological tools’ through which they think about and carry out their teaching. Using a sociocultural theoretical perspective, this study traces the learning of three second language teachers as they engage in the activity of teaching and learning in an intensive, university-level, language teacher professional development program. The findings suggest that even within the same professional development program there are tremendous differences in what and how teachers learn. The data indicate that the differences are mediated over time by their language learning and instructional histories, supportive relationships, and the agency they choose to exert on the activity systems that are part of their professional development experiences. L2 teacher researchers and professional development programs can benefit by recognizing the significant role L2 teachers’ prior experiences play in their learning and the power of individual agency and supportive relationships to mediate language teacher cognition.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to extend my deepest thanks and appreciation to my advisor and committee director, Dr. Karen E. Johnson, who has both encouraged yet challenged me by pushing my thinking beyond anything I could do on my own. I am truly grateful for the opportunity to be mentored by a true teacher's teacher, one who embodies what it means to foster learning from a sociocultural perspective.

I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. Meredith Doran, Dr. Celeste Kinginger, and Dr. Patrick Shannon, whose support and close reading of my dissertation particularly through the final stages has been invaluable to bringing this project to fruition. Another person I would like to thank for encouraging my academic development is Dr. Paula Golombek who opened the door for me to explore teacher learning long before I realized it would be the 'stuff' of my research.

I am also indebted to the very talented teachers who volunteered to participate in this study and allowed me into their worlds. In the process of capturing their learning, I became so much more aware of my own.

On a more personal note, I would like to thank my parents, Bill and Debbie Smith, for nurturing in my sisters and me the desire to push ourselves just that little bit more to see what we can accomplish. They have inspired each of us to explore beyond the surface, ask the difficult questions, value all that we have and look for the strengths in others.

I would also like to thank each of my sisters, Dori, Linda and Pam, as well as my sister-in-law, Margaret, for never letting a phone call or visit end without asking the important question, "Did you finish that thing yet?" I love you guys!

Finally, without the unwaivering love and support and endless patience of my husband, Eric, I could not have completed this process. He willingly managed the household, from shopping to laundry, and still smiled each evening as he asked about my progress. He will not have to ask, "Are you done yet?" any more. Thank you, Dear!

I know how incredibly fortunate I am to have had each of these amazing people mediating my journey. To each of you, I warmly and sincerely say, thank you.

Chapter 1: The Introduction

Background and Purpose of Research

In their 1998 *TESOL Quarterly* article, Freeman and Johnson proposed a re-conceptualization of the knowledge base underpinning second language (L2) teacher education. Their contention was that the field of L2 teacher education needed a “broader epistemological view” (p. 397), one that located the activity of teaching at the core of the knowledge base thereby recognizing “teachers as learners of language teaching” (p. 407). Given the number of scholarly conversations that have followed Freeman and Johnson’s article (see Johnston & Goettsch, 2000; Putnam & Borko, 2000; Tarone & Allwright, 2005; Widdowson, 2002), their call for repositioning the activity of teaching at the center of the knowledge-base of L2 teacher education was published at what could now be considered a critical juncture for the field of research on language teacher learning. Whether sparked or simply fanned by Freeman and Johnson’s (1998) premise, their article marks the beginning of a paradigm shift in how L2 teacher learning research and education are conceptualized, a shift that led to support of a sociocultural theoretical perspective for understanding language teacher learning (Johnson, 2009). The central premise of a sociocultural theoretical perspective is that human cognition originates in the social world and is mediated by physical and symbolic tools (Johnson, 2009; Lantolf, 2000a; Vygotsky, 1978). From this perspective, language teacher cognition is understood as emerging in and through the specific activity of their social worlds, and this understanding changes how we think about language teacher professional development (Ball, 2000; Donato & McCormick, 1994; Johnson, 2006, 2009; Johnson & Golombek, 2002, 2003; Johnston, Pawan & Mahan-Taylor, 2005; van Huizen, van Oers & Wubbels,

2005; Verity, 2000). A sociocultural theoretical perspective as an epistemological stance for understanding teacher learning no longer struggles on the periphery but instead has gained a foothold as the epistemological stance informing research on language teacher learning and education during the current historical period.

Thus, the goal of my research is to illustrate how a sociocultural theoretical perspective makes visible language teacher learning and development as it occurs in the activity of teaching and to demonstrate the explanatory power of this theoretical perspective for understanding how teachers come to know language teaching and instantiate Johnson's (2009) position that embracing a sociocultural theoretical perspective can enhance our understanding of language teacher cognition.

To begin this journey, I draw largely on Freeman's (2002) historical review of research on teacher learning in both general and language teacher education to understand the epistemological stances through which teacher learning has been "conceptualized and studied" (p. 1). This discussion closes with an exploration of why a sociocultural theoretical perspective has emerged and is currently driving research on language teacher cognition. Finally, a brief summary of the remaining chapters of the dissertation is provided.

Research on Teacher Learning: Historical Perspectives

The 1960s-70s

When research on teacher cognition began in the 1960s-70s, the positivist or process-product paradigm guided mainstream educational research (Freeman, 2002). The focus was on student outcomes and how to equip teachers with discrete teacher behaviors that when used in the classroom would 'produce' student learning. Teacher education curricula were built on the premise that when teachers mastered specific behaviors, knowledge would be successfully

parlayed to students (Freeman, 2002; Good & Brophy, 1973; Johnson, 2006; van Huizen et al., 2005). While valuable, this paradigm missed the mark for understanding teacher knowing. “Background, experience, and social context were all overlooked as potential influences on how new teachers formed knowledge in their professional education” (Freeman, 2002, p. 5).

The 1980s – Decade of Change

By the 1980s, researchers recognized the inherent complexities of teaching and moved from compiling lists of good teacher behaviors to understanding the activity of teacher learning as a complicated process unique to the individual teacher (Elbaz, 1988; Freeman, 2002; Johnson, 2006; Lampert, 1985; van Huizen et al., 2005). The mental lives of teachers became the focus of research creating a paradigm shift from process-product to interpretive research frameworks. Freeman refers to this era as the ‘Decade of Change’ as teacher researchers and educators began to recognize teachers as thinkers and agents in their learning capable of integrating personal practical knowledge with their teaching activity and develop expertise in their profession (Clandinin, 1985; Connelly, Clandinin & He, 1997; Freeman & Richards, 1993). The research of this decade established the study of teacher learning as a legitimate discipline within general education research and eventually led to the emergence of language teacher cognition as a distinct area of study (Freeman, 2002).

The 1990s – Decade of Consolidation

New theories about teacher learning and their agency in the process encouraged researchers to think differently about *how* language teacher learning was studied during what Freeman called the “Decade of Consolidation” (1990-2000). The post-modernist perspective arising in this decade influenced general education research and provided the impetus for inclusion of teachers’ voices for and about their teaching (Bisplinghoff & Allen, 1998; Florio-

Ruane, 2001; Hubbard & Power, 1999). By including teachers' perspectives on their learning, scholars acknowledged teacher learning as a socially situated, complex, moment-to-moment activity within a particular context that involved "negotiating identity and positioning knowledge" (Freeman, 2002, p. 10). The "Decade of Consolidation" brought the field to a more comprehensive understanding of teacher learning and how to study the learning process. Sleeter's (1999) work was an example of this shifting understanding as she suggested the linking of epistemologies guiding general education teacher research to deepen our understanding of teacher learning. For Sleeter, each epistemology provided some element of truth – positivism provides a focus on patterns and checklists for 'good teacher behavior', qualitative research offers portraits, research from marginalized groups highlights differences in learners, and research through a post-structuralist/post-modernist lens encourages questioning of who is conducting the research and for what reasons. Sleeter noted that as we continue to research teacher learning, thinking across epistemologies is critical because "doing so will enable us to develop not agreement and consensus, but greater wisdom about what it can mean to teach well in a pluralistic society..." (p. 2). This emphasis on how to teach in our changing society by understanding how teachers learn was also reflected in the work of language teacher education scholars who were conceptualizing language teachers' cognitive and social processes differently as well as methods to explore them (Hawkins, 2004; Johnson, 2006; Johnson & Golombek, 2003; Tarone & Allwright, 2005; van Huizen et al., 2005; Widdowson, 2002).

The New Millennium (2000-2009)

In the first years of the new millennium, Johnson and Golombek (2003) took a bold step toward the "greater wisdom" Sleeter (1999) proposed by first examining what was missing in the field. They argued that while the field of L2 teacher research was moving forward, it was doing

so without a “coherent theory of learning upon which to ground a common understanding of what the internal cognitive processes of teacher learning actually are” (p. 730). For Johnson and Golombek, a sociocultural theoretical perspective based on the tenets of a Vygotskian sociocultural theoretical perspective was the “coherent theory” (p. 730) with which to move forward.

As if in answer to their argument, Hawkins (2004) just one year later wrote of an “emergent shift of perspective” (p. 3) in how the field viewed language learning - a sociocultural shift. She noted that language learning, and consequently language teaching, was understood as comprising “co-relationships between language, culture, context, and identity” (p. 4). Johnson’s (2009) text, *Second Language Teacher Education: A Sociocultural Perspective*, provided a sound basis for further instantiating a sociocultural theoretical perspective for understanding L2 teacher cognition and posited that teacher learning emerges in and through “the inherent interconnectedness of the cognitive and the social” (Johnson, 2009, p. ix). The common element in these conversations was support for a sociocultural theoretical perspective as a “coherent theory of learning” for the study of L2 teacher cognition (Cook, Smagorinsky, Fry, Konopak, & Moore, 2002; Johnson & Golombek, 2003; Johnson, 2006, 2009; Kelly, 2006; Smagorinsky, Cook, & Johnson, 2003).

Summary

This overview describes the epistemological underpinnings that have shaped and continue to shape how language teacher learning has been understood from the positivist paradigm of defining good teacher qualities, the interpretive research paradigms that described the mental lives of teachers and recognized teacher agency in their learning, to most recently, the sociocultural theoretical perspective which understands learning as mediated in and by a

teacher's social and mental worlds (Johnson, 2009). It is important to note that the L2 teachers who participated in this study were learning in and through a second language teacher development program that was grounded in a sociocultural theoretical stance and designed to mediate teacher learning and development in the activity of teaching.

The Dissertation and Research Questions

This study embraces the emergent sociocultural theoretical shift in research on L2 teacher cognition as the epistemological foundation through which to articulate how teachers negotiate their social and cognitive worlds and how that negotiation mediates their learning and development. Using ethnographic case studies of three in-service teachers enrolled in the same intensive, university-level L2 teacher education program, the following research questions are examined:

- 1) What is the nature of L2 teacher learning as revealed through concept development and transformation of teaching activity?
 - a) What are the activity systems that mediate L2 teacher learning and development in an intensive, in-service L2 teacher education program?
 - b) What is the process of development in an intensive, in-service L2 teacher education program (i.e., microgenetic analysis)?

Overview of the Chapters

Chapter 1: The Introduction, provided an historical overview of the epistemologies guiding the research over the past 30 years on teacher cognition in general education and more recently on language teacher learning and development to trace the emergent shift to a sociocultural theoretical perspective for understanding teacher learning.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature-A Sociocultural Theoretical Perspective, provides a review of the literature on teacher learning as it has been explored from a sociocultural theoretical perspective. The chapter begins with a review of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and psychological constructs as both theory and method to understand the processes inherent in L2 teacher cognition. From a sociocultural theoretical perspective, cognition originates in the social world, and language is the mediational tool through which teachers make sense of their social and mental worlds. As such, narrative data were collected for this study, and a review of the contributions of narrative research to understanding language teacher learning is also included. The chapter closes with a discussion of A.N. Leont'ev's (1977, 1978) Activity Theory as a framework to acknowledge and understand the activity systems that emerged in the data as mediating and mediated by each teacher's learning.

Chapter 3: The Research Design, details the methodology for this study and provides a description of the participants and the contexts mediating their learning and development. Also included are descriptions of the types of data collected and an explanation of the method of data analysis.

Chapters 4: Mark-A Novice Teacher's Psychological Struggle, is the analysis of Mark's learning as a novice teacher in a new context. Four activity systems emerged as influencing his learning and development including his roles as both graduate student and teaching assistant and his struggle to balance those roles, the support systems afforded to him through his program (i.e., supervising professor, other instructors, and graduate courses), his classroom teaching activity, and his own agency as the subject of his activity. The psychological constructs of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory provide an explanatory framework to uncover the complex, non-linear nature of Mark's learning. Mark's experiences point to the challenges inherent in moving a

novice teacher from learning about L2 teaching to development of a conceptualization of L2 teaching that can transform his teaching activity.

Chapter 5: Daniel-An Experienced Teacher's Journey, traces the learning of Daniel, an international student with prior ESL and EFL teaching experiences. The university-level teaching and learning context was new for Daniel, and as he began his teaching experience, his conceptualization of teaching was guided by a pseudo-concept (Cook et al., 2002) of constructivism. In some sense, his experiences mirrored Mark's as he, too, struggled to internalize a conceptualization of teaching that could serve as the tool to mediate how he thought about his teaching. Similar activity systems emerged in Daniel's data and included his teaching activity, support systems, and his agency in the learning process. Throughout the first semester, he experienced contradictions between the expectations he had for his students and the reality that unfolded in his classroom. While he wanted to co-construct learning with his students, he struggled with how to make that happen and vacillated between feeling totally responsibility for their learning and placing full responsibility on his students. His supervising professor provided strategic mediation through which Daniel began to understand how to guide his students' learning, but as he entered Semester Two, his material conditions changed. He no longer had the mediation afforded by his supervising professor's supportive relationship, and that lack of support coupled with non-responsive, apathetic students, pushed Daniel to become frustrated. By the close of Semester Two, instead of creating learning partnerships with his students, he shifted total responsibility for learning to his students. Like Mark, Daniel's experiences provided evidence of the power of the classroom context to mediate a teacher's learning particularly when a teacher does not have a fully developed conceptualization to guide his teaching.

Chapter 6: Tony-Teaching through Expertise, tells a very different story than each of the others. Tony was an experienced teacher like Daniel, however he had a much longer and varied L2 teaching history which included ESL and EFL teaching in the United States and overseas. Through these experiences, he developed and was able to articulate his fully internalized conceptualization of L2 teaching that was built on communicative language teaching. In addition, Tony's conceptualization was consistent with the philosophy of his professional development program. Because his beliefs were reflective of this new learning context and reinforced on a regular basis, he maintained a high level of self-confidence in his teaching activity and did not feel cognitive dissonance throughout the first year in the program. As such, the expertise he had developed guided how he thought about his teaching, and he was confident that he knew what his students needed. Tony's experiences were mediated by the same activity systems as Mark and Daniel, but it was his expertise rather than the activity systems that mediated how he thought about and approached his teaching activity, and there was no evidence of change in his activity.

Chapter 7: Implications, Limitations, Future Research Directions, looks across Mark, Daniel and Tony's experiences to locate the shared as well as unique cognitive processes that emerged and mediated how each teacher navigated the activity of his social and mental worlds. First and foremost, the findings indicate that context matters. Specifically, the activity systems that emerged as most salient for mediating their experiences included the notion of time, the individual language learning and instructional histories they brought with them and the individual agency that developed in and through those histories, and the importance of supportive and open relationships with other L2 teachers and their supervising professor. The interplay of the activity systems and the surrounding contexts determined how their cognitive

processes were mediated and how their individual conceptualizations of L2 teaching emerged as tools to guide how they thought about and approached their teaching activity. This chapter also answers the research questions and illustrates the significance of examining L2 teacher learning from a sociocultural theoretical perspective and how this perspective can help us think differently about research on L2 teacher learning and education. The chapter closes with a discussion of the limitations of this research study as well as questions that arose as a result of the study that can lead to new ways to think about and approach future research to better understand how it is that language teachers come to know.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature - A Sociocultural Theoretical Perspective

Introduction

Over the past 20 years, the epistemologies guiding research on language teacher learning and development have been shifting from a positivist view for understanding how teacher learn to a sociocultural theoretical perspective through which teacher cognition is understood as mediated in the social worlds (Ball, 2000; Cook et al., 2002; Donato & McCormick, 1994; Johnson, 2006, 2009; Johnson & Golombek, 2003; Kelly, 2006; Smagorinsky et al., 2003; van Huizen et al., 2005; Verity, 2000). Using a sociocultural theoretical perspective, this dissertation seeks to further strengthen our understanding of language teacher learning by tracing the emergence of the conceptualizations of experienced and novice teachers as they participated in the activity of teaching. For the purposes of this paper, *learning* is understood as a teacher's awareness of how he thinks about his teaching; whereas, *development* is defined as a teacher's conscious awareness of his teaching, an awareness that pushes a teacher to think differently about his teaching and ultimately transform his teaching activity. A sociocultural theoretical perspective provides an explanatory framework to explore and articulate these similar yet distinct cognitive processes.

While the tenure of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory in L2 teacher learning research is relatively young, his work affords a compelling explanatory tool and theory of mind for understanding the inherent complexities of L2 teacher learning and development (Johnson & Golombek, 2003; Johnson, 2009). The central premise of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory is that the human mind is mediated in the social world by physical and symbolic tools, the most powerful of which is language (Lantolf, 2000a). The strength of this theoretical perspective is

that it considers the “totality of human experience” (Newman & Holzman, 1993, p. 17) as mediating cognition, and when applied to L2 teacher learning suggests that cognition is mutually constitutive of and by the activity of the social and mental worlds of teachers. Perhaps as Bernstein (1993) noted almost 20 years ago, “In a way we have caught up with Vygotsky. It’s not so much an idea finding the time, but a time selecting its idea” (p. xviii).

Overview of Chapter

This chapter begins with a review of the literature on Vygotsky’s (1978, 1986, 1994) sociocultural theory and continues by examining how his theory has been applied in research on teacher learning and development in both general education and in research focused on language teacher learning. A brief comparison of Vygotsky’s ideas with other social theorists is also included to distinguish the power of Vygotsky’s theory and his psychological constructs for showing cognitive development, specifically within teacher learning. For Vygotsky, the unit of analysis for cognitive development is ‘the word’ which is captured in this study through narrative data. As such, the chapter continues with a discussion of the history of narratives and their contributions and use in understanding teacher learning and development. The chapter closes with a discussion of A.N. Leont’ev’s (1977, 1978) Activity Theory which provided the explanatory framework to analyze the activity systems that emerged in the data as mediating each teacher’s conceptualization of teaching.

Historical Perspective on Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory

Lev Semenovich Vygotsky (1896-1934) was a Russian psychologist and prolific writer whose contributions while not widely recognized during his brief lifetime, continue to grow in prominence today (Johnson & Golombek, 2003; Kozulin, 1986; van

der Veer & Valsiner, 1994). Vygotsky's work was influenced by the writings of Marx and the idea that human consciousness begins in life itself (Newman & Holzman, 1993). Vygotsky's philosophical stance led him to become critical of the atomistic, piecemeal approach to the study of psychology that was prevalent at the turn of the century. He sought to create a new psychology of human consciousness, one that emphasized the social world (Kozulin, 1986; Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2000; Vygotsky, 1986). Vygotsky's work is built on the notion that human consciousness embodies the "totality of human existence" (Newman & Holzman, 1993, p. 13) which involves a complex of processes in a constant state of change. According to Vygotsky, these processes are most effectively studied in their development, in movement, in the life-process (Kozulin, 1986; Newman & Holzman, 1993). The core themes of sociocultural theory are: 1) the insistence on a genetic, developmental method to examine human higher mental function; 2) that human social and psychological processes are mediated and shaped by signs and tools, primarily language, and 3) that higher mental functions occur first on the intermental psychological plane between people and artifacts and evolve into the intramental psychological plane within the individual (Lee & Smagorinsky, 2000; Newman & Holzman, 1993; Vygotsky, 1978, 1986). These themes guided Vygotsky's search for a method to study the development of human consciousness comprising perception, voluntary memory, selective attention, problem solving, planning and comprehension. For Vygotsky, the unit of analysis of human consciousness is 'the word', metaphorically, that place where meaning and linguistic form unite and make visible the relationship between the mind and the social world (Lantolf, 2000a). The following model of mediation (Figure 1)

conceptualizes Vygotsky's artifact-mediated, object-oriented theoretical understanding of human interaction.

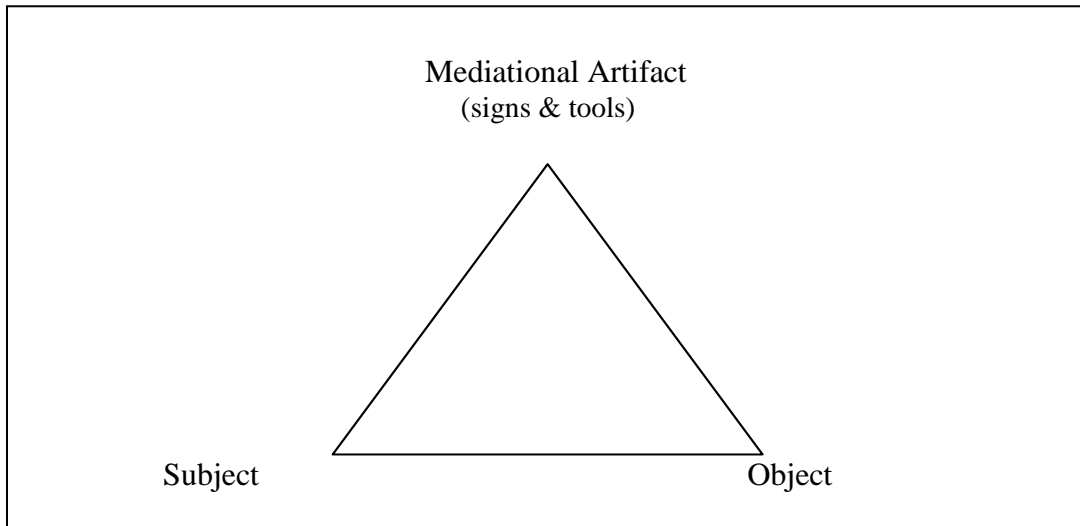


Figure 1. Vygotsky's model of mediation.

Other Theorists

While many of Vygotsky's ideas for conceptualizing human cognition are unique, some were echoed by social theorists and cognitive psychologists such as American cognitive psychologist, Jerome Bruner (1990), and Italian social theorist, Antonio Gramsci (Colucci, 1999) who share Vygotsky's (1978, 1986) belief that the origins of knowledge are engendered in our social, cultural, and historical realities.

In addition to a shared view of the origin of knowledge, these scholars have similar conceptualizations of knowledge, and while labeled differently, each posits two distinct types of knowledge. For Vygotsky (1978, 1986) knowledge is conceived as scientific concepts or learned knowledge and spontaneous concepts or everyday knowledge realized through activity in the social world. Contradictions between scientific and spontaneous concepts generate mediational spaces which afford opportunities for the development of higher cognition. Bruner (1990) recognizes two modes of knowledge, paradigmatic and narrative knowledge, and suggests that learning is

possible when knowledge is organized in an appropriate and accessible manner. Paradigmatic knowledge, also called decontextualized, invariant, and logical knowledge, is judged as reliable through generalizations. Narrative knowledge is contextualized, situated, and variable and refers to those concepts we judge as reliable not through generalizations, but based on sense, coherence and essence (Bruner, 1990; Elbaz-Luwisch, 1997; Huberman, 1995; Sarbin & Kitsuse, 1994). Gramsci (Colucci, 1999) describes concept formation as the melding of philosophical scientific thought with common sense knowledge. Different forms of knowledge integrate into knowing when rooted in our practical activity or “real life conditions”. Knowledge, then, can be understood through the historical analysis of its genesis and in activity, transforms into higher mental consciousness or critical common sense through symbolic mediational tools, specifically language (Colucci, 1999; Lantolf, 2000a; Newman & Holzman, 1993). Gramsci believed that using common sense knowledge ordinary people or “organic intellectuals” are capable of producing theories of change as their personal and social histories interact with activity in the material world. In Gramscian terms, teachers can be considered organic intellectuals who create theories and come to know through the dialogic intersection of philosophical knowledge and common knowledge in their practical teaching activity.

While it is true that many ideas of Bruner (1990) and Gramsci (Colucci, 1999) parallel Vygotskian thought, it is the psychological constructs of Vygotsky’s (1978, 1986) sociocultural theory that distinguish his work from the others and afford a framework through which to explore L2 teacher learning and development. The psychological constructs provide a way to study closely ‘the word’, Vygotsky’s unit of analysis, to understand human cognition. At the

same time, his constructs suggest a shared vocabulary for researchers seeking to understand how teachers learn and develop throughout their professional lives (Johnson, 2006).

Psychological Constructs of Sociocultural Theory

Vygotsky critiqued the sequential steps and stages of cognitive growth used in psychology at the time, choosing instead to describe the development of consciousness as an unpredictable “twisting path” (Cook et al., 2002, p. 410). It is precisely his defiance of linear cognitive development that makes clear description of his theory a challenge. At the risk of being labeled ‘reductionist’, but with the goal of explicating Vygotsky’s psychological constructs, a sequential heuristic gives “systematic access to Vygotsky’s ideas” (van der Veer & Valsiner, 1994, p. 7):

affective-volitional → *mediation* → *zpd* → *internalization* → *concept* → *transformation/*
tendency *development* *externalization*

The following discussion of Vygotsky’s psychological constructs begins with what I believe is the psychological construct that holds the most explanatory power for understanding human cognition, affective-volitional tendency. The role of mediation in learning and development within the metaphorical zone of proximal development (zpd) is then discussed as are the constructs of internalization and externalization in concert with concept formation to illustrate how these constructs afford a powerful explanatory framework for understanding teacher learning.

Affective-volitional tendency

Odd as it may seem to begin with the psychological construct described by Vygotsky as, “the last step in our analysis of inner planes of thought” (1986, p. 252), it is actually quite fitting to do so for two reasons; to support Wells (1999) who criticized those scholars who have disparaged Vygotsky for ignoring the role of individual affect on

the development of higher mental functions; and most importantly, because as Vygotsky so carefully states in the closing pages of *Thought and Language* (1986):

Thought is not begotten by thought; it is engendered by motivation, i.e., by our desires and needs, our interests and emotions. Behind every thought there is an affective-volitional tendency which holds the answer to the last “why” in the analysis of thinking. A true and full understanding of another’s thought is possible only when we understand its affective-volitional basis. (p. 252)

While Vygotsky acknowledged affective-volitional tendency as a significant determinant of thought and ultimately cognitive development, he did not espouse a definition of this problem for psychology. However, he did suggest that just as we have theories of cognition, emotions also require a unique set of theories which focus on their origins and effect on human cognitive functioning (Wertsch, 1985). The work of Vygotsky’s colleague and collaborator, A.N. Leont’ev (1977, 1978), and his grandson, D.A. Leont’ev (manuscripts a, b), elaborate on the role of personality and affect in cognitive development, i.e., needs, motives, and personal meaning.

Recognizing affective volition as integral to teacher learning and development is an important starting point for education scholars. Attitudes and emotions of teachers can be captured in several ways including diaries, reflective journals, interviews, and questionnaires. Verity’s (2000) study, a narrative of her experiences as an “expert teacher” turned “novice” in her initial semester of teaching in Japan, offers insights into affective volition and teacher learning. Over the course of a semester, Verity documented her experiences in a teaching diary. The language in her diary revealed the emotional and

cognitive imbalance she felt in her daily teaching practice. Cognitively, she was prepared to use the strategies and teaching techniques that had been such an integral part of her professional experience, yet affectively, she was not prepared for those strategies to fail. By the end of the semester, she became cognizant of what she had known subconsciously as an “expert” teacher, that the activity of teaching requires a balance between “the intellectual and the affective, the self and the other” (p. 181). Using the constructs of sociocultural theory, Verity explains that to rediscover that balance, she had to redefine her zone of proximal development and mediate herself within that metaphorical space. Using her diary to externalize her thoughts, she was able to restructure her “fragmented” expertise (p. 188).

Mediation

Verity’s (2000) teaching diary is an example of a physical artifact, or mediational tool, in which she used language to connect her inner thoughts and feelings with the external world of her teaching activity. The intersection of her mental and physical worlds led to a higher level of consciousness about her teaching. “Vygotsky’s fundamental theoretical insight is that higher forms of human mental activity are always and everywhere, *mediated* by symbolic means” (Lantolf, 1994, p. 418, emphasis in original). Created and recreated through generations, physical and symbolic artifacts provide a window to the study of higher mental functions (Lantolf, 2000a; Mitchell & Myles, 1998; Scribner, 1985). While both physical and symbolic tools carry historical significance and influence human activity, it is the symbolic tool of language that mediates cognitive change. In L2 teacher education research, journals, diaries, and portfolios are examples of mediational tools that capture teacher language and make

visible the complex processes inherent in their learning as they navigate and connect their teaching activity with their mental worlds.

A closer look at how portfolios have been used as mediational tools in L2 teacher research illustrates its effectiveness in promoting conscious awareness of learning and development. Antonek, McCormick, and Donato (1997) asked novice foreign language teachers to construct portfolios as mediational tools for teacher learning and development. The teachers reflected synchronically and diachronically on the artifacts in their portfolios and engaged in collaborative dialogue with one another throughout the semester. An analysis of the teachers' reflections indicates that the activity of portfolio construction empowered the teachers to synthesize and understand their thoughts and behaviors. The study illustrates that "the portfolio as a mediational tool has the potential to raise the consciousness of the student teacher, thus helping the student teacher go beyond remembering teaching facts to reasoning about teaching practice" (p. 17). Antonek et al. state that the portfolio, anchored in the activity of teaching, connects a novice teacher's social world, the classroom context, and her cognitive awareness and creating a mediational space in and through which teacher cognition can develop.

In a similar study, Suzuki, Hur, and Childs (2005) used Vygotsky's sociocultural theory to analyze the portfolios of two ESL teachers and explore whether or not portfolio construction foments learning and development. The data included portfolio artifacts representing learning activity throughout the semester and goal statements written at the end of the semester as part of the activity of portfolio construction. One participant taught ESL classes at the time of the portfolio assignment, and the other tutored a second language learner. The participant who tutored was engaged in a very different type of

teaching activity than the teacher involved in daily classroom instruction, yet the artifacts in each portfolio provide evidence that both teachers were learning, albeit differently, through their teaching activity. Like Antonek et al. (1997), the data support the notion that the portfolio, anchored in the activity of teaching, can mediate teacher learning.

Zone of proximal development (zpd)

The zone of proximal development is probably the psychological construct written of most prolifically, and it continues to be dissected, reconstructed, critiqued, and expanded in education, and more recently in second language education and teacher learning (Kinginger, 2002; Lantolf, 2000a; Mitchell & Myles, 1998; Tolman, 1999; Wells, 1999; Wertsch & Smolka, 1993). Lantolf (2000a) explains that the zpd is not a concrete place but “a metaphor for observing and understanding how mediational means are appropriated and internalized” (p. 17). More specifically, Vygotsky originally defined the zpd as the point at which a child has a foundational understanding of a task but can complete it only with assistance from an adult or expert other (Wertsch & Rogoff, 1984). As such, the zpd is the “essential means through which the social world guides...development of individual functions” (p. 4). Through mediated social interactions, the learner is scaffolded by other- and/or object-regulation on the interpsychological plane and “inducted into a shared consciousness” (Mitchell & Myles, 1998, p. 145). As the learner appropriates new concepts, he transforms them into his intrapsychological plane (Lantolf, 2000a; Martin, 1993; Tolman, 1999), and it is through this process that Newman and Holzman (1993) suggest, “learning leads development” (p. 60).

Early interpretations of the zpd construct suggest that an expert other is necessary to lead the development of a less skilled individual (Kozulin, 1986; Wertsch & Rogoff, 1984). Expanded interpretations of the zpd recognize physical tools like computers and calculators, symbolic tools such as journals and portfolios, and individuals even when not physically present, as legitimate mediators of learning (Wells, 1999). Another shift in the interpretation of the zpd is that the opportunity for learning applies to all participants in the social interaction and not only the less skilled learners. Lantolf's (2000b) suggests that "mediation is contingent" (p. 81) on any number of levels, particularly in regard to the intersection of the attitudes and motives of the participants:

Mediation is contingent; that is, while assistance is necessary for learning, it is equally necessary for it to be withheld or withdrawn when a learner show signs that it is either not required or *not welcome*.

(p. 81, emphasis added)

Broadly speaking, an individual's zpd is affected by many factors including the activity itself and the attitudes of those involved in the process. Together, these factors determine whether learning progresses, regresses, or remains unchanged such that Newman and Holzman's (1993) statement, "learning leads development" (p. 13), might be qualified as "learning *can* lead development".

Martin's (1993) study illustrates how the zpd is in fact unique to the individual learner or in this case, teacher. She shares her findings from three separate projects in which experienced teachers were trained to implement several new teaching strategies. One of the projects centered on training and assisting a 5th grade science teacher with new approaches for teaching her class which had been labeled as the lowest achievers in the

school. After spending several weeks in the classroom helping the teacher implement the new strategies, Martin notes that the children were experiencing success. Encouraged by the children's achievement and the teacher's delight, Martin expected the teacher to embrace and adopt the new teaching methods. However, the teacher did not use the strategies after the researchers left and made no other changes in her teaching behavior. Martin concluded that even though she believed she met the teacher within her zone of proximal development and the teacher was primed for instructional change, because she had no external support, or mediational means to continue to lead her in her development, she did not transform the new concepts into her teaching activity. Within the zpd, "the nature of a person's interactions with others is key to his or her internalization of new information" (p. 83).

When a teacher does not have the opportunity to interact with others, she may seek another way to discover or rediscover her zpd and mediate herself within that space as is the case with Verity (2000). In her new teaching context in Japan, she lost her ability to self-regulate her teaching activity. Using a teaching diary helped her reconstruct her zpd and allowed her to 'other-regulate' and mediate her thinking and activity through language until she was able to regain self-control. When asked to write a book chapter relating her experiences, Verity revisited her teaching diary and recollected the experiences that inspired her initial reflections. She noted that the activity of writing her story from the diary enters she had written previously was in itself an "act of transformation" (p. 197). Like the diary it emerged from, the retelling of her experiences in a book chapter represents a second recreated zpd in which she was able to again

reconstruct her intrapsychological planes of cognitive functioning which led her to think differently about her experiences.

Internalization, concept development, and externalization

Verity's motive for using a diary was to regain expertise she felt she had lost, and her experience illustrates how concepts are appropriated through mediation in the zpd, internalized in the intramental or intrapsychological plane, and transformed into an image or ideal. "Man's activity is regulated by mental images of reality" (A.N. Leont'ev, 1977, p. 5). These mental images enable a person "to explore the circumstances, to preview the effectiveness of an intended action" as part of a particular activity (Gal'perin, 1977, p. 55). Ultimately, the images and representations that mediate practical activity are how we gain the "capacity to think and act consciously" (Jones, 2001, p. 286). In an almost cyclical process in practical activity, an object is transformed through language into an ideal. That ideal is then recreated in activity in the form of deeds and things that are imbued with personal meaning.

Transformation of objective reality into an ideal occurs when a subject is confronted with a contradiction between scientific and spontaneous concepts (Newman & Holzman, 1993; Vygotsky, 1986). From a sociocultural perspective, scientific concepts are acquired "as a result of deliberate and systematic instruction" (Wells, 2004, p. 4), whereas spontaneous concepts are learned by individuals "in the course of her/his daily life" (p. 4). A contradiction between these concepts creates cognitive dissonance which forces conscious awareness of the activity and begins the transformative process that can lead to the development of higher mental consciousness (Jones, 2001). This process can be illustrated with an example from a teacher's classroom teaching experience. A novice

teacher wants to apply the scientific concept of communicative language teaching she learned in her coursework to the practical activity of her student teaching. She provides what she believes are examples of authentic language, creates a nurturing, caring classroom environment, and gives her students ample opportunity to express themselves, yet her students refuse to participate. Because of the frustration she feels, her emotional reaction makes her consciously aware of the difference between her scientific ideal of communicative language teaching and her concrete teaching activity. To resolve the contradiction, she may seek mediation through the assistance of a colleague, expert other or in literature related to the concept. Over time and with ongoing mediation, she may begin to internalize and reorganize her understanding of communicative language teaching and eventually transform her teacher activity.

While Newman and Holzman (1993) suggest that a contradiction is necessary to become consciously aware of activity and thought and move toward higher level cognition, I suggest that conscious awareness and transformation can also result from a *conscious connection* of scientific and spontaneous concepts and use a similar classroom example to explain. A novice teacher may establish what she envisions as a communicative classroom environment in which her students respond as she anticipates to her instruction. The positive connection between her vision of the scientific concept of “communicative language teaching” and what she experiences in her teaching activity or her spontaneous concept, merge to create a higher level of cognitive understanding of the concept of communicative language teaching. While awareness of a connection of concepts is not emotionally charged in the same way as a contradiction, connections, too, can lead to development.

Acting on a contradiction or a connection between scientific and spontaneous concepts allows an individual to reconstruct her ideal which is then externalized and transforms subsequent practical activity. At this point, the individual has moved from object- or other-regulation to self-regulation of her thought and activity. According to his work on tool and symbol development, Vygotsky (1994) explains that not all external activity moves through this process of transformation and externalization. This notion is illustrated with the teacher in Martin's (1993) study. Learning *can* lead development, but it is not automatic. Vygotsky (1994) notes that a concept

...continues to exist and to change as an external form of activity, before definitively turning inward. For many functions, this stage of external signs lasts forever as their final stage of development. Others, after long development become intrapsychological. (p. 154)

Cook et al.'s (2002) work provides an explanation of why concepts may remain on the interpsychological plane and do not develop fully. They suggest that unity of a concept is necessary for a concept to enter the intrapsychological plane and develop into an ideal. To illustrate their point, the researchers followed Tracy, a novice teacher, through her professional development program, her student teaching practicum and her first year of teaching. They were interested in how she appropriated constructivist learning theory as a novice teacher in each educational context.

To understand the notion of unity, Cook et al. begin with a detailed explanation of Vygotsky's three layers of concept development which are most easily illustrated in terms of a child's cognitive development. The first layer of concept development is that of a complex, explained as a child's primitive understanding of concepts. At this level, a

child learns that an animal with four legs is a dog and uses that understanding to conclude that objects with the same external characteristics are the same. As such, any four-legged animal is a dog. The second layer of concept development is a pseudo-concept, or an understanding that bridges the level of complex and the fully developed concept. A child can now distinguish among categories of four-legged animals (i.e., dogs, horses, cows) but cannot yet discern different types of dogs and refers to all dogs in the same manner, for example, as a poodle. When a child has a fully developed understanding of an idea, he has achieved the level of a concept. Now the child recognizes that there are many breeds of dogs and can distinguish among them (p. 392).

Cook et al. analyzed Tracy's data to determine her level of understanding of the theoretical principals of constructivism as she completed her university professional development program. They measured her understanding again after she had completed her student teaching and first year as a teacher in her own classroom. They suggested that because her understanding of constructivism was not supported and reinforced in her subsequent teaching experiences, Tracy was not able to develop a conceptualization of constructivism that could lead her teaching and that she could "reapply...to a new situation" (p. 392). Instead, she developed an understanding of constructivism at the level of a complex and that she understood discrete aspects of constructivism, i.e., creating a student-centered classroom, but she did not fully understand how to think about and organize classroom opportunities that would mediate co-construction of knowledge. This study supports Newman and Holzman's (1993) idea that the "correct pieces" or a unified concept must be available for the individual to move beyond the level of a complex to a pseudo-concept and ultimately to a fully development concept or ideal.

Cook et al. (2002) came to these conclusions about Tracy's learning based on their analysis of a particular set of data sources. Using interviews, concept maps of her understanding prior to her student teaching, classroom observations, school documents, and background information on her mentor and university supervisor, the researchers constructed their understanding of how Tracy's experiences mediated her conceptualization of constructivism. They collected a substantial amount of data about her teaching activity and some on how she thought about her teaching. From a Vygotskian perspective, if language is the fundamental tool for the development of higher mental consciousness, then including a reflective journal or diary may have provided a powerful mediational tool for her learning and another window into her concept development. As Freeman (1996) states, "how one observes and collects the data shapes what one sees" (p. 365). For my own study, it is narrative data that affords the most opportunity for capturing teacher learning from a sociocultural theoretical perspective.

Narrative Data and Language

For Vygotsky, the 'word' is the unit of analysis of thought. Narratives, written and spoken by teachers, provide a method for exploring the intersection of a teacher's cognitive world and practical teaching activity by providing a window into the thoughts of teachers (Goodson, 1997; Vélez-Rendón, 2002; Verity, 2000). It is not surprising then that as research on teacher learning evolved from a positivist perspective that generated lists of good teacher behaviors to understanding the complexity of how teachers come to know, narrative as a method of study gained prominence (Carter, 1993; Elbaz-Luwisch, 1997; Kinginger, 1997; Verity,

2000). To understand the emergence of narratives in teacher learning research, a background on narratives beginning with their history in psychology is helpful.

The use of narratives to understand human cognition is rooted in narrative psychology and the work of psychologists like Bruner (1990), Sarbin (1986), and Polkinghorne (1983). Sarbin (1986) began by suggesting that human thought and action is guided by narratory principles such that we “think, perceive, imagine, and make moral choices according to narrative structures” (p. 8). In a rather unorthodox research fashion, he tested the strength of this theory using several psychology experiments in which participants were asked to observe the activity of geometric shapes and explain what they saw. Without being prompted, participants immediately personified the shapes and explained the interactions in narrative form. These findings led Sarbin to define narrative as “a symbolized account of actions of human beings that has a temporal dimension...a beginning, a middle, and an end...held together by recognizable patterns of events called plots [or] human predicaments and resolutions” (p. 4).

Sarbin’s work provided a foundational definition for narrative which was further developed by Polkinghorne (1983) who posited that humans employ two distinct types of narrative; narratives of description used to create meaning from the events in our lives, and narratives of explanation which move story beyond meaning to the exploration of causes and connections of life events. Bruner (1990) expanded the conceptualization of narrative by illuminating the dimension of agency, more specifically, that the storyteller constructs her story based on choices. These choices include determining which story events to disclose to a particular interlocutor, how to order those events, and whether to edit or enhance the story based on the audience. Bruner also offered a perspective from which to begin any study of the human

mind, and I found it particularly powerful as a guide for thinking about narrative research:

The study of the human mind is so difficult, so caught in the dilemma of being both the object and the agent of its own study, that we cannot limit its inquiries to ways of thinking that grew out of yesterday's physics. Rather, the task is so compellingly important that it deserves all the rich variety of insight that we can bring to the understanding of what man makes of his world, of his fellow beings, and of himself. That is the spirit in which we should proceed. (p. xiii)

The use of narrative to understand human cognition speaks to his suggestion that we employ creative methods of inquiry for exploring the complexity of human cognitive function. Similarly, Polkinghorne (1983) suggests that understanding human cognition requires an exploratory methodology of study that remains open to possibility and "resist[s] settling down to any single paradigm" (p. 9).

Teacher knowing represents a type of human cognition and is a complex phenomenon for which narrative inquiry provides an exploratory and creative approach for uncovering the inherent complexities. The use of narratives in education research has focused on the nuances of teachers' stories, the hidden influence of personal, social, and collective histories in the construction of their narratives (Carter, 1993; Gudmundsdottir, 1995; Johnson & Golombek, 2002; Verity, 2000). These nuances highlight the role of context, the social, political, cultural, and economic dimensions of a teacher's world, as a powerful determinant for how teacher narratives are constructed and the insights they can provide on teaching knowing (Fenstermacher, 1997).

The use of narrative as a method and object of teacher research is rich and telling, yet it is precisely its richness and multi-faceted nature that makes it challenging to define as a research approach. I found the work of Jalongo, Isenberg, and Gerbracht (1995) to be helpful in defining narrative for this study. Like stories, they state that teacher narratives have settings, characters, themes, plots, and style, but they explain that teacher narratives are distinguishable from traditional stories because of their “realm of reflections on teaching” (p. 3). Narratives can be constructed by teachers and/or researchers as tools for reflection on or about teaching. Either way, narratives make visible the dialogic relationship of a teacher’s practical and mental activity. The following characteristics “elevate a teacher’s story from the realm of idle talk” (p. 12):

1. It is genuine and rings true.
2. It invites reflection and discourse, which are fundamental to reflective practice.
3. It is interpreted and reinterpreted.
4. It is powerful and evocative. (p. 10)

Teacher narratives may be captured through journals, diaries, questionnaires, classroom observations, and teacher’s histories written at a given moment in one’s teaching career. Narratives can also be constructed over time by connecting observations of classroom events and infusing those stories with reflections from teacher journals and interviews. Regardless of the method of storying, the key aspect of teacher narratives is the element of reflection. Carter (1993) notes that in the language of narrative is evidence of the connection of a teacher’s internal world of thoughts and her external world of practical teaching activity, what Carter refers to as narrative unity:

At the center of learning to teach is an internal debate in which teachers, using their personal narratives or life stories, interpret information and experiences and construct the images that capture their understandings of classroom and of how they will behave as teachers. (p. 188)

Narratives require teachers to reflect on their experiences and bring continuity and coherence to their worlds giving them “increasing control over their thoughts and actions” (Johnson & Golombek, 2002, p. 7). Teachers’ ways of knowing emerge in their language through the patterns, the metaphors, the rhythms, and the images they use to share their worlds (Carter & Doyle, 1995; Doyle, 1997; Kinginger, 1997; Johnson & Golombek, 2002; Johnson & Golombek, 2004).

Cautions with Narratives

Teacher narrative research has achieved status and validity as a method of inquiry in educational research, and advocating for research that showcases the voices of teachers and portrays them as the active, thinking agents will continue to promote narrative inquiry as a legitimate method of study. While teacher narratives can be used to elevate and legitimize teachers’ ways of knowing, if not championed carefully, these same stories can diminish the perceived value of teacher knowing in teacher education research.

Even when teachers’ voices are privileged, another level of concern arises - whose stories are selected and how they are told. As Pavlenko (2002) cautions in her work with narratives of L2 learners, researchers must remain cognizant of “whose stories are being heard and why, and whose stories are still missing, being misunderstood, or being misinterpreted” (p. 216). For example, we may select research participants who are most like us because of ease of access to them or comfort in working with them (Elbaz-

Luwisch, 1997). We may privilege some stories and “distort or conceal other perspectives and promote or legitimate one point of view to the detriment of others” (McEwan & Egan, 1995a, p. xi).

These messages are not new. As story was beginning to gain status almost 20 years ago, Carter (1993) cautioned researchers to be “more self-conscious than we have in the past about the issues involved in narrative and story, such as interpretation, authenticity, normative value, and what our purposes are for telling the story in the first place” (p. 10). When we write our research questions, determine our methodology, select our participants, and collect and analyze their stories, Fenstermacher (1997) and Goodson (1997) ask, are we:

1. privileging stories that match our political beliefs?
2. studying narratives as they are truly given to us as researchers?
3. wrapping our own narratives into teachers’ stories by focusing on certain aspects and ignoring others?
4. What is our motivation for why we study teachers? To benefit teachers and not just ourselves and the academy?

Shannon (1999) reminds us to first explore our own stories as “symbols of larger social issues” (p. 407) that may be unconscious responses to hegemonic ideals of our society and our discipline before we reconstruct the narratives of teachers.

Staying sensitive to how narratives are constructed, whose stories are told, and how they are conveyed is essential if we are to conduct ethical narrative research that will continue to promote its legitimacy. This is particularly important as we live in an era of limited research funds coupled with recommendations at the federal level that support

projects that “build the knowledge base of educational interventions proven effective through randomized controlled trials...in large-scale replications” (Coalition, 2002, p. i). Recommendations of this nature do not bode well for the future of narrative research in teacher education. Institutional and political powers that determine research funding and faculty tenure requirements tend to favor research through which results can be manipulated for particular purposes and teachers can be held accountable to objective checklists, formative evaluations, prescribed curriculums, and national standards (Goodson, 1997, 2000). Large-scale, randomized intervention research further promotes the power differential between departments of education and teachers, and removes teachers from the “discourse of schooling” (2000, p. 17). To keep teachers voices in those conversations, Herman (2003) advocates for research collaborations across disciplines to generate interdisciplinary theories of learning and cognition that might strengthen support for narrative research. Advocating for the legitimacy of narrative research in an era of educational standardization requires careful examination of reasons for research and biases that might be tainting that research. Such examination can assure that the reconstructions and interpretations we make of the knowledge of teachers promotes their knowing in a way that remains free of judgment or imposed societal expectations.

Activity Theory

Conducting narrative research from a sociocultural theoretical perspective allows, and in a sense, requires us to acknowledge the social influences and our own histories helping us remain honest in our interpretations of the broader influences mediating the language and activity of teachers. A sociocultural theoretical perspective

for understanding the development of human consciousness reminds us that the “essential task is always to grasp the systemic whole, not just separate connections” (University of Helsinki, 2009), that human cognition cannot be understood apart from the social, cultural, and historical activity within which it occurs. Therefore, the challenge is to find a way to capture the dialogic relationships within the ‘systemic whole’. A.N. Leont’ev’s (1977) Activity Theory provides that framework.

A.N. Leont’ev’s (1977) Activity Theory is an extension of Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory, and when used in concert with Vygotsky’s psychological constructs, affords a conceptual framework for capturing the ‘whole’ while identifying the relationships of activity systems within it. At this juncture, it is important to acknowledge the work of Yuri Engeström (1999) who expanded Leont’ev’s model of activity to reflect the larger sphere of collective activity. Engeström’s model incorporates consideration of societal rules, the larger community, and the division of labor within that community to capture the macro-level influences mediating an individual’s activity. While in current research on learning and transformation, Engeström’s model is more frequently used, I made a conscious choice to frame this study using Leont’ev’s theoretical model because it provided a lens through which to explore the microgenesis of learning and development as a process that unfolds in activity.

Background

A. N. Leont’ev (1977), student and colleague of Vygotsky, elaborated and extended Vygotsky’s work through the development of ‘Activity Theory’ which is based on the notion that “man’s activity is the substance of his consciousness” (p.150):

It need not be repeated that this internal movement of the individual’s

consciousness is engendered by the movement of a person's **objective reality**, that behind the dramatic moments of the consciousness lie the dramatic moments of his real life, and that for this reason, a scientific psychology of the consciousness is impossible without investigating the subject's activity, forms of its immediate existence. (p.15)

Activity cannot be separated or extracted from collective social relations such that "meaningful activity constitutes the main 'channel' for coming to know man's inner life" (Gal'perin, 1997, p. 40). This means that individual human activity "is a system in the system of social relations" (Ballantyne, 2000, p.4), the interplay of which mediates human cognition. To understand cognition from an activity theory perspective, Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001) note:

...the task of scientific investigation is to determine how general mental concepts develop out of specific activities, and this task is accomplished through the investigation of the history of human beings, either as individuals, societies, cultures, or as a species, and of the activities through which they transform their worlds and are in turn transformed by their worlds. (p. 144)

For Leont'ev (1977), activity is "a highly dynamic system" capable of transforming at any moment, a system that is not linear but rather a complex circle that "opens specifically in sensuous practical activity itself" (p. 6). 'Activity' is directed toward an 'object' that is determined by a 'subject', all of which is immersed in the social world. In this study, the 'subject' is the L2 teacher engaged in the 'activity' of language teaching and learning, and the 'object' is the teacher's conceptualization of teaching.

The Units

Leont'ev explains activity via units not for the purpose of separating activity into discrete parts but rather to understand the relations among and between that which characterizes human activity while never losing sight of the activity system as a whole:

- activity is governed by *motive(s)*
- actions are processes defined by conscious *goals*
- operations depend on *material conditions* surrounding goal attainment

A closer look at each of the 'units' shows their interrelatedness and illustrates dynamic nature of Activity Theory as a conceptual framework for interpreting human activity systems and the development of higher consciousness (see Figure 2).

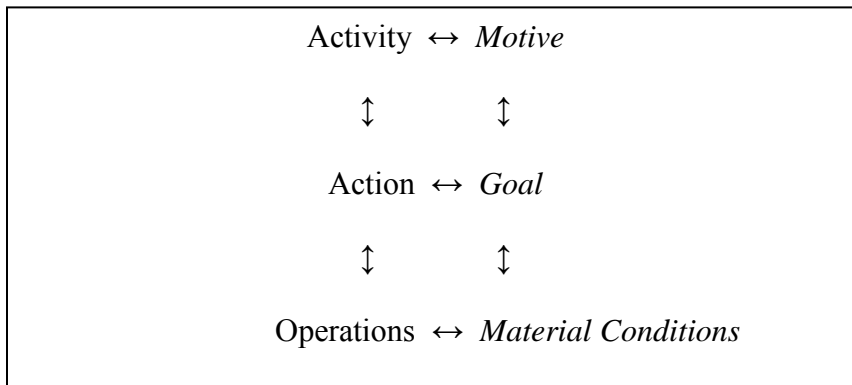


Figure 2. A.N. Leont'ev's Activity Theory (Ballantyne, 2000)

The motive is the object or orientation of the activity. In other words, the motive corresponds with the need that drives the activity in the social world and ultimately leads to cognitive development and transformation of the environment. Motives, then, distinguish and differentiate activities such that what appears on the surface to be the same activity may in fact be different because of the motive associated with it. Activity cannot exist without a motive, but a motive can be hidden or not easily discerned.

Actions are the processes that are used to achieve goals related to the motive, but unlike motives, actions are observable and goal-oriented and serve as the starting point

for understanding activity. The operations or material conditions are the circumstances surrounding the activity, or “the way an action is carried out, and depend on the conditions under which actions are executed” (Donato & McCormick, 1994, p. 455).

Leont’ev (1977) uses the units to summarize the cyclical nature of activity:

In reality, however, we have to deal with the concrete specific activities, each of which satisfies a definite need of the subject, is oriented toward the object of this need, disappears as a result of its satisfaction, and is reproduced perhaps in different conditions and in relation to a changed object. (p. 4)

Donato and McCormick (1994) use activity theory as the theoretical framework for their study on the role of portfolios for mediating learning to understand language learning strategies used by L2 learners in a university-level foreign language classroom. They also draw on Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory to explain how the mediation provided through the activity of portfolio construction within a particular language learning context foments language learning:

Rather, the sociocultural perspective informed by activity theory and the concept of mediation, maintains that the emergence of strategies is a by-product of goal-directed, situated activity in which mediation through artifacts, discourse, or others plays a central role in apprenticing novices into a community of practice. (p. 456)

They conclude that that conducting their research from a combined sociocultural and activity theoretical perspective mediated their understanding of student learning and allowed them to acknowledge the dynamic nature of human cognition. I have offered that same argument in my research that sociocultural theory and activity theory, when

purposefully applied to the learning activity of L2 teachers, can provide a lens through which to see L2 teaching learning and the development of a conceptualization of teaching.

Conclusion

Donato and McCormick's (1994) research with language learners and most recently Johnson's (2006, 2009) work advocating for a sociocultural theoretical perspective in L2 teacher cognition and education research illustrate the epistemological shift occurring in the field. The goal of my research is to analyze language teaching cognition from a sociocultural theoretical perspective to illustrate its power as a theory of mind for understanding L2 teacher learning. I use Leont'ev's (1977, 1978) Activity Theory to identify and define the activity systems mediating teacher learning and Vygotsky's (1978) psychological constructs to examine the language of the data to understand how language teacher cognition is mediated in activity. A sociocultural theoretical perspective provides a coherent, robust conceptual system through which to articulate how language teachers negotiate their own social and cognitive processes and how that negotiation mediates their learning and development.

Chapter 3: The Research Design

Research Purpose and Questions

The purpose of this research study was to explore the nature of L2 teacher learning and development from a sociocultural perspective as it occurred with teachers engaged in the activity of teaching. The following questions were addressed:

- 1) What is the nature of L2 teacher learning as revealed through concept development and transformation of teaching activity?
 - a) What are the activity systems that mediate L2 teacher learning and development in an intensive in-service teacher education program?
 - b) What is the process of development in an intensive in-service teacher education program (i.e., microgenetic analysis)?

When determining how to design a study of L2 teacher learning and development within the framework of sociocultural theory, I returned to the core assertions of Vygotsky's theory. First is the insistence on a genetic, developmental method for studying cognition. This study is ethnographic in design and follows L2 teachers for an extended period of time, specifically throughout their first year of teaching in a new instructional context. Second, Vygotsky's theory suggests that higher mental functions occur first on the intermental psychological plane before they move into the intramental psychological plane. The third assertion is that human social and psychological processes are mediated through language. To address the last two assertions, I included data sources that captured teachers' language and offered evidence of the inner thought processes of L2 teachers and how the human mind is mediated.

The social and psychological lives of L2 teachers are complex and varied, so I found Tarone and Allwright's (2005) suggestions of the multiple contexts in which L2 teacher learning

should be studied very helpful:

Such longitudinal studies should examine second language teacher learning as it takes place in contexts such as these: in the language classroom, in hallways in conversations with colleagues, in university courses, in university practicum experiences, at professional conferences and at home reading professional publications such as this one. Such studies should also examine the various ways in which this teacher learning takes place: through imitation of mentor teachers, through observation of all kinds of second language classrooms, through challenges to one's system of beliefs about the way languages are learned encountered in academic classrooms and readings, through observations of second language learners classroom contexts, through quiet reflection on one's own teaching (and learning) practice, and through discussions with colleagues and others. (p. 11)

A comprehensive list such as this is exciting because it illustrates the almost endless opportunities L2 teachers have for learning and development. At the same time, it reminds us of the daunting task of conducting research that can capture L2 teacher learning to understand how, when and why it happens, how teacher educators can tap into potential learning contexts, and how to create teacher self-awareness about their own learning. So while it was not possible to capture in one study all that Tarone and Allwright propose, it was possible to begin to look at some of the contexts simultaneously. A sociocultural theoretical perspective afforded the conceptual framework with which to do so. van Huizen et al. (2005) put this same idea into more theoretical terms when they stated that "... 'activity' is the most fundamental and comprehensive concept, suggesting that the functioning and development of human individuals are to be studied in the context of their participation in social practice and, more concretely, in a

variety of activity systems...” (p. 271). The challenge, then, was how to collect data that captured the activity systems mediating language teacher learning and the interplay among them, and at the same time, make visible the learning and development of L2 teachers as it was happening in and through their teaching activity.

Overview of the Research Design

This study was not designed to develop and implement an intervention to promote L2 teacher learning. Instead, it was intended to capture L2 teacher learning as it occurred in the activity of teaching, much like Tarone and Allwright (2005) suggest and in keeping with a sociocultural theoretical perspective for understanding teacher learning. Three participants were recruited, each of whom was entering the first semester of an intensive language teacher professional development program in the same university context, a new context for each participant. Data were collected across their first two semesters with the majority of the data gathered in Semester One. In keeping with a sociocultural theoretical framework, I collected a variety of language-rich data throughout both semesters. The data included some solicited responses and some voluntary, some gathered in natural environments of the classroom and some through reflective journals. I analyzed the data at a macro level to uncover salient activity systems mediating and mediated by their learning, then examined the data again on a micro level to find evidence of contradictions and emotive language that might indicate concept development and formation of ideals mediating and mediated by their teaching. Throughout this process, I have tried to remain cognizant of how my own L2 teaching experiences and biases could have influences my interpretations of the data. I also tried, as Clandinin & Connelly (2000) suggest, to remain “open about the imaginative possibilities” (p.116) afforded by narrative data for deepening our understanding of language teacher cognition.

The Language Teacher Professional Development Program

The participants in this study were enrolled in an intensive L2 teacher preparation program that was housed in an academic department whose scholarship and philosophy was grounded in a sociocultural theoretical perspective. As such, these L2 teachers were exposed to a sociocultural theory in both their teacher preparation experiences and their graduate program coursework. These opportunities provided ongoing mediation for novice through experienced language teachers as they engaged in the activity of teaching. The teaching and learning context included a workroom shared with other language teachers, individual and collective weekly meetings with other language teachers and led by the supervising professor, periodic classroom observations with the supervising professor, as well as opportunities for individual strategic mediation with the same professor. Because of the program's focus on preparation of language teachers and the professional and consistent manner of available support, this language teacher learning context afforded an ideal environment in which to 'see' L2 teacher learning as it was mediated in the social world.

Methodology

The Participants

The participants who volunteered for this study were engaged in the same language teacher professional development program and were all male, but they represented a range of ages and experience levels (see Figure 3). Two participants, Daniel and Tony, had previous language learning and teaching experiences, and both were Ph.D. candidates. The third participant, Mark, was a novice second language teacher and a master's degree candidate. Each participant brought a unique L2 teaching and learning history to this research study.

Participant	Program	L1	Gender	Age	ESL/EFL Teaching Experience
Mark	MA	English	Male	Early 20s	≈ 1 year
Daniel	PhD	Portuguese	Male	Early 30s	≈ 5 years
Tony	PhD	English	Male	Late 40s	≈ 14 years

Figure 3. Characteristics of the participants.

Mark

Mark was a 22-year-old, first-year, first-semester master's student with significant second language learning experience in German. He discovered his love for the German language in junior high and continued to take German classes throughout high school. The summers following his eighth and ninth grade years were spent learning German in an intensive foreign language immersion program in the United States, and he later taught in that same language institute during the summers of his 11th and 12th grade years. He studied in Germany his junior year in high school and lived there the summer following his senior year in college. While Mark did not have experience teaching English as a second language nor teaching language in a formal, structured classroom environment, he did have limited experience teaching German in an immersion program. His goal for entering the master's program was to use language teaching as a means for traveling around the world.

Daniel

Daniel was an international student from Brazil who was in his early 30s and had followed a unique path to teaching English as a second language. In high school, he opted to study electronics through vocational training and did not intend to go to college. He worked in the electronics field for a short time during which he realized that it was easier to read the manuals for the field in English rather than in his native Portuguese and started to take English language courses. At the same time, he enrolled in a bachelor's degree program in business

administration. Through his experiences, he discovered his affinity for English and his enjoyment of learning languages. When the electronics company he had been working for went out of business, he changed his degree program from business to letters and literature and eventually enrolled in an English teacher's training course at the same university.

After completing one and one half years in the letters and literature program, Daniel applied for and was accepted to an undergraduate program for language study in the United States (U.S.) and decided to move to the U.S. to complete his bachelor's degree. He then earned his master's degree in ESL and technology at the same university. After a short stay in his home country where he again taught English in a private language institute, he returned to the U.S. to pursue a Ph.D. in linguistics. Daniel entered this professional development program with formal classroom teaching experience though none at the college level, a desire to pursue L2 teaching and research, and a strong passion for language learning and teaching.

Tony

Tony was from the U.S. and came to this study with over 14 years of language learning and teaching experience in a variety of contexts. He received his undergraduate degree in Russian language and literature and completed his master's degree in TESOL. He studied abroad in Spain and Russia, and spent over 10 years in the Czech Republic in English education first as a high school teacher, then a business English teacher, language program director, language program owner, and finally L2 teacher trainer. Tony was proficient in several languages including Italian, Spanish, Czechoslovakian, and Russian. It was Tony's experience as a trainer of English language teachers in the Czech Republic that helped him decide to pursue a career in academia with a focus on language teacher education.

These brief biographical sketches of the participants' language teaching and learning

histories illustrate the many ways people come to L2 language teaching. Each brought a unique and rich history to this new language teacher professional development experience. And while they shared the same intensive L2 teacher education program in the same university context, their individual histories and agency mediated their cognition in very different ways.

The Data Sources

A sociocultural theoretical perspective centers on the premise that the human mind is mediated in the social world most specifically through language, the word, the place where meaning and linguistic form unite and make visible the dialectical relationship between the mind and the social world (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986). Therefore, I included data from a variety of sources to capture the participants' language and to locate evidence of how their cognition was mediated. The data sources comprised reflective journals, qualitative interviews, stimulated recall reports, email correspondence, lesson plans, weekly meetings with the supervising professor, and classroom observations. Each data source provided a unique window through which to 'see' how teacher learning was mediated. Individually and collectively, these data sources afforded evidence of language teacher cognition as it was mediated through the interplay of the various activity systems.

Weekly journals

- Participants were asked to write weekly reflective journals throughout Semester One. In the journals, they were asked to share thoughts related to their teaching and learning about teaching, but only those minimal directives were given to see if and how they chose to use the journals as mediational tools for their learning. Not surprisingly, each participant used the journal activity in a different way. Tony used the journal to catalogue classroom events and included limited reflection on his teaching and learning

activity. In differing degrees, Mark and Daniel used their journals as opportunities to reflect on and think about their teaching activity as well as their learning about teaching. At the close of Semester One, the participants were asked to provide feedback about the journal writing. None enjoyed it, each admitted that he had to be reminded to write the journal entries, and all three said that they would not use journals by choice as a mediational tool for professional development because of the time required to write them.

Stimulated recall activity of classroom observations

- During Semester One, each participant was videotaped twice in the activity of teaching; once at the midpoint of the semester, and again at the end. Immediately following each taping session, the teacher and I viewed the video together, and he reflected aloud on his teaching. Sometimes comments were spontaneous responses to what was happening in the video, and other times reflection was prompted based on observational field notes I had written throughout the class period. Stimulated recall conversations were audio recorded, transcribed, and analyzed.

Semi-structured interviews (see Appendix A)

- Each participant completed three (3) semi-structured qualitative interviews at specific points throughout Semester One, and two (2) toward the end of Semester Two. While the initial interview provided an understanding of their previous language learning and instructional histories, the remaining interviews asked them to reflect on the teaching and learning experiences in which they were engaged each semester.

Semester One interviews.

Interview #1 - Pre-School Week: The focus of this interview was to capture each teacher's language learning and instructional history, the reasons for enrolling in this particular professional development program, and their attitudes toward and expectations of their new L2 teaching and learning experience.

Interview #2 - Week 7: The focus of this interview was to have the participants reflect on the support systems available to them and their perceptions of how each mediated their teaching and learning.

Interview #3 - Week 16: This interview was largely a chance for each participant to reflect on his Semester One experiences and share the teaching and learning moments that were most salient to him. The interview also included questions asking about thoughts and plans for teaching in Semester Two and how Semester One may have influenced those ideas.

Semester Two interviews.

Follow-Up Interview #1 – Week 10: The focus of this interview was to have the participants reflect on the support systems available to them and how they perceived each as mediating their teaching and learning.

Follow-Up Interview #2 - Week 16: This interview was largely a chance for each participant to reflect on his Semester Two experiences and share the teaching and learning moments that were most salient to him.

Lesson plans

- Throughout Semester One, lesson plans were discussed during interviews and stimulated recalls, collected at the end of the semester, and used as part of the data analysis. No particular lesson plan format was required.

Classroom observations

- Five classroom observations were conducted with each of the participants. Observations were audio recorded and field notes were written. In addition to field notes, follow-up questions were emailed to the participants immediately following the class observations. Their responses helped clarify different aspect of the classroom observations.

Observations of weekly meetings with supervising professor and other language teachers

- During Semester One, three weekly meetings with each participant and the supervising professor were observed and audio recorded and field notes were written.

Summary of the Data

The data represent an attempt to capture some of the many contexts and experiences that have the potential to mediate the cognitive development of these language teachers. The journals, stimulated recalls, lesson plans, and interview responses originated from the teachers themselves and provided personal descriptions and interpretations of their learning activity. The field notes from the classroom observations, stimulated recalls, and weekly meetings with the supervising professor, as well as the analyses that follow in the next three chapters represented my descriptions and interpretations of the participants' learning as mediated in unique ways by their activity systems. The data analyses in the following chapters make visible each teacher's psychological struggle to develop a conceptualization that could guide how each thinks about his teaching.

The Analysis

I began by analyzing the language of the data at a macro level to locate the salient activity systems that emerged for each participant and showed how the interplay among those systems mediated their cognition. A.N. Leont'ev's (1977) Activity Theory, an extension of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, was used as the conceptual framework identifying the activity systems mediating each teacher's learning. I then used Vygotsky's sociocultural theory to analyze the language on a micro level through "the word". For Vygotsky, concept development, the transformation of objective reality into an ideal, occurs when a subject is confronted with a contradiction between scientific and spontaneous concepts (Newman & Holzman, 1993; Vygotsky, 1986). A contradiction between these concepts forces cognitive dissonance which creates conscious awareness of the activity and begins the transformative process that leads to the development of higher mental consciousness (Jones, 2001). Scholars in language teacher learning emphasize the importance of the moments of tension or contradiction as the starting point of concept development (Freeman, 1996; Johnson & Golombek, 2003; Johnston et al., 2005; van Huizen et al., 2005). Freeman (1996) notes, "to develop their classroom practice, teachers need to recognize and redefine these tensions" (p. 226). In transcripts of teacher narratives, Johnston et al. (2005), found the "most salient feature of the analysis" (p. 58) to be tensions, "the understandings, choices, and decisions that involve conflicting or opposing values and beliefs and that constitute the living dynamics of the teacher's professional development" (p. 58).

To locate those tensions, I used Verity's (2000) notion of emotive language in teacher narratives. Verity analyzed the language of her own teaching diary which she kept as she began teaching in an unfamiliar context. She suggested that new teaching experiences are often

affectively charged. Her personal analysis offered insights into how to use the emotive language of novice teachers or those in new teaching environments as evidence of learning. For example, she found that her initial diary entries included words of fear and unworthiness. Yet as the semester progressed, these words disappeared as she felt the gradual re-emergence of self-regulation and expertise. Verity's work suggested that emotive language may illuminate the point at which a teacher begins to make sense of her teaching.

Using Verity's idea, I then located emotive language and contradictions between everyday and scientific concepts in the data and used the psychological constructs of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory to understand the processes for how concepts are internalized and ultimately externalized in transformation of teaching activity.

While the analytical framework I have outlined appears to have some semblance of systematicity, the journey through the analysis was anything but systematic and clean. Just as Vygotsky's sociocultural theory defines learning and development as a "twisting path", so too was the process of data analysis. The following three chapters present the analyses of the data for Mark, Daniel, and Tony.

Chapter 4: Mark – A Novice Teacher’s Struggle

Introduction

This chapter follows Mark, a novice ESL teacher and MA TESL graduate student wrestling with his conceptualization of what it means to be a second language teacher. Several activity systems emerged as individually and collectively mediating his conceptualization of L2 teaching (see Figure 3):

1. his agency in the process (i.e., affective volition and language learning and instructional history)
2. balancing his roles as both graduate student and novice ESL instructor
3. his support systems (i.e., supervising professor, the professional development program itself, peer ESL instructors, graduate courses)
4. his classroom teaching activity

Each activity system pushed Mark’s emerging conceptualization of L2 teaching creating a psychological struggle that mediated his learning. This chapter provides a lens through which to examine that struggle and see how individually and collectively, these activity systems and the context surrounding each mediated Mark’s conceptualization of L2 teaching. Ultimately, the data illustrate the complex and non-linear nature of Mark’s learning and point to the challenges inherent in moving from learning about L2 teaching to developing a conceptualization that can transform teaching activity and guide how a novice teacher thinks about his teaching.

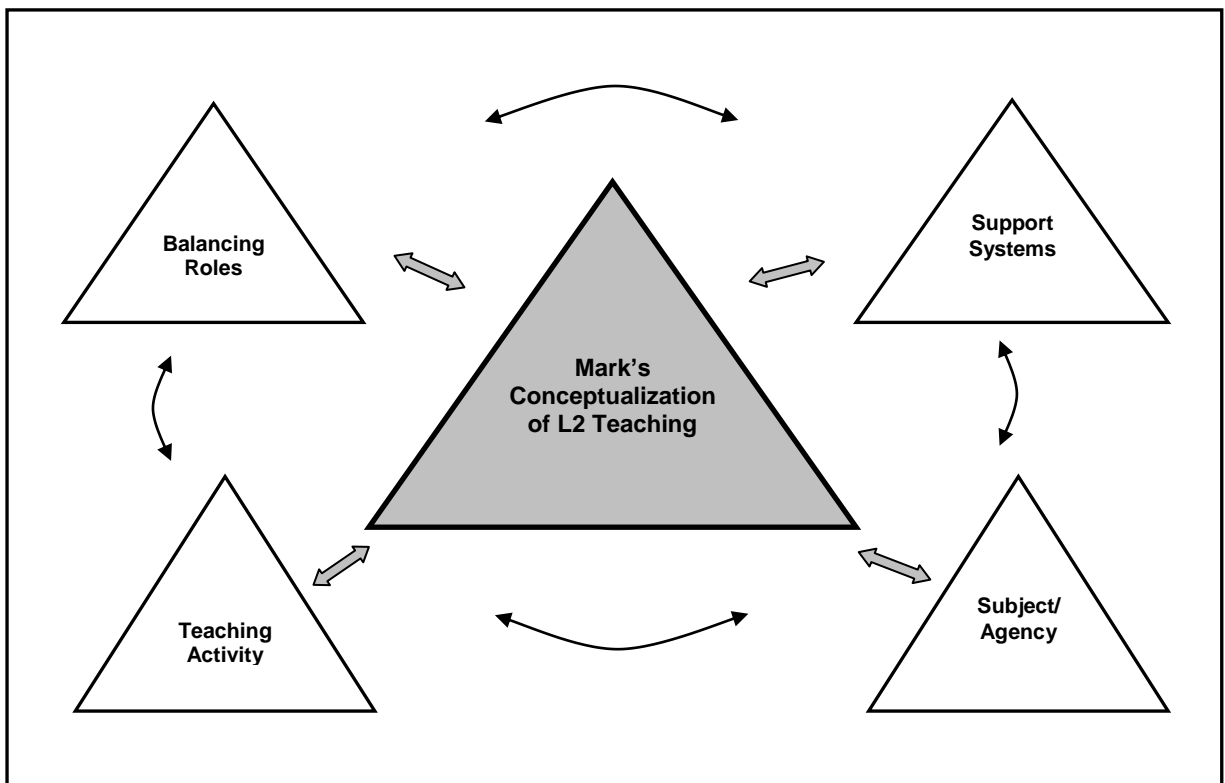


Figure 4. Activity systems mediating and mediated by Mark's conceptualization of L2 teaching.

Summary of the Findings

The data show that Mark's conceptualization of language teaching and learning was largely based on his own language learning which took place in immersion contexts and traditional classroom contexts. It was through these experiences that he came to understand language teaching as engaging students in talk in the target language. As Mark began his first year in graduate school and his first experience as an ESL teacher, his thoughts about how to teach and his sense of agency were continuously challenged as he tried to navigate these new contexts. By the mid-point of Semester One, the disconnect Mark was experiencing between his mental image of the classroom and his actual teaching activity was apparent in the emotional language in his journals and other data. His emotions and ultimately his learning were mediated by the activity systems in which he was engaged. The activity system that was particularly salient for Mark throughout Semester One was the support available to him through his

professional development program, most specifically, the supportive relationship he had with supervising professor. With her help, Mark was beginning to think differently about his teaching activity and even change the way he structured his classes, and this was apparent through observations of his ESL classroom. However, during the second semester, Mark's teaching contexts shifted as did his motivation to seek mediation from his supervising professor. Without her support and consistent reinforcement of pedagogical concepts, Mark's learning shifted. He admitted that he still believed that language was best learned through authentic language activities and a communicative approach, but he had taken the less challenging road of following a textbook, using an audiolingual approach, and incorporating 'chalk and talk' activities into his teaching repertoire. Apathetic students, participation in a different department, and ease of lesson preparation mediated Mark's teaching rather than his own beliefs about language learning. Examining Mark's activity systems across both semesters provides a lens through which to make sense of the shift in how he was approaching his teaching.

Overview of the Chapter

To best represent Mark's journey, a discussion is provided on each of the four (4) activity systems that emerged in the data. Within each of those discussions, the data are presented chronologically. The chapter begins with a discussion of the first activity system, Mark as the agent or subject of his activity. It is important to note that Mark's agency was mediated by contexts and his individual choices within those contexts. This section provides a closer look at his affective volition as well as his language learning and teaching history and illustrates how the agency he felt in his new context mediated his learning over the course of each semester. The second activity system, balancing roles, captures Mark's struggle to balance the work required by his roles as both graduate

student and ESL teacher. As a novice ESL teacher unfamiliar with the challenges of preparing for new classes, Mark struggled to manage his time effectively. That struggle mediated the way he engaged with the other activity systems that emerged; his classroom teaching activity and the support systems available to him. Each activity system played a role in mediating Mark's conceptualization of L2 teaching.

Mark's Conceptualization of L2 Teaching

With the exception of limited instructional responsibilities in the state-side immersion context, Mark had no English as a second language or traditional classroom teaching experience. His conceptualization of L2 teaching was based on his own language learning experiences, his apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975), which had been in language immersion contexts. Mark wanted to create an immersion environment for his students and believed he could do so by creating classroom activities that would engage his students fully in the target language. In an immersion context, he thought, learners quickly felt frustration and confusion, and their discomfort provided the motivation for learning:

People don't like it [confusion] and they want to understand. And if they are given the chance, **if it seems very clear cut and they aren't challenged too much, they don't have the drive to catch on because they don't feel lost a little bit.** (Interview #1, 9/8/05)

While he used different language, Mark's explanation of how language is learned was congruent with the sociocultural epistemological underpinnings of the graduate and professional development program in which he was enrolled. As such, it seemed that because of this alignment, Mark's conceptualization of L2 teaching would be supported

and would continue to develop. However, as Mark began to teach in this new context and create experiences for his ESL writing classes that would encourage student talk, he quickly became discouraged:

I think it's been failing in the last few lessons because **I really want them to talk** a little bit more, and they're really reticent to talk...and **I really try to get my students to talk** all the time and with German **as I've done before**.

(Interview #1, 9/8/05)

The more he met with resistance, the more frustrated he became, and by the end of October, his frustration led to a shift in how he approached his classes:

Like **last week, what I had them do for the first time was have them write for a large portion of class** and turn that in to me to have me look at it. **And I hadn't done it before because I just felt like the class is quiet**, a lot of the, I don't know, theory is that if they're there paying for it they can have the quiet writing time while they're gone, but we did a lot during class, like we interjected a little bit of help along the way or whatever. **And I think it was good in class, but previously I wouldn't have done that. At the beginning of the semester, I wouldn't have had them all just write. Like I would have had them do had a more of, I don't know, an activity than just writing.** (Interview #2, 10/20/05)

In this excerpt, Mark's psychological struggle with how to teach his writing class was apparent, "At **the beginning of the semester, I wouldn't have had them all just write**". He was cognizant of a difference between his teaching activity at the start of the semester and eight weeks later, "**And I think it was good in class, but previously I wouldn't have done that**". While it was uncomfortable for him, there was some indication that he

was beginning to accept his new teaching approach as appropriate for this context. Mark had a network of support (see *Support Systems*) as part of his professional development seminar that he could access at any time and did for help with ideas for classroom activities. But there was no evidence that he sought mediation for how to teach a second language writing class in a way that was congruent with his language learning beliefs. A closer look at the activity systems mediating his evolving conceptualization of L2 teaching provides insights into his frustration and the shift in his teaching approach.

Activity Systems

Subject/Agency

As the subject of his activity, it seems that Mark had agency in his learning, yet his level of agency shifted depending on the context and his confidence within each. In order to understand the agency he appeared to exert in each context, it is important to understand his language learning and instructional history as well as the affective volition he brought to this university teaching and learning experience.

Language learning and instructional history

As the youngest of the study participants, Mark had a relatively limited language learning and instructional history which included high school German classes and a summer language camp experience in a state-side foreign language immersion program. These experiences led him to spend his junior year of high school as an exchange student in Germany, and he returned to Germany again for his senior year of college during which time he accepted the offer to enroll in this particular university professional development program. Because Mark had limited language teaching experience, he drew

on his apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975) from his language learning experiences to guide his teaching.

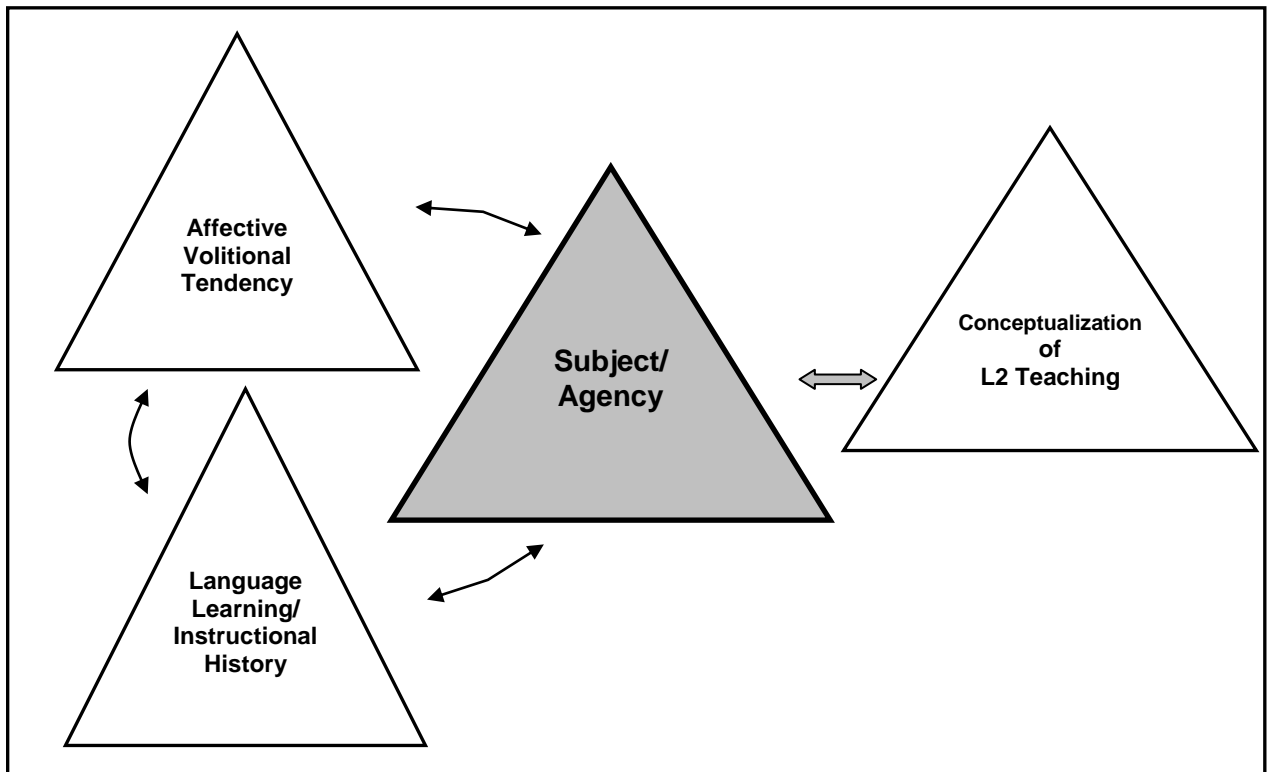


Figure 5. Mark as subject of his activity mediating and mediated by his conceptualization of L2 teaching.

Affective volition

Mark's experiences pointed to his strong personal interest in and motivation for learning language and for wanting to pursue a career related to language learning and teaching through this university professional development program. Mark explained that he had always known he wanted to be in education, and after a junior high German language learning experience, he knew the content area that best matched his interest and ability:

I always want to be a teacher, so I think before I started language I had thought of maybe being a math or social studies teacher, **but then I started German in**

junior high, and I excelled at it. And I figured this is the thing I'm really good at, so I want to teach this.

(Interview #1, 9/8/05)

He explained that his long term goal was to work in academia, and that ultimately, he hoped to write a mandated curriculum focused on changing public school curriculums to focus on language immersion experiences that promote global citizenship. Mark had high expectations for himself that led to a desire to perform well in both his graduate and professional development programs. However, as a novice second language teacher, the demands of teaching and taking classes simultaneously challenged Mark, and he struggled to manage his time and balance his new roles as graduate student and novice ESL teacher.

Balancing Roles

At the beginning of the first semester, the activity system Mark spoke and wrote of most frequently was balancing his roles in his new context; his role as a first-year, first-semester graduate student in a major research institution, and his role as a novice ESL teacher in an intensive, in-service professional development seminar. These potentially complementary roles became contradictory as he struggled with how to define himself within each as they competed for his time.

Roles defined

As a graduate student, Mark was required to remain continuously enrolled in at least nine (9) graduate credit hours per semester and maintain a 3.0 grade point average. As a teacher, Mark was expected to prepare and deliver well-reasoned, challenging lessons for two sections of an ESL writing course designed for beginning to intermediate English language learners (ELLs). This role required a significant amount of time

because it was his first ESL teaching experience and he felt ill-prepared to teach the course because of concern for his own writing ability. Also, he was given latitude in determining the course curriculum which he welcomed, but without prior teaching experience in this area, lack of self-confidence, and a limited curriculum to provide a foundation, preparing lessons for the course was challenging for him.

In addition to the expectations inherent in these roles, Mark had self-generated expectations for his performance. He was committed to achieving As in his graduate courses and to providing student-centered, task-based, immersion-like learning opportunities for his ESL students; however, he admitted that because of the time it took him to prepare to teach his courses, many times he sacrificed his own graduate work to focus on his ESL courses. These competing expectations led to tension that manifested in stress, feelings of inadequacy, and continuous reassessment of his expectations. Vygotsky's psychological constructs allow a closer look at how Mark wrestled with his emerging conceptualization of L2 teaching in this challenging context.

Affective volition and mediation

At the beginning of the semester, Mark was confident in his abilities as a graduate student and did not express concern about that role. He did not, however, feel that same level of confidence as an ESL writing teacher. As Mark anticipated the start of classes and found out about this study, he quickly agreed to participate. He had the desire to do well as a teacher and thought that participating in this research study would “**be good for me**” and would help him stay focused on his teaching:

I would love to [participate] actually because I think it will be good for me.

I'm being selfish because I thought having someone watching me **would keep me on track.**

(Interview #1, 9/8/05)

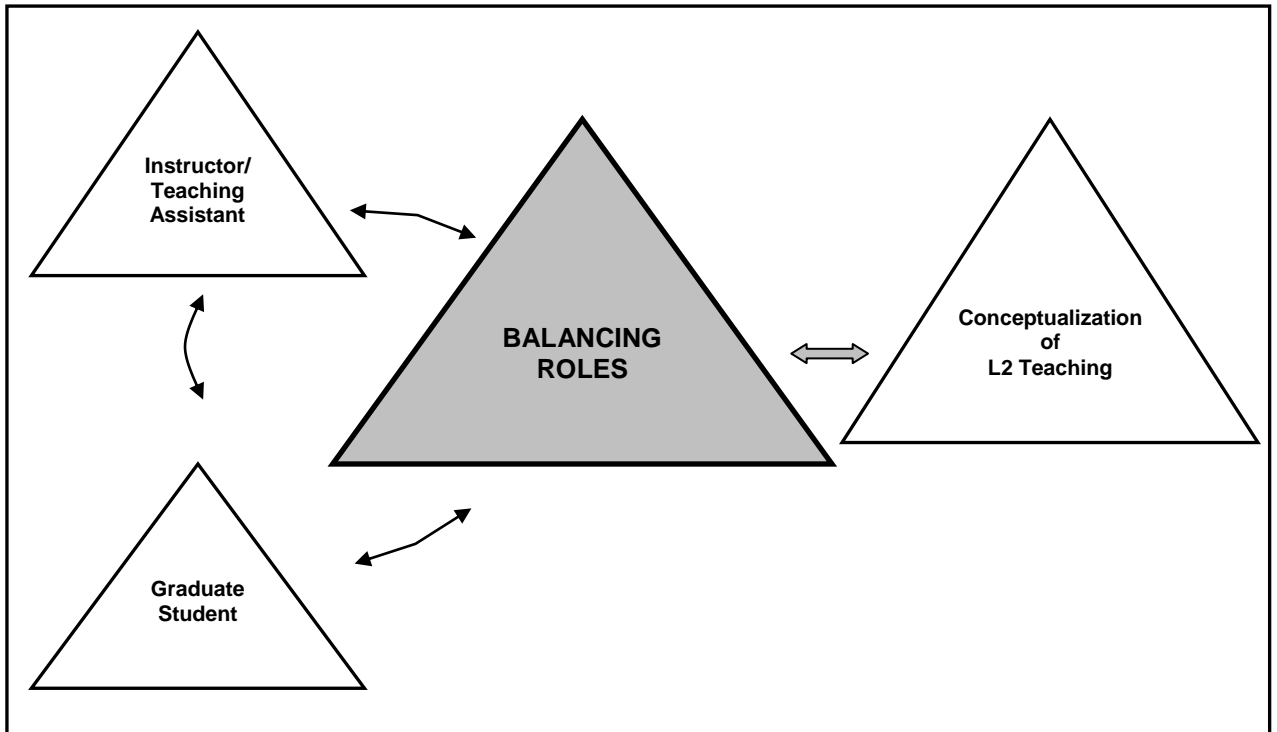


Figure 6. Balancing roles mediated Mark's conceptualization of L2 teaching.

His comment that participation in the study might “**keep me on track**” indicated that even before he started teaching, he was feeling some level of concern about handling the demands of the semester.

Mark also welcomed writing the journals that were required by the study and said, “**I signed up to do this [the study] with you because I really wanted to have that [the journal]**” (Interview #1, 9/8/05). Ironically, as the semester progressed, he did not complete his journals without prompting and expressed disappointment with his level of commitment to the journal writing, “**I wanted to be good at them so much, and that, honestly, is the reason I participated**” (Interview #3, 12/16/05). Even though Mark felt that he did not use the journals as he could have, there was evidence in the journals that

they did afford a mediational space for his emerging conceptualization of L2 teaching (see *Support Systems*).

It is clear that Mark anticipated struggling to balance his commitment to his teaching and his graduate work. At the beginning of the semester, he did not have any difficulty keeping up with both worlds, but by the midpoint of the semester, pressure to complete assignments for his graduate courses increased, and time began to slip away from him. In one interview, he expressed concern about where to focus his energies, on his own coursework or on preparation for his teaching. He realized that depending on his choice there would be consequences, and he decided that his students and financial aid mattered more than his own graduate work:

I have priorities and the students come before me. [My supervising professor] I'm sure says **I'm supposed to come before students**, but **I would feel bad.** **Like because financially, if someone found out that I was neglecting my students, I would not maintain my financial aid here at [the university]. But if I slip a little bit** behind the scenes **no one knows that.**

(Interview #2, 10/20/05, italics added)

At the same time Mark was trying to balance both roles, he was also beginning to see the connection between them:

I think that a lot of it is incorporating the content of the courses that I'm taking into what I'm doing, and to do that **as fast as possible.** Like because **I felt that at the beginning, I didn't see the interconnectedness** between what I'm doing and what I'm learning. **Like I separated those roles in myself**, like,

thinking that while I'm in class as a student, I'm a student. And when I'm in class as a teacher, I'm the teacher. (Interview #2, 10/20/05)

Mark explained that initially, he was not consciously aware of the influence of his courses on his teaching but was beginning to recognize the relationship between his roles and tried to build on that relationship:

And really, **I need to, while I'm in class as a student think, "I'm a teacher. How is this going to help me?" And when I'm in class as a teacher, I have to think, "I'm learning by doing this. How can I incorporate that in what I produce as a student in my other classes?" That it's not two different hats...** You're a student, and you have this job, like this after school job kind of thing, and it's not true. **It's one.** (Interview #2, 10/20/05)

Yet as the semester drew to a close and time pressures increased, juggling both roles brought the return of earlier tensions. As he tried to complete assignments and papers required by his courses, prepare his students for competency tests and determine their grades, he became frustrated and made a sweeping generalization about his overall performance as a teacher:

The only thing that I've been pretty proud about is that I've turned in every writing thing the next class time so far. (Stimulated Recall #2, 11/29/05)

As stress weakened his confidence in his teaching abilities, it actually pushed him to draw boundaries with his students, something he had not been able to do to this point in the semester. The following excerpt from his final journal entry showed this shift:

During these last few weeks, my time has become very conflicted between addressing my students concerns and my own. As they miss deadlines and e-

mail me things outside of class, **I have a hard time** keeping up with everything. **I have decided that after today, I will not be able to give them any last minute help. They needed to get those concerns to me when there was more than a matter of hours before the assignments were due.** (Journal #4, 12/5/05)

Mark's tension was pushing him to learn the consequences of being lenient with deadlines for his students, and he was rethinking his expectations, "**I have decided that after today...**", and placing more responsibility on his students, "**they needed to get those concerns to me...**".

By the final interview of the semester, his teaching and coursework had ended and Mark had time to reflect on his experiences. He spoke more freely now than at any point in the semester, and his thinking became transparent through emotive language:

I really wanted to give my students my primary focus and myself secondary, and I'm sure I'm getting fine grades or whatever but I know they [my grades] were affected by me teaching the classes. I've had a lot of problems balancing my roles, not problems, I think my academics have gone a little bit because of having to keep my students as a priority. (Interview #3, 12/16/05)

He was cognizant of his psychological struggle and verbalized the tension he experienced throughout the semester. In spite of his struggles, Mark realized that teaching second language learners as he was learning about L2 teaching was mediating a deeper understanding of his own learning and teaching:

I think that it's really important that [the department has graduate] students doing the teaching... Especially for me, I know that others have had ESL experiences, but for me it was really new. So to have the practical

applications of like the theoretical things I was learning in class, I think gave me a little more insights than the other students that weren't TAs [teaching assistants] that didn't have a way to apply something the next day that they had gone over in class. (Interview #3, 12/16/05)

With time to reflect on his experiences, Mark was able to acknowledge the value of the opportunity to teach and learn simultaneously and was appreciative of this aspect of the professional development program.

As Mark entered Semester Two, he had to balance the same roles he did in Semester One, graduate student and language teacher, yet the expectations of each role changed with the new contexts as did the agency he exerted in those contexts. This semester, he felt more comfortable with his graduate courses and indicated that they required less time commitment than his Semester One classes:

I'm on top of my own classes this semester. And last semester **I had snowballed toward the end.** And the courses I'm taking this semester **aren't as time consuming.** (Follow-Up Interview #1, 3/13/06)

His coursework did not include ESL teaching methods or teacher development, and he was not challenged to think differently about his teaching as he had been in Semester One. In addition, his teaching assignment was less stressful because it included one section of the same ESL writing course he taught in Semester One, so he had some level of preparation and was comfortable with his lesson plans. The other course he was teaching was an introductory German course, a curriculum that was very familiar from his past language learning and teaching experiences, "**Oh, it's much more fun to teach German. I really like it**" (Follow-Up Interview #1, 3/13/06). Consequently, with a

different, less stressful set of expectations and familiarity with the courses he had to teach, Mark found it much easier to balance his roles this semester. His increased sense of confidence in this new context also influenced his learning this semester, and this will be discussed in the last section of this chapter.

Support Systems

It was clear that Mark's struggle to balance his roles particularly during Semester One was an activity system that had an important influence on his learning. Another activity system that emerged as mediating Mark's conceptualization of L2 teaching was the complex network of support afforded through his professional development seminar that surrounded Mark throughout his first year in this learning and teaching experience:

1. the supervising professor for the professional development program
2. other ESL instructors (graduate students who participated in the professional development program)
 - a. a large workroom that served as a collegial space for ESL instructors
 - b. participation in weekly meetings with the supervising professor and the instructors teaching similar courses
3. the professional development program
4. his graduate courses

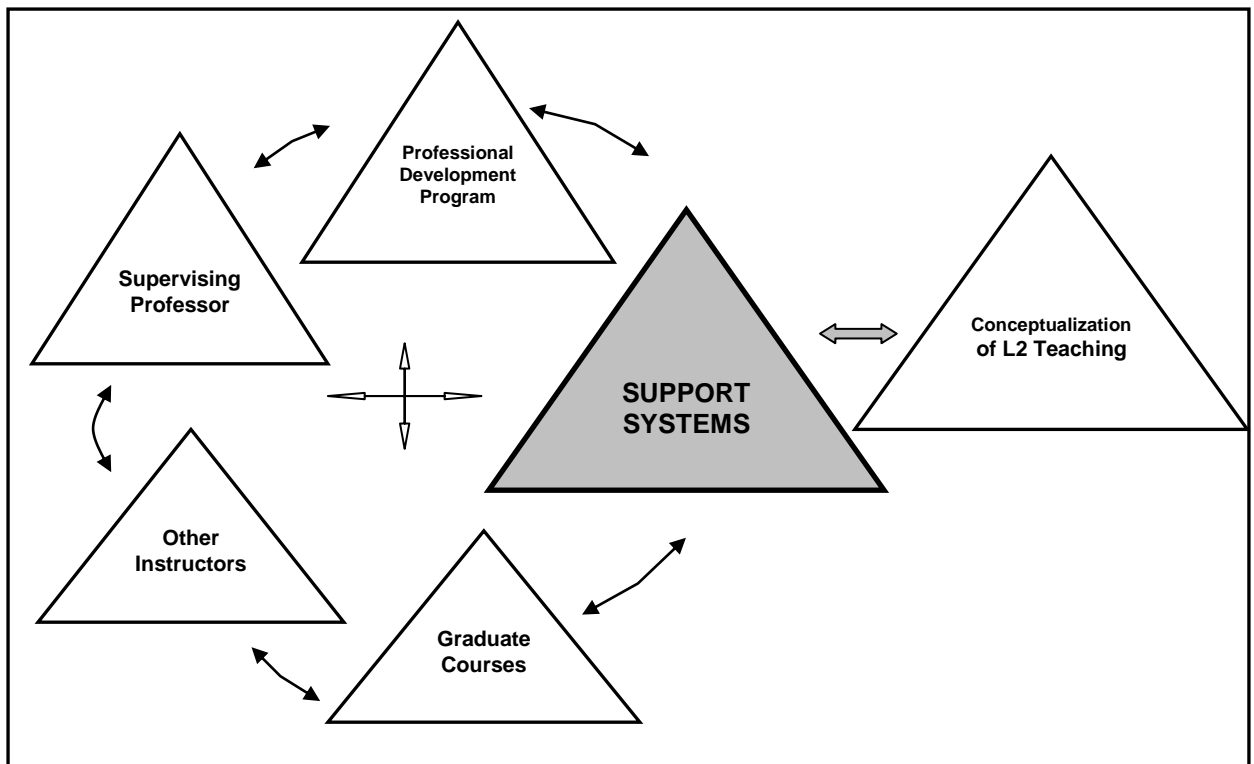


Figure 7. Support systems mediating and mediated by Mark's conceptualization of L2 teaching.

Supervising professor

Mark's supervising professor played a key role in mediating his conceptualization of second language teaching by creating a context in which he could feel comfortable expressing his emotions as he struggled to balance his roles and come to terms with his own learning. In addition to regularly scheduled meetings with his supervising professor and other ESL teachers, Mark sought individual consult from her often for a range of teaching concerns from creating his syllabus and dealing with classroom management issues to sharing ideas for teaching strategies:

I think it's that **[she] has been so good** at creating such a good environment that **I go to her more than I would**. I started out that way where I wouldn't go to her because everything's fine, you know, the macho, **I can handle it, I don't need directions, or whatever**. But now I feel like if I go to her that she's not going

to judge me for not being as prepared as I should. **So I do go to her more than I would probably.** (Interview #2, 10/20/05)

Mark was comfortable with his supervising professor and described her as very supportive, approachable, and always accessible, yet his exchanges with her decreased toward the end of the semester. While this was in part because of time constraints, Mark confessed that it was a conscious choice on his part because his supervising professor was also a professor for one of his graduate classes. This particular course was one he had neglected because he was struggling to manage his courses and teaching responsibilities, “**I get self-conscious** dealing with [her] because she’s also the teacher of the course that I’m taking right now” (Interview #3, 12/16/05). While Mark consulted his supervisor less frequently over time, the meditation she provided for him, both in terms of his teaching and emotional support, played a critical role in mediating his understanding of L2 teaching (see *Teaching Activity*).

Other instructors and teacher workroom

Fellow instructors in the professional development seminar represented another support system for Mark, particularly three (3) instructors who taught Mark’s ESL course previously. One instructor was especially attentive to Mark’s questions, and Mark found himself conversing with him, “**daily, bi-daily, four times a week**” (Interview #2, 10/20/05). Mark and he were often in the instructor workroom at the same time and had cubicles near one another:

The person who gives me the most ideas is [Joe]. He sits adjacent to me. So if I have a question, I spin my chair around and **he's really nice and willing to help me out. I really rely on him a lot for busy work kind of questions** like where

do I go for this, how did I do this, who do I call, **but also, I don't know, support, emotional support, and just ideas and stuff.** (Interview #2, 10/20/05)

The opportunity to share a common ESL teacher workroom area was an extremely important support for all aspects of Mark's experiences including his graduate courses, his teaching, and his social well-being:

So if I had questions in something in a class I'm taking or how can I apply something I've learned in a class to my teaching, they all have that knowledge. And I couldn't go anywhere else for that. (Interview #3, 12/16/05)

Without the ESL instructor workroom Mark noted:

I would be absolutely lost. If I had my own office, if my office was just a room in this building and wasn't down the hall from [two professors], and it wasn't in the same room with all those guys, **I would, not only would I be lost as a teacher, I would be lost socially because that's also where a lot of my social interaction comes from.** (Interview #3, 12/16/05)

In addition to the workroom exchanges, Mark met weekly with several instructors and his supervising professor to discuss the courses they were teaching. From the beginning, he felt a bit out of place in these meetings because he was the only novice ESL instructor and did not teach the same course as the others. His supervising professor recognized Mark's need for added support and met with him individually before or after these meetings:

[She] and I started that because as you see, **I don't speak a lot in that because a lot of it's not relevant to me,** or because, **what am I going to say? They all**

know a lot about this kind of stuff, and I mean, I'm still a beginner, relatively so. (Interview #2, 10/20/05)

Mark was conscious of his novice status, “**I'm still a beginner**”, and admitted that in this context, he was hesitant to speak, “**what am I going to say?**” He was grateful for the one-on-one meeting times with his supervising professor for the first part of the semester.

Professional development program

By the midpoint of the semester, however, Mark became more confident in his teaching abilities. His shift in confidence was apparent as he participated more readily in the weekly meetings and offered substantive ideas to other ESL instructors. When asked why he appeared more self-assured and participatory in the meetings, he explained:

What's unique in this program and programs that are similar **is that they [other instructors] also have the same major as I do, are in the same classes as mine, and my classes somehow relate to what I'm doing.** So it's not like the math department where some of them are becoming mathematicians and not math teachers. **We're all involved in the teaching aspect. So our classes aren't just learning about language, they are learning about language teaching. So there's a huge common goal involved in all our activities in that room.**

(Interview #2, 10/20/05)

Mark described the design of the professional development program and how their “**common goal**” of “**learning about language, [as] they are learning about language teaching**” was unique and mediating his learning because it related to what he was doing.

At the end of Semester One, he again commented on the value of the program design:

It's incredibly helpful for the TAs to have this experience...So to have the practical applications of like the theoretical things I was learning in class, I think gave me a little more insights than the other students...

(Interview #3, 12/16/05)

Mark's words indicate that he was very much aware of and engaged in his learning experiences this semester and was developing some sense of agency for his learning as a result.

Graduate courses

Mark's was also acquiring an increased feeling a agency through the concepts his was learning in his graduate courses and indicated that they were mediating his thinking about teaching and his teaching activity. From his pedagogy class, Mark verbalized his understanding of the power of context on teaching activity:

I think the first time that I heard it [the 'it depends' mantra] from [one professor] in the course I'm taking from her, I really took it to heart. She explained it really well in that every classroom, every day, every time of the year, every student, every, you know, all those factors are really important in how effective a lesson can be. And you have to take those factors into

consideration.

(Interview #3, 12/16/05)

He was consciously aware of his learning, "**I really took it to heart**", and related his understanding of context to his teaching, "**all those factors are really important in how effective a lesson can be**". Mark's awareness of his learning was also apparent in the next excerpt as he talked about his L2 acquisition course:

And the other course that I took was **SLA theory**. **And there were a few times when after I read a few things for that course, I could either articulate my decisions that I had previously made or challenge them. And there were a few times where I saw them affect my future lesson plans and things.**

(Interview #3, 12/16/05)

He verbalized that he was making a connection between scientific concepts and his teaching activity, “**I saw them [concepts] affect my future lesson plans and things**”, though because he did not specifically state the concepts he was referring to, the connection cannot be substantiated in data from Semester One or Two.

Even though the same support systems were available to Mark during Semester Two, his engagement with them was noticeably different. Meetings with the ESL teachers and supervising professor were not required of him, he chose not to seek assistance from his supervising professor:

So we never set up that weekly meeting, so I think we’ve all just gone to her [the supervising professor] as things have come up. **And I just haven’t, you know, really connected with her.** (Follow-Up Interview #1, 3/13/06)

From his experiences during Semester One, Mark was aware of the importance of the support systems surrounding him and welcomed and sought assistance from them. There was evidence of a shift in how he was thinking about and approaching his teaching. Yet when his context changed in Semester Two, he did not feel compelled to seek support for his teaching or interact with his support systems in any significant way. Instead, there was evidence of a shift in his teaching activity even though he never indicated a shift in his initial beliefs about how language is learned.

Teaching Activity

Two distinct yet connected aspects of Mark's teaching activity emerged as mediating his teaching; his classroom management, and the way he organized and executed his lessons. Classroom management was defined as the expectations and boundaries Mark set for his students such as being on time, coming to class prepared, attentiveness during class, time on task, and how he communicated his expectations to his students. Organizing and executing lessons included how he thought about, organized, and made sense of the lesson content for each class period.

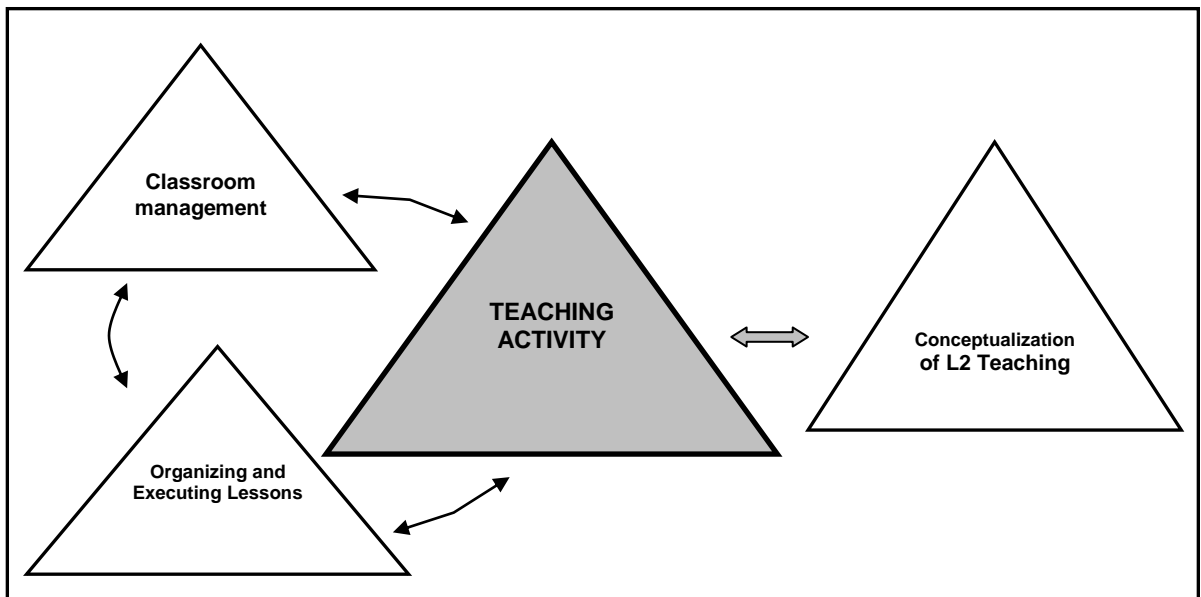


Figure 8. Teaching activity mediating and mediated by Mark's conceptualization of L2 teaching.

Classroom Management

Because this was Mark's first experience teaching in a traditional classroom context, he had much to learn about classroom management and how to respond to student behaviors such as being tardy for class, not completing assignments, and lack of interest in the lessons. He then had to decide what the consequences would be for these

types of behaviors and enforce those consequences. Throughout much of Semester One, Mark did not delineate clear behavior expectations or set boundaries for his students:

I told them that two tardy attendance days can add to an absence, but if they come in the first few minutes... **I'm not much of a stickler.**

(Stimulate Recall #1, 10/11/05)

By the end of the semester, however, Mark's frustration with his students' classroom behaviors spurred an emotional response that mediated how he talked about his students' and his own expectations:

I think that **I've become a little bit more strict** about a few things, like speaking out of turn in class and things like that, **because I kind of got burned** by relaxing the tone with [George] and a few other students a few times.

(Interview #3, 12/16/05)

Classroom observations confirmed that he was “**a little bit more strict**”, and one example of this shift happened during a classroom observation toward the end of the semester (Observation #5, 11/17/05). Three students arrived and did not have the required assignments, and without hesitation, Mark dismissed them to go to the library to complete the work for a late grade. His response suggested that he was beginning to think differently about his role as a teacher and set boundaries and expectations for his students.

Organizing and Executing Lessons

At the same time Mark was learning to manage classroom behaviors, he was learning how to organize and execute meaningful lessons. Throughout much of Semester One, there was a disconnect between Mark's conceptualization of his lessons and what

was observed in the classroom (Observations #1-5, 9/8/05-11/17/05). One example of this incongruity was apparent in the following journal excerpt about a particular class. Mark explained that his students needed more work with verb tense, and he carefully outlined the activities he used to address that need, and even provided a justification for what he had done:

I decided that their biggest need was for a better understanding of verb tense. I spoke for a large portion of the lesson and wrote on the board. The students were asked to chime in and give correct examples. The homework was to finish some sentences that were started in the textbook. I am really trying to lay track for switching the focus to genre and form of writing later on, but it is difficult. (Journal #1, 9/16/05)

On paper, it seemed that Mark had a clear plan for how to approach his teaching and determine the content for each class. He commented on the effectiveness of his teaching and his students' learning, and at this point early in the semester, he was comfortable:

I am glad that I picked up on the problems that my students were having, and I hope that it continues to go this well. (Journal #1, 9/16/05)

From an observers' perspective, however, Mark's teaching and the level of student engagement was quite different (Observations #1-5, 9/8/05-11/17/05). Mark provided a clear justification for his lessons on paper, but he did not explain the goal of the lesson to his students or provide a justification for the activities. In addition, he did not preview or review the activities within the lesson or use transitions to help his students make sense of the intended learning. Student participation was limited, and when they did respond, he did not extend their responses or encourage more participation.

Overall, the lessons were disjointed, lacked cohesion and clear a purpose and were delivered as a ‘checklist’ of activities. As a novice teacher, this type of lesson delivery is not unusual because he was still learning how to connect classroom activities in a way that would promote student learning. Yet because he sensed no cognitive dissonance or emotional tension at the end of the class, Mark was confident in this teaching and believed he was promoting student learning.

Affective volition, mediation and ZPD

Mark’s confidence level shifted dramatically one afternoon in late September after a visit from his supervising professor. Through the strategic mediation she provided, he began to experience a psychological struggle as she pushed him to think differently about his teaching activity. His struggle became visible in the following journal entry:

I didn't want to send out my e-mail [journal] until I had gone through all of my notes. **This week was very interesting for me** as [my supervising professor] observed me and **I got a lot of feedback and ideas**. On Tuesday, I had [her] observe my other section, and **my class did not go so well (I am sure she would never word it like that, but it's true)**. (Journal #2, 10/2/05)

It was clear from the first sentence of his journal entry that the story he was about to share involved a strong emotional component, precisely the emotionally-charged cognitive dissonance that can foment learning. The journal also provided evidence of a mediational space between his cognition and emotion as he experienced a contradiction in his teaching activity and the mediation by his supervising professor. The gap afforded a learning opportunity for Mark who was clearly functioning, albeit uncomfortably, in his

ZPD. As Chaiklin (2003) states, “Vygotsky never assumed that learning related to the zone of proximal development is always enjoyable” (p. 42).

Mark continued to describe the moment:

I then met with her [my supervising teacher] on Wednesday to talk about my class. **We focused on error correction, how to communicate task instructions. It gave me a lot to think about. I was also impressed with how [she] challenged me:** the times when **she wanted me to articulate myself to solidify my ideas** were so much like the instances when she was hoping that I would challenge my own ideas and change them, that I didn't feel like I was being put down for my mistakes. **I really feel lucky to have her helping me.** On [Wednesday] evening, **I was telling myself that the silver lining was that I wouldn't have gotten such good feedback if [she] had seen me at my best** (it was a stretch at the time, but I really believed it by the time Thursday rolled around). (Journal #2, 10/2/05)

Because of the emotional and cognitive dissonance he felt and the mediation provided by his supervisor, Mark responded quickly to her suggestions and changed the way he prepared and executed subsequent lessons, at least for a few weeks. This event represented a salient moment in Mark's learning and development as an L2 teacher, and he was consciously aware of and acknowledged the benefits of the mediation:

Because of the conversation I had with [her] I changed my plan for Thursday from a focus on ‘how to outline’ to ‘how to choose the best preparation for yourself’. **It went really well.** I had my students present the method that their

group was assigned. Then we talked about the advantages of each.

(Journal #2, 10/2/05)

From this October moment until the end of November, classroom observations, journals and interviews provided evidence that Mark was consciously aware of his teaching activity and was trying to create well-organized, coherent lessons focused on one major theme for each class period. During one classroom observation, Mark began the class by assigning a journal topic and used it as a preview to the day's activities (Observation #3, 10/20/05). He segued to an in-class group activity, and the students were engaged throughout the class. At the end, he connected the activity back to their journals and gave them a homework assignment that was also related to their journals. The overall organization of the lesson was much more solid than previous lessons, and his communication of tasks was clear. Students' responses reinforced Mark's developing understanding of how to create a coherent, organized lesson:

I was actually really excited about how well it went. I think it's probably the most conscious choice of any of the content things that I've done.

(Interview #2, 10/20/05)

A journal entry from the same timeframe indicated that he was consciously aware of changes in the way he was conceptualizing and executing his lessons:

I found that these last two weeks have been really good for my development in planning my lessons. I have changed my methods so that each lesson is one, connected activity, and when smaller issues come up, I deal with it differently than I had before: either dealing with it in comments on work I give

back to the students, dealing with it right then in a more spontaneous way, or saving it for another larger lesson later. (Journal #3, 10/24/05)

At the end of the semester, however, as pressure and deadlines from his graduate courses competed with the time he needed to prepare for his classes, his teaching began to reflect an earlier approach as lessons lost their focus and became disjointed again. Mark knew his teaching was changing, but because of time, he did not seek mediation during the final weeks of the semester to help him continue to grow in his understanding of L2 teaching. The shift in Mark's teaching activity was indicative of the changeable nature of learning and the need for time and mediation to push concept development.

Activity Systems and Semester Two

As Mark began the second semester, his learning was mediated by what appeared to be the same activity systems, but the context surrounded each had changed. As a result, Mark's teaching activity shifted, and instead of focusing on creating well-organized, coherent classes that engaged his students in authentic language learning experiences, he now struggled to justify why he was comfortable teaching in a way that was not congruent with his own language learning beliefs or those of his department and professional development program. A closer look at the changes in his activity systems helps to explain the shift.

Like Semester One, Mark taught two classes; a section of the same ESL writing class he had the first semester, and a level two German class for undergraduates. Unlike Semester One, planning for the ESL class was not as time consuming because he had taught it before, and the German class did not require much preparation. Even his graduate classes were less time-intensive this semester, so managing his time and

balancing his roles did not create a psychological struggle for him. He did, however, express frustration with the level of participation in his ESL class in the same way he had in Semester One:

The **spoken participation is really different because of fewer students who are on the whole not so talkative**. So the three of them really are the only ones that volunteer to speak, and the other four or five don't really speak, and even then, it's, **it's difficult**. (Follow-Up Interview #1, 3/13/06)

He decided that their lack of motivation could be traced to their reasons for coming to the United States:

None of them are, well, I think maybe [Thanh], the guy from Viet Nam, he might stay here, **but I think the rest of them are here purely foreign exchange students and are going back**...the rest of them **are all pure visitors...and I'm sure they're not going to really need English** like some of the students who were actually going to live in America. (Follow-Up Interview #1, 3/13/06)

Mark seemed satisfied with his explanation and his students' behavior since he was "**sure they're not going to really need English**".

Even in the German class, participation was an issue, and he again pointed to student motivation. This time, he attributed the apathy of his students to their focus on other priorities and that German was low on their lists:

I have to create the atmosphere of German in the German classroom. **I'm the only one that's gonna really just speak German. They're not going to talk to each other**. They all have English as the common language. They all just got out of a day or morning of speaking English and for **an hour they're supposed to**

speak as much German as possible. And German, it's difficult for me because there's 20 kids, and **German is not their priority** and so attendance isn't perfect. (Follow-Up Interview #1, 3/13/06)

The context of the German department also determined Mark's expectations for his students and for his teaching activity. Department standards were measured through interviews and portfolios of student achievement, and both were very different from assessments used for his ESL class and did not reflect his own teaching philosophy or that of his other department:

It's been difficult just because of the plan the German department has laid out. It has a lot of different things. **They want the students to have interviews throughout the semester and do what they call portfolios. But they are much different from linguistics. It's just, it's pretty much just a periodical check on the different skills.** (Follow-Up Interview #1, 3/13/06)

Mark explained another difference between the ESL and German program and noted that the German class was textbook-driven, and teachers were expected to cover certain material by the end of the semester:

But the **grammar is all hopefully the same by the end of the semester.** It might be in different level and different stages, but **the vocabulary, we didn't have a template of what they need for vocabulary from the book because it's ridiculous.** (Follow-Up Interview #1, 3/13/06)

As such, the textbook, or at least the concepts from the text, mediated Mark's teaching rather than his conceptualization of language teaching. The textbook became an

important focus for Mark, and he spent a lot of time explaining the problems with it even though it was being phased out of the program:

The **book is absolutely awful. It's horrible.** So now the other classes like German 1 have the new book that they [his students] will get half way through the next semester, and German 3 has the new book that comes after that.

(Follow-Up Interview #1, 3/1/06)

Because of external constraints imposed by departmental requirements, Mark believed that he was 'required' to teach in a textbook-driven fashion. A textbook-driven teaching approach was not congruent with Mark's beliefs about how language should be taught, yet he was comfortable in this teaching context because it was familiar from his language learning history: "**Oh, it's much more fun to teach German. I really like it**" (Follow-Up Interview #1, 3/13/06).

Unlike the first semester, the data did not point to any tension between Mark's role as a teacher and as a graduate student. This may be in part because he felt a sense of agency with both the German and ESL curriculums and did not struggle to prepare lessons. It may also be that unlike Semester One, he was not enrolled in graduate courses related to ESL teacher learning and was not challenged to think differently about his teaching activity as he had been. Another factor was the absence of mediation from his supervising professor who had pushed his learning throughout the first semester which created a psychological tension for Mark that motivated him to think differently about his teaching. Without her mediation and without the influence of the other activity systems on his thinking, it was not apparent that he was giving much thought to his teaching in Semester Two. The data from Semester One illustrated how tensions created mediational

spaces in which he was thinking differently about his teaching. The absence of contradiction this semester was a sign that his emerging conception was not being fostered, yet there was no evidence that his core beliefs about language teaching had changed:

I have reverted a little bit in that the [other] department is very, I don't know, **touchy feely. Everything can be done through communicative learning. And I like that, but I feel there's a point** at which there's complicated grammar that **just needs to be explained, practiced, and charts and things like that memorized.** (Follow-Up Interview #1, 3/13/06)

Mark realized that his teaching approach was not reflective of his own experiences and beliefs nor did it echo the philosophy of his graduate department and professional seminar. Yet he justified his teaching activities by explaining that others in the German department used the same approach:

I've talked to other people in the German department, and that's kind of the conclusion we've come to. I mean, I love this. They also have in the German department a big focus on communicative learning, but when you sit down and talk to the instructors, they say that's all well and good, but when I'm teaching this, this, and this, I have to just stop and sit with them and do the 'chalk and talk' and say here's what, you know, here's the phenomenon, and here's how you do it. (Follow-Up Interview #1, 3/13/06)

During this semester, Mark allowed the context of his classroom and department to shape the level of agency he chose to exert on his learning, to mediate his teaching activity, and even to provide him with a justification for an approach that was counter to his own

beliefs. Agency is a powerful indicator of learning, an indicator that is mediated by an individual's choice within a given context.

Conclusion

The activity systems pushing Mark's learning were made visible through the language of the data. As the subject of his activity, the agency Mark felt he had in his role as a novice ESL teacher mediated his ability to balance his roles as graduate student and teacher. When he was unable to handle the pressures of both roles in a way that felt comfortable to him, the frustration he felt generated feelings of inadequacy that distracted him from learning about teaching. Support systems also played an important mediational role in Mark's learning. In particular, his supervising professor and other instructors provided the cognitive and emotional support he needed to push his learning. The importance of these relationships became even more apparent when Mark taught in a new context in the second semester and chose not to continue to cultivate the relationships with his supervising professor or other instructors in his department. Without their support, Mark's sense of agency shifted, and he chose to allow his teaching context rather than his beliefs about language learning to mediate his thinking. Because he did not experience tension or any sense of challenge to his thinking about teaching, there was no evidence that his learning as a teacher was mediated as it had been in the first semester.

The context in which Mark taught during Semester Two was decidedly different from his first semester, and his experiences illustrate that context is a powerful mediator for learning. Consistency of pedagogical concepts or theoretical unity across learning contexts is critical for language teachers, novice teachers in particular, to develop an understanding of their teaching (Cook et al., 2002; Smagorinsky et al., 2003). Because his

emerging understandings of L2 teaching were just that, emerging and not fully internalized, Mark did not have a solid conceptualization through which to think about his teaching and was influenced by the context surrounding his activity. Mark's story illustrates the importance of supportive relationships, consistency of concepts across learning contexts, and the realization that it takes time to develop a conceptualization of L2 teaching that can serve as a tool for how teachers think about and approach their teaching.

Chapter 5: Daniel – An Experienced Teacher's Journey

Introduction

The material conditions surrounding Mark and Daniel's learning and development as L2 teachers were similar; both were first year graduate students in a major university, enrolled in nine graduate-level credits in the same department, had prior language teaching and learning experiences, were instructors for two sections of college-level ESL classes, shared the same instructor workroom, and were mentored by the same supervising professor. In spite of seemingly similar material conditions for learning, their conceptualizations of L2 teaching emerged and developed in unique ways. This phenomenon is an example of the major premise of activity theory that what appears on the surface to be the same activity may have different outcomes as a result of the activity systems mediating and mediated by the activity and the agency of the individual in the learning process.

What follows is a description and analysis of the activity systems that individually and collectively mediated Daniel's conceptualization of L2 teaching. Activity theory provides the framework with which to "see" the activity systems that shaped Daniel's evolving conceptualization and the psychological constructs of sociocultural theory provide a language through which to understand that evolution.

Summary of the Findings

Daniel was an international student who entered his new teaching context and graduate program with a variety of EFL and ESL teaching and learning experiences. In Semester One, he approached his teaching from what he described as a constructivist philosophy, but it was clear from the data that he had developed a pseudo-conceptualization of constructivism and struggled with how to develop learning

partnerships with his students. He wanted them to be motivated to learn yet at the same time, he wanted to control their learning. This was evident as he talked about meeting individually with each student to determine his or her needs and to give each student the strategies needed to address them. Frustration settled in quickly for Daniel when students did not respond as he expected, and the more disenchanted he became with their motivation the more he vacillated between feeling guilty for not meeting their needs and detaching himself from their learning outcomes. A close examination of the data illustrates Daniel's psychological struggle and provides evidence of the inherently complex process of concept development.

Overview of the Chapter

Daniel's process of learning and development was captured from data that included classroom observations, journals, and interviews, the majority of which were collected during Semester One. Data from Semester Two included two interviews, one at the midpoint of the semester and another at the end. The chapter opens with a discussion of Daniel's conceptualization of L2 teaching and continues with a close look at each of the activity systems that emerged in the data. These activity systems include his role as the subject of his learning activity, the choices he makes as the agent in his learning, and the influence of his language learning and instructional history and affective volition on his learning. The next section looks at the support systems, emotional and cognitive, available to him through his professional development program and his life circumstances. The remainder of the chapter examines his concrete teaching activity and uses the psychological constructs of sociocultural theory to make visible the relationship

between and among these activity systems to illustrate how they mediate his conceptualization of L2 teaching.

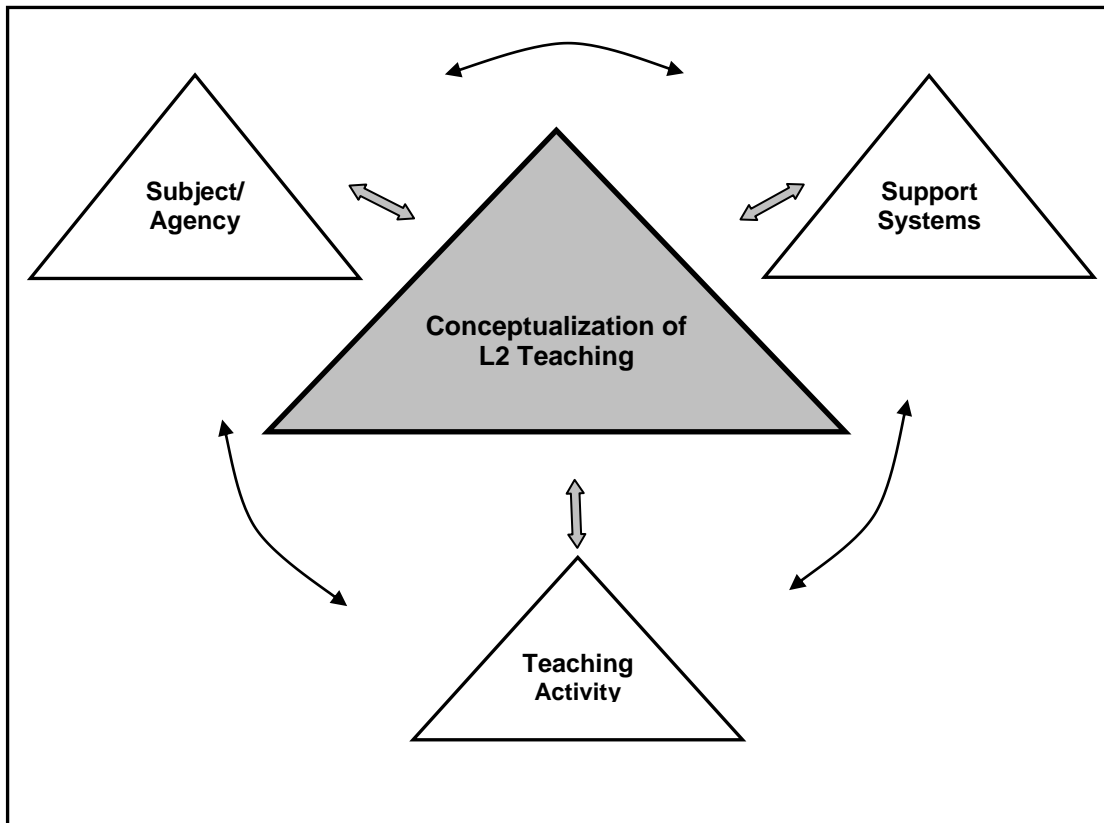


Figure 9. Activity systems mediating Daniel's conceptualization of L2 teaching.

Daniel's Conceptualization of L2 Teaching

Daniel entered his new teaching context with prior language teaching and learning experiences and stated that his conceptualization of L2 teaching was rooted in the philosophy of “constructivism”. However, through careful examination of the data, it appeared that he was struggling with how to operationalize “constructivism” in his teaching and define his role in his students’ learning. On one hand, classroom observations showed that his teaching activity reflected constructivist ideals as he worked in partnership with his students to guide their learning. His teaching was student-centered, and he used authentic language learning activities that engaged his students and

appeared to promote learner motivation and autonomy (Murphy, 1997). But it was the motive behind his teaching activity that pointed to Daniel's psychological struggle. Through the language of the data, it was apparent that Daniel positioned himself not as a guide but rather as fully responsible for whether or not his students progressed in their language learning. It was his sense of agency in the process, his belief that he could help them learn what they needed to be successful that caused him to put undue pressure on himself to manage their success had him seeking ways to control their learning. One approach he used was to meet individually with each student throughout Semester One to determine his/her language learning needs and provide specific strategies to improve them.

At the midpoint of Semester One, however, in spite of the time and effort Daniel devoted to addressing his students' needs, some of his students were not taking up his instruction nor reaching the level of learning he expected. Daniel felt tension between his expectations and his students' learning and exerted his own agency in attempts to resolve the tension he felt through self- and other-mediation. By the close of Semester One, he wavered between feeling responsible for and wanting to control his students' learning to detaching himself from their learning outcomes and placing responsibility fully on his students. Semester Two brought with it new students that Daniel described as more apathetic, and their lack of motivation continued to push Daniel's struggle with how to think about and approach his teaching. The following section provides an in-depth look at Daniel as the subject of his own activity, and how his language learning and instructional history and the affective volition driving his learning mediated his conceptualization of L2 teaching.

Activity Systems

Subject/Agency

Recognizing who Daniel was as the subject of his activity is critical for understanding how his own agency mediated his evolving conceptualization of L2 teaching. Daniel's agency comprised his language learning and instructional history and his affective volition.

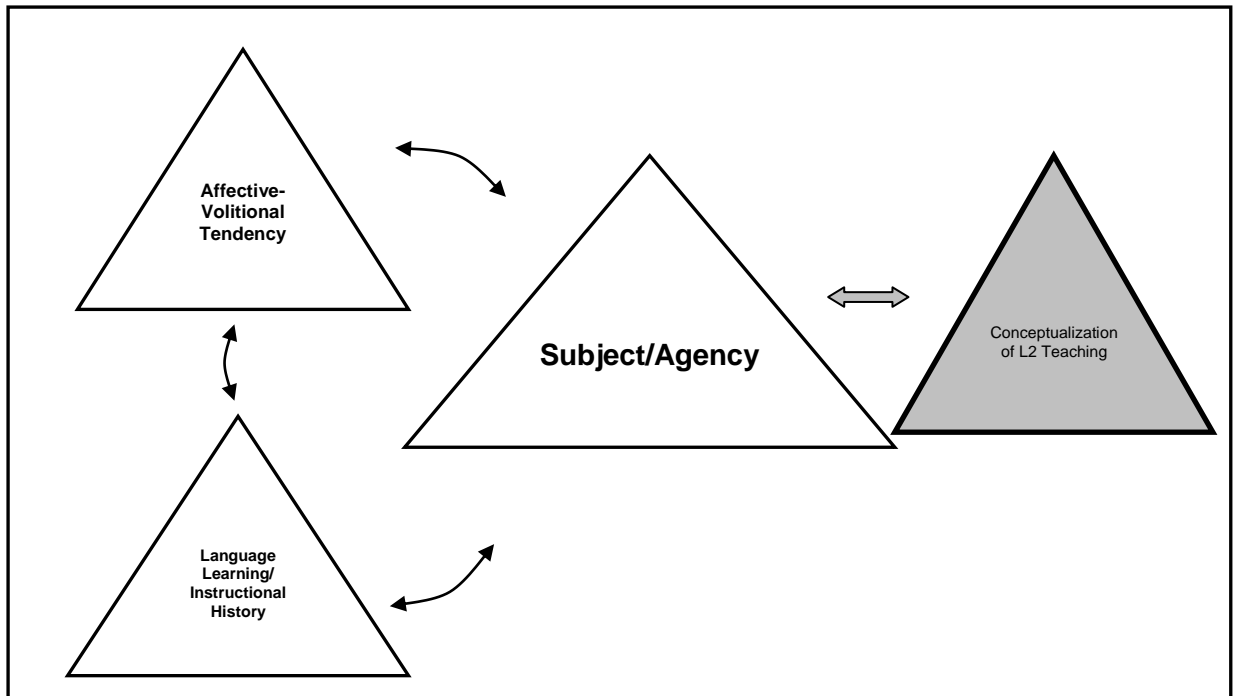


Figure 10. Daniel as the subject of his teaching and learning activity.

Language Learning and Instructional History

As was noted in the beginning of this chapter, Daniel was an international student and began his study of English in an EFL learning environment. He described his language learning experiences as:

...just like learning Spanish in high school here. You don't really learn a lot.

In high school, it was **really focused on the grammar and vocabulary.**

(Interview #1, 9/7/05)

Daniel had little interest in learning English in high school and never expected to enter the world of language teaching. He began working in the electronics field after graduation and found that technical manuals important to his work were written in English. To better navigate his field, he enrolled in an English language school, excelled at English, and his extrinsic motivation grew into a love of language learning:

Psychologically I thought, you know this is so relaxing and so, **I feel very good when I am here, learning** how to read in a different language...So I would say **that the way I felt in the classroom really made me think, you know, wouldn't I like to be a teacher, teaching a language,** and I think that's how I got started with it. (Interview #1, 9/7/05)

He changed his undergraduate degree program from business to letters and literature and continued at the language institute completing each level of English offered there. He reflected on the influence of the English teachers from the institute:

The first teacher I got there was not good at all as far as I think of him. He was very stern, not very communicative and just not a fun person. So that was the first bust. **But I liked it so much, learning the language that I didn't give up on doing that.** So then the **second semester I had this American teacher called Joan.** So up to this day, **I am still in touch with [Joan].** (Interview #1, 9/7/05)

Though the first instructor did little to motivate him, the second instructor was “so great, so nice” that she had a major impact on his decision to study language education:

Because **it was a turning point in my life I think was realizing that teaching was something I wanted to go into.** And not only teaching in general, but **teaching English which was the language I really liked.** (Interview #1, 9/7/05)

Initial teaching experience

Daniel completed the English courses at the language school, took a teacher training course offered there, and at the same time, did an internship at a private language institute. He found the internship challenging because he was a novice teacher with adolescent students whose parents had paid for their schooling. He was left on his own to teach these students and with no guidance, found himself drawing on previous language learning experiences:

So when I first started the internship [in the private school], **the supervisor just gave me the books and said, “You just teach”. And I thought, I guess subconsciously, I will do the same thing as my instructors had done.** (Interview #1, 9/7/05)

His supervisor’s assumption that Daniel could “**just teach**” led Daniel to believe that teaching involved little more than imitating what he had experienced in the language learning classroom. He was not concerned with epistemological stances or even course goals and meaningful lesson plans. Rather his concern was with how to display a “**teacher presence**” in the classroom:

The only thing that I was a little concerned about was being in front of students and having to have a voice, a presence, teacher presence to be talking to them.

(Interview #1, 9/7/05)

Daniel survived this initial teaching experience but explained that he had to focus on discipline and classroom management rather than on teaching. In the following excerpt, he shared his thoughts about that experience:

...always trying **to think of behavior strategies**, so you **never get to the teaching point**. It’s “**how can I control behavior and help them get to the point where they learn?**” **And my conclusion is that it’s really up to them.**

(Interview #1, 9/7/05)

Shortly after this experience, Daniel moved to the U. S. to complete his undergraduate program and earned a master's degree in educational technology. He then took a position in a U.S. public middle school, and the experience was very much like the one he had had in the private language institute in Brazil:

I was teaching in the public school system in the middle school, and that made me think, “Do I really like teaching?” It totally made me re-think. So I worked, it was very difficult at the public school system. It's just a whole new world where I had a totally different reality, completely different thing all together. (Interview #1, 9/7/05)

As Daniel reflected on his past L2 teaching and learning experiences, he acknowledged that he entered his prior teaching experiences with a confidence and naiveté that grew out of his own language learning and teaching experiences:

I think it [my teaching] is always evolving, really. I think when I first started teaching, basically I didn't think there were any different methods or anything. I just thought teaching is teaching...I didn't think anything of it... It wasn't an awareness of it, directly aware of that exclusively, but that's probably what I did. Because you remember I didn't fear and didn't hesitate at all in that respect.

(Interview #1, 9/7/05)

At the same time, he realized that he had learned and continued to learn from each of his experiences and recognized the dynamic nature of teaching as well as his own learning in the process. Daniel's language learning and teaching history revealed the passion he had for language education as well as his openness to learning about language teaching. The manner in which he approached his experiences was evidence that behind his teaching

activity was a strong affective-volitional tendency, an important aspect of his agency that mediated his learning.

Affective-volitional tendency

Daniel's affective-volition was apparent in his teaching and learning history which helped him clearly define his goal for his graduate studies:

So my goal is to **become a university professor**. The bottom line, I would like to be in **a university setting teaching people**, probably in **this area, linguistics, applied linguistics, teaching, teacher development**. (Interview #1, 9/7/05)

Daniel's goal highlighted his interest in understanding L2 learning and teaching and his desire to do well both as an L2 instructor in his professional development program and a student in his graduate studies. Daniel was confident that he made the right choice for himself:

I am **having a great time** so far. I **am really happy** that I made the decision to go for a Ph.D. I'm at the **right place**. (Interview #1, 9/7/05)

Daniel's motivation and excitement about his studies and professional development were mirrored in his attitude toward the courses he was asked to teach. He found them a perfect fit with his current interests and previous language and teaching experiences:

This really is the **chance of a lifetime** to be honest. As an instructor for [these courses], I feel that **most of the knowledge, skills, and experiences I've had educationally and professionally converge to this point**. In other words, I'm being able to use different experiences I've had in the past to work with this classroom: **my experience teaching English** both in [my home country] and in the U.S.; my knowledge and skills from **my teaching preparation program, my**

natural vocation for teaching; and my master's degree in Ed. Tech.

(Journal #1 & 2, 9/13/05)

This was Daniel's first opportunity to teach at the university level, and as the semester began, he found the teaching more challenging than he expected, in part because of the feeling that the stakes were higher for students in this context than his previous experience in the private language school. This along with his desire to be an effective teacher pushed him: **"I always think about my teaching"** (Observation #1, 9/7/05). He willingly focused his time and energy on determining strategies that maximized his students' learning time both in and out of class:

I'm still **trying to do all of my work for [the classes I'm teaching] on Saturdays**, but so far, it's been **more difficult than I thought** (mostly in terms of being efficient). While this kind of teaching (college-level) is much less time-consuming than public school teaching (which I've done before), **it's still hard for me to do everything I want to.** (Journal #3, 9/18/05)

Because Daniel believed his students were benefitting from his efforts, he continued to take extra steps he thought were needed to support their learning:

I've also been **spending a lot of energy on the course's organization** (the OCD type of guy that I am!). But **it's really for the students' benefit.** In fact, I got a couple of emails suggesting that I organize the files on [the web]. So I did that this weekend. **I want them to feel that the online component of the course is to help them, rather than frazzle them.** (Journal #4, 9/25/05)

His positive approach to his teaching was apparent even when lessons did not go as intended. Rather than perceiving those class periods as time wasted, he chose to learn

from those moments to improve his teaching, an illustration of the positive approach he took to his teaching and learning, and his choice to exercise agency in the process:

Well, I think also **you put things more into perspective, because at first you think, “I really can’t waste any time at all. It is all precious time”**. But then you don’t experiment, and you don’t get to learn. And **now I think I see it more as if the 50 minutes goes and nothing came out of that, that’s a learning experience.** (Interview #2, 10/12/05)

Daniel’s affective-volition did not wane at the end of Semester One. Instead, he was ready to use each “**learning experience**” to prepare for Semester Two. Preparing ahead of time was important for Daniel, and in the first interview of the semester, he explained why. He described the maturity level of his students, the importance of helping them realize success, and how these characteristics of his students pushed his desire to be properly prepared to meet their needs:

So here there’s a whole different issue because it is the maturity level, world knowledge, and they know a lot more. They bring a lot more to the classroom and they really are very focused... They know what they want, and they know that they need this to get what they want. So then they really soak up everything you say. Which is really more responsibility because you’re on the spot all the time in terms of what you’re trying to give them as direct instruction. You almost feel guilty if you don’t really do something very well. (Interview #1, 9/7/05)

He indicated that teaching adults meant being “**on the spot all the time**” to meet their expectations and with that responsibility was the potential to feel “**guilt**” if he did not

plan well. He noted that he felt guilty for having used the syllabi of others at the beginning of the semester:

Well, I think **as a professional, you feel a little bit like a slacker**. Okay, since this [a syllabus] here and is applicable, **I still need to go through it. I still need to go through it and see, is it really as good as it could be for this class? So the fact that it's good and applicable doesn't mean that it's as good as it could be for this class at this point in time. And so I would feel guilty too, I think. I felt guilty just reusing the same structure, but I could get away with that by thinking, "Well, I didn't have time to prepare a syllabus. It's my first semester, so I'm just going to start with that and see how it goes."**

(Interview #3, 12/3/05)

Daniel made a distinction between being prepared to teach and being prepared to teach *his* students when he says that even if a syllabus was “**good and applicable doesn't mean that it's as good as it could be for this class at this point in time**”. Because he recognized that each class was unique and had different needs, he “**felt guilty reusing the same structure**”.

Daniel’s desire to create meaningful opportunities for his students pushed him to seek new teaching strategies throughout Semester Two, another illustration of his individual drive and agency in the learning process. By the end of the semester, he had a set of lesson plans that he had solidified across two semesters, yet he believed there was always something to be improved:

But it [teaching] does mean that **it's a never-ending search for effective ways to maximize your time** so that you can, consequently, **maximize student learning**

in the very limited three hours a week you have with your students. **It's also exciting.**

(Follow-Up Interview #2, 5/1/06)

Throughout both semesters, Daniel was motivated to seek assistance for his teaching and did so through self-reflection and by engaging fully in another activity system, the support systems available to him. These support systems proved critical for mediating Daniel's conceptualization of L2 teaching.

Support Systems

Daniel's support systems served as mediational spaces that were available to him through his graduate and professional development programs and life circumstance, and he chose to fully engage in each throughout Semester One:

1. journals - required for the study and also shared with his supervising professor
2. graduate courses
3. weekly meetings - with his supervising professor who was the 'expert other', and another instructor
4. other support
 - participation in this study
 - his significant other who was a counselor

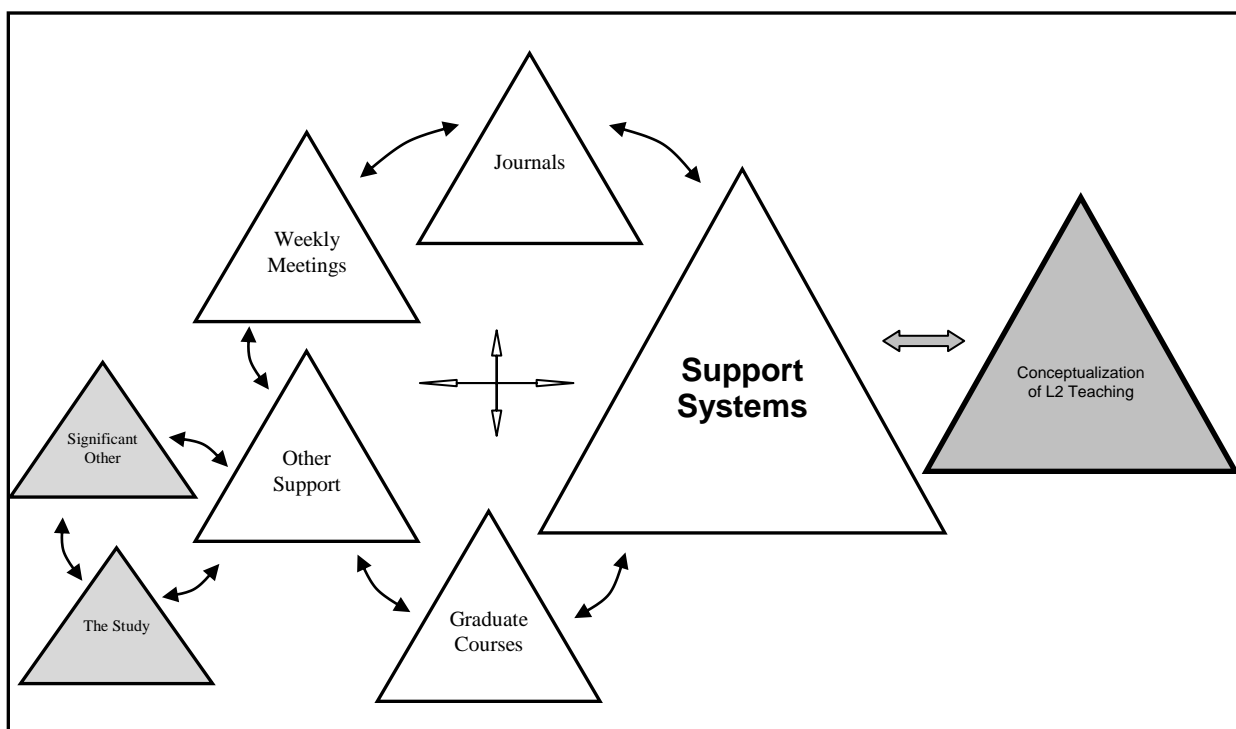


Figure 11. Support systems mediating and mediated by Daniel's conceptualization of L2 teaching.

For the most part, Daniel's support systems mirrored those of Mark's, but because Daniel and Mark were not at the same point in their teaching careers, they took up the support very differently. Daniel was consciously aware of what was afforded him and actively engaged with his support systems in Semester One, particularly the support and guidance of his supervising professor. The support systems provided protected spaces in which Daniel challenged and reorganized his conceptualization of L2 teaching.

Journals

An ongoing part of this study was a weekly journal in which Daniel was asked to reflect on his teaching. He was not overly enthusiastic about the idea yet he wrote regularly, turned his journals in without prompting, and was a prolific and thoughtful writer. It was evident that many of his significant learning moments were captured in his journals, and his writing appeared to function as a mediational tool that encouraged

reflection on his teaching that may not have happened otherwise. When asked if that might have been true, he responded:

I think **the thoughts were there anyway**. But I do think **the journal**, writing a journal, **helps me to make them clearer**. The journal I think made it clear and expressed on paper. It's almost like, okay, so I processed it. **Now I can move on to other things and know what's going on with my teaching as opposed to just thoughts that never materialized.** (Interview #3, 12/3/05)

As he tried to answer, his own words mediated his thoughts about the role the journals had played in his learning. He began to realize that they helped clarify his thoughts more than he realized and certainly more than conversations with others: “I see those two things very differently...In terms of **thought processing, I think the journals were a lot more reflective**” (Interview #3, 12/3/05). Daniel’s journal entries mediated his thinking, provided evidence of his evolving conceptualization of L2 teaching and are used in the upcoming section on Teaching Activity to make visible his learning about teaching in concrete teaching activity.

Graduate Courses

Daniel’s graduate courses represented another support system. He was enrolled in L2 acquisition theory, computer-assisted learning, and discourse analysis in Semester One, and L2 teacher education, statistics, and functional systemic linguistics in Semester Two. Unless specifically prompted to talk about his graduate coursework, very little language in the data referred to his courses with the exception of the following interview excerpt in which he was asked how his courses mediated his thoughts about teaching:

Bits and pieces of ideas that professors, well, not only bits and pieces, but **major beliefs** also. I think **I really now lean more towards constructivism** even though it's not a word that even any of my professors has really used but just the whole, as we talk in the classroom, **communicative language teaching**.

(Interview #2, 10/12/05)

While he clearly states that he follows a constructivist philosophy, what was absent was his explanation of what he meant by “constructivism” or “communicative language teaching”, so it was difficult to know how these concepts were being taught in his graduate program, how he was making sense of them, and whether or not he was internalizing them in a way that guided how he thought about his teaching. So while it was not possible to understand how his graduate courses might be mediating his learning, he did speak often about his supervising professor, and there was evidence that she played a significant role in mediating his learning.

Meetings with Supervising Professor

Daniel's supervising professor, or ‘expert other’, mediated his understanding of the course he was teaching and himself as a teacher in this context. Throughout Semester One, they developed a collegial, supportive relationship through informal conversations and hallway chats and through weekly meetings with another instructor who taught the same course as Daniel:

The meetings with [the other instructor] and [supervising professor] have been very helpful. It's a great opportunity to talk about many different things related to the course, whether technical, personal, pedagogical, etc.

It's a great discussion forum, and I seem to feel more and more comfortable

sharing my thoughts every week that goes by. (Journal #4, 9/25/05)

At the beginning of the semester, he was a bit hesitant about the need for these meetings because of a similar yet ineffective mentoring experience he had in another teaching context:

I didn't feel like it really worked because it was **like an imposition**. "You do this because **we have this policy that you meet every week** with your, actually your mentor". (Interview #2, 10/12/05)

This time, however, Daniel found the meetings meaningful because he and the other instructor were encouraged to determine the agenda and could base the discussions on their needs:

I've never had this weekly meeting which **actually means something to me**. So when I have the meeting with [the professor] and [instructor], I really feel I can bring up whatever is happening and **I will learn a lot from both of them and I can talk**. It just feels like **a productive time for me**. (Interview #2, 10/12/05)

The meetings focused on course goals, structure and content, and afforded emotional support for Daniel when he needed it:

A student just didn't do the assignment right, **and I didn't know how to react** to that. **So then I talked to [my supervising professor], and after that, I had a lot more confidence** to go back and say, "Look, this is what's happening", or "That's what I want you to do." (Interview #2, 10/12/05)

Daniel's supervising professor created a safe, collegial learning space in which he could share his thoughts. He was an experienced teacher navigating a new instructional context

and found her support important, so much so that when asked at the midpoint of the semester which support system was most important to him, he said:

I think **first and foremost [the supervising professor]** because, to me, **she is the source of the know-how in a way**, not in terms of the daily teaching experience, **but in terms of the logistics of the course and the major goals of the course.**
So I think that framework in which I work, that comes from her ...

(Interview #2, 10/12/05)

He also appreciated the emotional support she provided for him throughout both semesters:

Yes, **I feel like [she] is this open door whenever I need to literally function.** I just walk in to her office and if she's **there she'll have some time for me.**

(Follow-Up Interview #3, 3/3/06)

Other Support Systems

Daniel acknowledged two less formal support systems available to him outside his professional development and graduate program contexts; daily conversations with his significant other who was a counselor, and participation in this study. In regard to this study, Daniel noted that the interviews and conversations related to this study provided mediational spaces for him to dialogue about his daily teaching activity:

I really enjoy talking to [the interviewer] about teaching as it really **creates an opportunity for reflection.** Wouldn't it be wonderful if every teacher could reflect on their teaching on a regular (and frequent) basis? It's helped me **to pinpoint certain aspects of my teaching that I just don't think I would be able to notice on my own.**

(Journal #13, 12/4/05)

Conversations with his significant other provided consistent and meaningful emotional support as well as a space in which Daniel could process teaching ideas: “I think he has a **very good intuition for teaching**, so I **often bounce things off of him** and try to come up with ideas” (Interview #2, 10/12/05). The opportunities to reflect with his partner afforded a nonthreatening, mediational space in which he verbalized thoughts about his teaching. He described their dialogues as “living journals” and commented that he wished he could study the transcripts from them:

[He] is really a **sounding board** for me...**I wish I had transcripts** of that because they would be really great, because **he's like my mediational tool** for almost everything... We help each other **process and make sense of** what we experience so I feel like that's **my living journal**.

(Follow-Up Interview #1, 3/3/06)

Each of Daniel’s support systems along with the agency he chose to exert in each context mediated how he approached his concrete teaching activity.

Teaching Activity

The experiences in the classroom in turn, shaped and reshaped how he interacted with his support systems and ultimately, how his conceptualization of L2 teaching evolved over the course of both semesters. It is important to note that the courses Daniel taught were high stakes courses, and the international students enrolled in them had to pass with an “A” in order to receive and/or maintain funding for their graduate studies. The pressure of that responsibility along with determining what level of proficiency constituted an “A” was a source of struggle for Daniel. To help his students reach the

goals of the class, Daniel explained that he believed language learning involved 50 percent formal instruction and 50 percent language use:

I think it's **kind of 50/50** in terms of the fact that you do need to sit down and **go over the language formally**. So I believe to learn a language you do need to have time to set aside to **actually study something**. **And I think the rules do help to have a book telling you, or even someone who speaks the language telling you the rules.** (Interview #1, 9/7/05)

Daniel tried to balance the two in his classroom and started by creating a relaxed “laboratory” space in his classroom where students could practice their language skills:

And really from the first day I tried to tell them that, you know, **this is a laboratory for you**....It's a place where you can come and **try your ideas out, see if you can get better**. Yes, it's going to be uncomfortable in the beginning, but that's why we're here - so you **become comfortable talking to other people and being in front of a class**. So I thought that made them **feel a little more at ease** from the beginning. (Interview #1, 9/7/05)

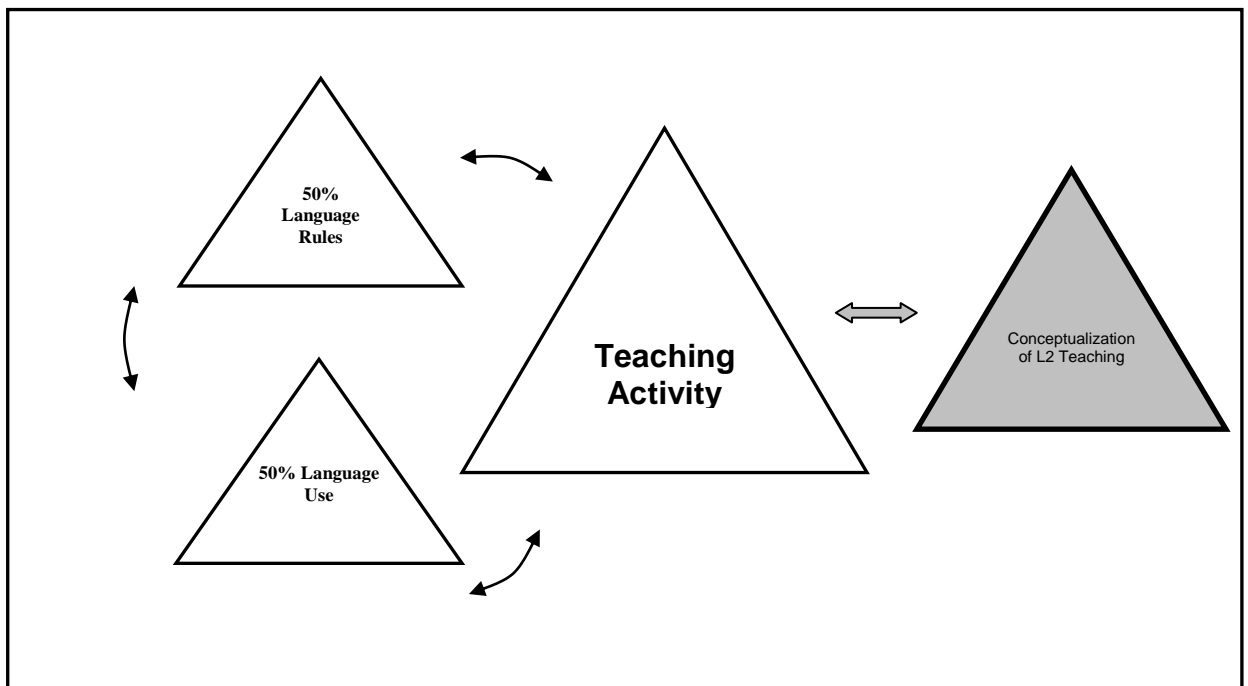


Figure 12. Teaching activity mediating and mediated by Daniel's conceptualization of L2 teaching.

Helping his students feel at ease was important to him, and he worked to create a non-threatening atmosphere in which students would feel comfortable and use language freely in the classroom (Observations #1-5, 9/7/05-11/21/05). In addition to comfort, Daniel established an interactive classroom environment that supported what he believed to be the other 50 percent of language learning, language use:

The other half, I think, is very much based on **what you want to do with it [language]. That stimulates you to learn** because what you learn with using books only goes so far... To be exposed to real language I think, is the issue, in an interactive way. Such **an important part of learning the language is socializing** so that you're exposed, and you have **to practice. And you talk and learn.** (Interview #1, 9/7/05)

Daniel was excited to teach English in an English-speaking context because it offered countless opportunities to engage in authentic language practice outside the classroom. So he required his students to take advantage of those opportunities:

I have, for example, **logs** that I ask them to keep every week for at least one hour. I want you to **log what you do, who you talked to, what kind of interaction** you had, and **one thing you learned** for every interaction you had. And the other one is listening. So how did you spend one hour this week **listening to English and what did you learn** from doing that about the English language.

(Interview #1, 9/7/05)

While he was confident that he was prepared to teach in this new context and felt a sense of agency in his lesson preparation and ability to know what his students needed, he acknowledged that he still had much to learn:

From the very first day of class, however, I can tell that **I have a long way to go!** ...I think there are many teaching skills to be developed and/or polished...**leading a discussion**. There's a lot I need to learn about **what kinds of questions to ask** and have a mental map of **where I want to get with the questions** that I'm asking. Another point to get **better at is time management**. **From my experience**, though, I know that **this [unknowing] is temporary**.

(Journal #1&2, 9/13/05)

His prior teaching experiences gave him the assurance that his initial concerns with how to be effective in a new context would fade as he settled in with his classes. It was interesting to note that the type of learning he was prepared to experience was related to fine-tuning his discrete pedagogical skills like asking the right questions and managing his time, teaching skills important to function from day-to-day. He did not indicate that he expected to learn about his teaching on a broader conceptual level, yet that was precisely the type of learning he experienced and became consciously aware of as Semester One continued.

The "Honeymoon" Period: Freedom from Contradictions

During the first few months of the semester, Daniel enthusiastically approached his teaching from the perspective that if he could determine his students' language needs, provide the right mediation and a comfortable learning environment, they would be successful language learners and achieve the "A" they needed to pass the course. From

classroom observations, it was evident that Daniel created a relaxed yet structured classroom environment in which students were engaged in learning throughout the class period. In a natural flow, he moved easily from one activity to the next using previews, reviews and transitions along with justifications for the various classroom activities. Student responses were acknowledged and expanded as Daniel genuinely worked to build mutual respect with his students (Observations #1-5, 9/7/05-11/21/05). Early in the semester, he was pleased with his classes and commented on the interest of these adult learners relative to his middle school students:

So here there's a whole different issue because it is the maturity level, world knowledge, and they know a lot more. They **bring a lot more to the classroom, and they really are very focused**... They know what they want, and they know that they need this to get what they want. So then they really soak up everything you say which means more responsibility because **you're on the spot all the time** in terms of what you're trying to give them as direct instruction. **You almost feel guilty if you don't do something very well.** (Interview #1, 9/7/05)

These same words illustrated the pressure he placed on himself to address their language learning needs effectively, and he made a similar statement a few weeks later:

One thing I should have mentioned last week is that **I'm getting many students who come to me for individual advice/help.** As an instructor, **I feel really good about that.** It's something that definitely **takes more time, but I'm glad to do. I want them to know that I'll do my best to try and help.**

(Journal #4, 9/25/05)

Daniel worked hard to meet what he perceived as his students' expectations for the course, and in trying to help them as best he could, he continued to take full responsibility for their learning by controlling the process. For example, early in Semester One, he ended a class by asking each student to sign up for an individual conference (Observation #2, 9/25/05). He believed that meeting individually with each student would help him understand and address their needs: "**I've been trying to take very specific notes to help students** in that area [pronunciation] **during our conferences**" (10/3/05). He was pleased that he had decided to require the conferences:

All in all, **I'm really happy that I chose to do the individual conferences. It's given me a lot more information and a lot more to work with.**

(Journal #6, 10/8/05)

However, the more committed Daniel became to each student's success, the more he sensed a lack of commitment on the part of some of his students.

Psychological Struggle Begins

Several weeks into the semester, Daniel became consciously aware of the level of interest and learning of some of his students and expressed his concerns about their progress:

Sometimes I wonder about my students' level of commitment to this course. Some seem to take it very seriously (they think they need it and enjoy it), **some take it more lightly** (they may enjoy it but don't seem to think they need it), and **some seem to just want to get through it** (a hoop to jump through).

(Journal #5, 10/3/05)

It seemed that the 'honeymoon' period was ending as Daniel recognized that the classroom he envisioned was not his reality. Daniel sought to mediate the contradiction

he felt by repositioning the responsibility for learning from himself to his students: “I’ve made it clear that **it’s their work that counts. I can’t learn English for them...**

(Journal #5, 10/3/05).

The following week, there was evidence that he was continuing to reposition himself and rethink his role in his students’ learning. He indicated that his significant other was mediating his thoughts:

My significant other is a true believer that **people are responsible for their own lives. So I can only offer them tools and things.** So that does help, but the other thing is myself. I look at myself and **at times I feel over burdened by, gosh here is this responsibility, I have 23 students and they’re supposed to get an A or not supposed to, but you want them to...** I just try to show them that **if they really want to succeed, they have to do a lot of the work.**

(Interview #2, 10/12/05)

Daniel was struggling with how to release himself from responsibility by offering “tools and things” to guide their learning. He was cognizant of his shift in thought and was trying to make sense of it through his conceptualization of “constructivist” teaching:

I think I’m feeling comfortable with that definitely in terms of going to the classroom and finding out what my role is, figuring out what I am supposed to do or not supposed to do, how do I fit into the scheme of things. And that also goes back to that **constructivism**, the notion that **I am here to help you, guide you.**

(Interview #2, 10/12/05)

In this excerpt, he verbalizes that on one level, he now understood his role in the classroom, that he was to guide their learning and they were responsible for their

progress. But Daniel was not comfortable with this approach and admitted that the process of rethinking his role was uncomfortable and a challenge for him:

So I'm really showing the students that it is their responsibility to learn. It's a struggle for me because I do like to take control, and I wish I were able to learn for them but of course I can't. (Interview #2, 10/12/05)

He verbalized that he wanted to control their learning, recognized that was not possible, and was struggling to accept that reality. Daniel's struggle to rethink his role in their learning was visible in the data, and that struggle mediated his conceptualization of his teaching.

Conscious Awareness of Teaching Activity

Daniel was aware of his desire to control his students' learning and was trying to learn how to guide rather than control his students' learning. He started to do so by thinking differently about how he provided instructions to his students:

I'm trying to get them to think, and it shows even in general assignments I'm giving them. I'll say, "I want you to think about what problems you are having and then come up with solutions for those problems." I was trying to get them to think, "I am responsible for this. I have to love what I am doing."

(Interview #2, 10/12/05)

In some ways, he was mediating his own learning about how to release control as he considered how his students thought about their assignments.

However, just two days after making these statements, Daniel returned to his earlier belief that he was responsible for his students' learning but did not realize he had done so. The shift was apparent during a classroom observation and subsequent

stimulated recall in which Daniel asked his students to tape a conversation with a L1 speaker of English, transcribe the interaction, but make no corrections as they transcribed (Observation #3, 10/14/05). When I asked him to tell me his goal for this assignment, he explained that he wanted his students to complete the assignment so *he* could determine each of their needs. He had once again assumed responsibility for their learning instead of guiding it:

I had initially asked them to transcribe for me, to tape and transcribe their own speech **so that I could look at that and see what are some problems they're having with the language.** That's how I brought the initial assignment up to them was that **I needed to know individually what mistakes they were making.** So I said, "**Don't correct anything,** just tape yourself. And give that to me, and **I'll be able to help you more.**" (SR #1, 10/14/05)

A sociocultural theoretical perspective posits that concept development is a mediated, inherently changeable process that occurs over time, and Daniel's shift to his previous belief and activity was an example of the unstable nature of the process (Vygotsky, 1987).

Reflection on his Teaching Activity

While Daniel did not realize that he was again trying to control his students' learning teaching, he was aware that something in his teaching activity was changing:

I really see a shift from when I started teaching. I think I drew a lot more from how I was taught. And I see that progressively because I am reflecting more, and I really think of the end goal: Are they really learning, or what are we

doing here? And through that **I tried to modify my thinking...**

(Interview #2, 10/12/05)

He realized that to this point in the semester, he had been drawing on his language learning and instructional history to guide his teaching. Through self-reflection, he was more conscious of the goals of the course, was better able to understand how to help his students reach those goals, and was able to work independently:

I have been noticing a higher degree of autonomy on my part in terms of preparing the assignments that I use with my students. At first (in the very beginning of the semester), **I relied more on materials that had already been used and prepared for this course.** Now, **I feel that I can better identify the short and long-term implications** of any given assignment...**It's really about knowing why I am doing what I am doing.**

(Journal #9, 10/29/05)

Contradiction Returns

Just as Daniel was beginning to understand the course goals and feel at ease with his teaching approach, he started to recognize patterns in the level of preparedness of some of his students and expressed concern with their commitment to the course:

With this second round of presentations, some patterns have become more apparent. I'm **trying not to label students or stereotype them** on the basis of how much work they do or how prepared they seem to be. But **I can't help seeing some consistent types of behaviors.**

(Journal #9, 10/29/05)

As he struggled with his emotions, another gap was created between his emotion and cognition which served as a mediational space in which he was again reminded that he

could not control whether or not his students took advantage of learning opportunities he provided for them:

As I mentioned during our last meeting [with his supervising professor], **some students seem to take advantage of the learning opportunities that I have created for them, while others choose not to, for whatever reasons.**

(Journal #9, 10/29/05)

Daniel's response was not one of anger but more of personal disappointment with their level of motivation and concern for themselves, but he quickly reassured himself that he was doing what he could to push their learning because most of his students were having success:

In a way, **I feel validated** for knowing that what I have been doing has been working with most of my students. But on the other hand, as I see some that are not taking advantage of this chance, **I can't help but feel like they aren't being helped.** So I'm **always reminding myself that it's their choice.** They are adults who know the implications of their own actions. **So that's that!**

(Journal #9, 10/29/05)

This time, it seemed that Daniel had fully reorganized his thinking about whose responsibility it was to learn. However, two days later, he was once again placing full responsibility for the learning of all of his students on himself. During a classroom observation, he began the class by seeking input from his students for how he could improve the class to better meet their needs (Observation #3, 10/31/05). The students offered ideas, asked thoughtful questions, and in that moment, Daniel was encouraged by

their interest and responded by making “**a few changes**” to his teaching activity. When I asked what compelled him to solicit their ideas in an open forum, Daniel responded:

I’m glad you asked that question. In fact, **it [requesting student input] was totally unscripted**, and it **put me in a very vulnerable position**...I thought opening up the floor would be a **‘democratic’ thing to do**...**I’ve already made a few changes** since then, and **I’m getting some good responses** (albeit indirectly).

(Email, 11/4/05)

The fact that this classroom event was “**unscripted**” and that he recognized that he placed himself in a “**very vulnerable position**” by asking for student feedback, pointed to his personal need to settle his emotional and cognitive dissonance. When he stated that asking for their input would be the “**‘democratic’ thing to do**”, he acknowledged that he wanted his students to have a role in the decisions about their learning. He took up their suggestions, made some changes to his teaching activity, and thought his students responded positively to the changes he made. But once again, their motivation quickly waned.

Mediating his Psychological Struggle

As Daniel’s dissonance returned, it illustrated the changeable nature of learning mediated in activity and Daniel’s level of agency in the process. He again experienced “**concerns and frustrations**” with some of his students, and again tried to make sense of where to place responsibility for learning:

Ok. I think the end of the semester is bringing with it **some concerns and frustrations**. Let me explain. I have been **fairly concerned** about **some of my students**. So now I have to **consciously remind myself** that **I have been giving them many learning opportunities and many tools** with which to improve their

learning since the beginning of the semester. I guess most of my frustration comes from realizing that some of my students are simply not progressing fast enough... **My rational side tells me it's their responsibility, and they have to accept their own limitations until they're ready to work on them. But another part of me, of course, would like to see all of them succeed...**

(Journal #11, 11/14/05)

Daniel's frustration was apparent when he noted he must "**consciously remind**" himself that he was, in fact, providing "**learning opportunities and many tools**". The psychological struggle was visible between his "**rational side**" which said his students were responsible for their learning and "**another part of me**", his emotional being, who wanted all of them to "**succeed**".

His frustration pushed him to seek mediation from his significant other and supervising professor, and he reflected on the dialogues:

After talking to [my supervising professor] and [significant other] about my concern for some of my students, I think **I've been able to 'reframe' the situation and to see things in a new light**...Before coming to [this university], but after being given my assignment by [my supervising professor], **I had a very different idea about who my students were going to be**. What I had in mind represents but one of the many different kinds of students I have in my classroom. **I thought they were ALL going to be extremely hard working, dedicated, and ready to work on whatever communication/ language problems they were having**. Well, that would be an ideal world (surprise, surprise). Now I can see

better that, in a way, my students are still a reflection of the bigger picture.

(Journal #12, 11/20/05)

Through other mediation, Daniel believed he could now “**reframe’ the situation**”, and he did so by settling on what he believed to be the root of his frustration, he was not prepared for resistant students or their lack of commitment to learning. Again, he tried to reposition himself as the teacher:

In other words, I have very hard-working and dedicated students, but I also have some others who are not that ready to work on their skills yet. This is perfectly ok, except I **need to watch out for my own reactions** to that (in terms of **who has the responsibility to make learning POSSIBLE and who has the responsibility to make learning HAPPEN**). As [my supervising professor] has helped me understand, there's **no magic wand** that I can just wave **to fix all their problems (or mine!)**. Therefore, I'm now trying to be **more politely straight forward** with my students. (Journal #12, 11/20/05)

This excerpt captured a critical learning moment. Daniel was operating in his zpd which was at that moment an uncomfortable space for him as was apparent in the emotions in his language. His supervising professor mediated his thinking in this space by suggesting that he could not magically motivate his students to want to learn. It was not likely that she was validating his frustration and releasing him from any role in his students’ learning. It was possible that she was pushing him to think differently about his role in his student’s learning and to understand that his role was to be a facilitator of learning rather than a controller of it. Because there was no data from the supervising professor and no way to know the level of intersubjectivity or shared understanding between them,

whether or not Daniel understood her words as she intended could not be substantiated in the data. By the final interview of Semester One, however, Daniel had the opportunity to reflect on his teaching activity and her mediation, and he came to terms with his role in the learning process:

Well, I think it was a **semester-long process** of trying to **shift the focus from "I do the work for you" to "you do your own work"**. I can **help you, guide you, tell you**, but **I can't do the learning for you**. I have **the feeling it is something I'll have with me for the rest of life**. (Interview #3, 12/3/05)

He was consciously aware that he was thinking differently about his teaching, and that awareness continued to emerge and evolve in Semester Two.

Activity Systems in Semester Two

Daniel taught two sections of the same course in Semester Two and began with a much better understanding of the course goals as well as a complete set of lesson plans. On the surface, the activity systems shaping how he thought about his teaching remained the same, but there were differences in the way he chose to exert his agency and engage in some of them. He continued to maintain a high level of motivation and interest in his teaching and spent time preparing meaningful lessons for his students. Interestingly, even though he had a very close connection with his supervising professor and found her support valuable for his learning, he had only one formal meeting with her in Semester Two. He did continue to engage in dialogues with his significant other and noted that those conversations were important to him. Daniel's teaching activity seemed to be the most powerful mediator for his learning this semester in part because the students were quite different from those he taught in Semester One. Each class had a higher number of

apathetic, unmotivated students, and their apathy pushed him to acknowledge that he could not control their learning, that learning was the responsibility of the student, and that his role was to guide the process.

Conscious Awareness

This semester, Daniel was not concerned with determining each student's individual language learning needs and giving students' strategies to address them. Instead, he talked about his teaching and their learning from a different and broader perspective:

...I'm just trying to raise their awareness, "I have the power to learn". I can't learn for you, so if you don't do it, you're not going to learn. The teacher might be excellent and wonderful but it's you. It's your job to learn not mine. I kind of help you with how to do it, give you suggestions, but you have to try it on and see if it works for you or not. (Follow-Up Interview #1, 3/3/06)

He was consciously aware of the shift in how he conceptualized his teaching but admitted that reframing how he thought was still a challenge for him:

So for example, this second semester, and **it goes against my nature** a little bit, but **I'm really trying to have them be solely responsible for how much they're learning. It's like I try to inculcate that** as much as possible. **I'm standing in front of the classroom** (pause) it's really **just to give you the tools, and you need to develop them.** (Follow-Up Interview #1, 3/3/06)

He still struggled to articulate an understanding of what he had to do to teach his students and provide the tools they needed for their learning.

Externalizing a New Understanding

By the final interview of Semester Two, however, he was more aware and confident with how to define his role as he compared and contrasted his teaching activity in Semester One and Two:

In this context, I started off by thinking that **if I were able to tell them what it was that they needed to work on, that they would immediately start working on that AND be able to change it.** Now, however, after trying this approach for most of the last semester and **my new approach** this semester, **I realize that just knowing what the problem is does not at all mean that a student will take ownership of it and start working on it.** (Follow-Up Interview #2, 5/1/06)

Daniel could see that his conceptualization of L2 teaching had been shifting over the course of the year. His language indicated a significant change from Semester One when he believed that responsibility for his students' learning rested solely on his shoulders, and now, his "new approach" was to make his students responsible for their learning. As he continued to share the changes in his teaching, Daniel not only placed full responsibility for learning on his students now, but he was able to release himself emotionally from the process:

The **climate/environment/classroom personalities of my two sections** this semester were not only **different** from last semester's but also very different from each other. The second section was always (most of the time) **difficult to teach...**As soon as I realized how different this section was, **I tried adapting my materials to suit their needs better.** That's when I ran into **another snag. They were not responsive...**They were usually **apathetic** as a group and overall **de-**

energized...Emotionally, I've been able to become more detached from my student's feelings. I still feel very strongly about their success, but I've learned to accept that I shouldn't worry more about their success than they do themselves! (Follow-Up Interview #2, 5/1/06)

Apathetic, unmotivated students pushed Daniel to try new strategies to help them learn, and in spite of his efforts, his students remained disengaged. Over the course of the two semesters, his teaching activity mediated a change in how he thought about his teaching. While he did not stop trying to find ways to reach his students and help them in their learning, emotionally, he released himself from feeling responsible for their achievements.

Conclusion

Daniel entered his new university-level teaching context with a developing conceptualization of L2 teaching based on a constructivist perspective and the idea of a student-teacher learning partnership, yet he believed that ultimately he was responsible for his students' learning and felt confident in his level of agency to promote their learning through his teaching. Over time, however, his feeling of being in charge of his students' learning and wanting to control their success led him to experience emotional and cognitive dissonance that took time to resolve. Throughout Semester One and much of Semester Two, Daniel struggled to understand how to approach his teaching and motivate his students. The more his students resisted his attempts to meet their needs, the more the cognitive dissonance he felt pushed him to internalize a different understanding of who was responsible for learning, and he eventually released himself emotionally from the process:

Overall, however, I feel that this semester **I was able to detach myself from the outcome of this course**. In other words, as much as **I have done everything I could to help my students** I think **it is their responsibility to succeed**.

(Follow-up Interview #2, 5/1/06)

His psychological struggle to determine who was responsible for learning gave rise to a broader way of thinking about his teaching:

But **more importantly**, I think that **students hold the key to their success**. **I can help them find the key or even make one**, but **I don't have the key myself, and I cannot just give it to them**.

(Follow-up Interview #2, 5/1/06)

In this metaphor, Daniel explained that because students “**hold the key to their success**”, he “**cannot just give it to them**”. He acknowledged that he could not guarantee their learning and had to let go of his desire to control it. It was also clear that he had never abandoned his belief in constructivism and could now he positioned himself as the guide in the learning process, “**I can help them find the key or even make one**”. The last statement of this excerpt that captured Daniel’s learning across the two semesters: “**I don't have the key myself, and I cannot just give it to them**”. In the first semester, the data indicated that Daniel believed that he *did* have “**the key**” to unlock each student’s learning, but through two semesters of engagement with his students, he realized he did not have nor could he give a “**key**” to them. Instead, his students had to be responsible for their own learning. Daniel’s metaphor neatly captured and made visible the evolution of his conceptualization of teaching. Daniel acknowledged that learning was a natural part of teaching:

...You're never the same teacher again. You know, with every semester or every experience you have teaching, you learn something new.

(Follow-up Interview #1, 3/3/06)

Daniel was a motivated, experienced teacher who believed he had agency in this context and was confident that he could help his students be successful. He entered this new context with a developing conceptualization of L2 teaching and a desire to become a better teacher. Throughout Semesters One and Two, he experienced contradictions between the mental image he had of his classroom and his actual teaching activity that led to some insecurities and shifts in the level of confidence with which he approached his teaching. Those contradictions created a psychological struggle for him as he tried to understand his role in the teaching-learning process. By the close of Semester Two, he acknowledged that he was thinking differently about his teaching, noted that the nature of teaching was an ongoing, dynamic learning process, and welcomed the opportunity to grow in his profession. Daniel's conceptualization of L2 teaching mediated and was mediated by the agency he chose to exert on each activity system and the interplay of those systems. His experiences illustrated the complex nature of language teacher learning.

Chapter 6: Tony – Teaching through Expertise

Introduction

Because Tony participated in the same graduate and professional development program as Mark and Daniel, their learning and teaching contexts were similar as were the activity systems that had the potential to shape their conceptualizations of L2 teaching. Their experiences were differentiated by their prior language and learning histories, the agency they believed they had as a result of those histories, and the belief that they could exert their agency in a particular context. Tony came to this new context with a fully internalized and clearly articulated conceptualization of L2 teaching that had developed over time and through his extensive language learning and instructional history. His philosophy about second language learning was consistent with that of the professional development program and reinforced rather than challenged his beliefs. As such, he felt little cognitive dissonance through his experiences and was able to depend on his expertise to lead him in this new context.

Summary of the Findings

Tony's conceptualization of L2 teaching was mediated by many years of second teaching and learning experiences in a variety of social contexts. Through his experiences, he developed teaching expertise, a "blend of 'expert' knowledge and craft knowledge" (Kennedy, 1999, p. 31), which guided how he thought about and approached his teaching activity. Tony's expertise was evident in the confidence with which he approached this new university-level teaching context, a context familiar to him because of had previous teaching experience in a university context. As Kelly (2006) noted, "teacher expertise is closely linked to the circumstances to which it pertains" (p. 507). It

is not surprising that unlike Mark and Daniel, the language in Tony's data contains many excerpts of positive emotions rather than negatively-charged emotional language. Tony was able to make sense of his teaching and reinforce his conceptualization of L2 teaching through positive emotional connections to prior teaching experiences. The data made visible Tony's expertise and illustrated that over the course of the academic year, his conceptualization of L2 teaching remained unchanged and regulated the interplay of his teaching and learning activity systems.

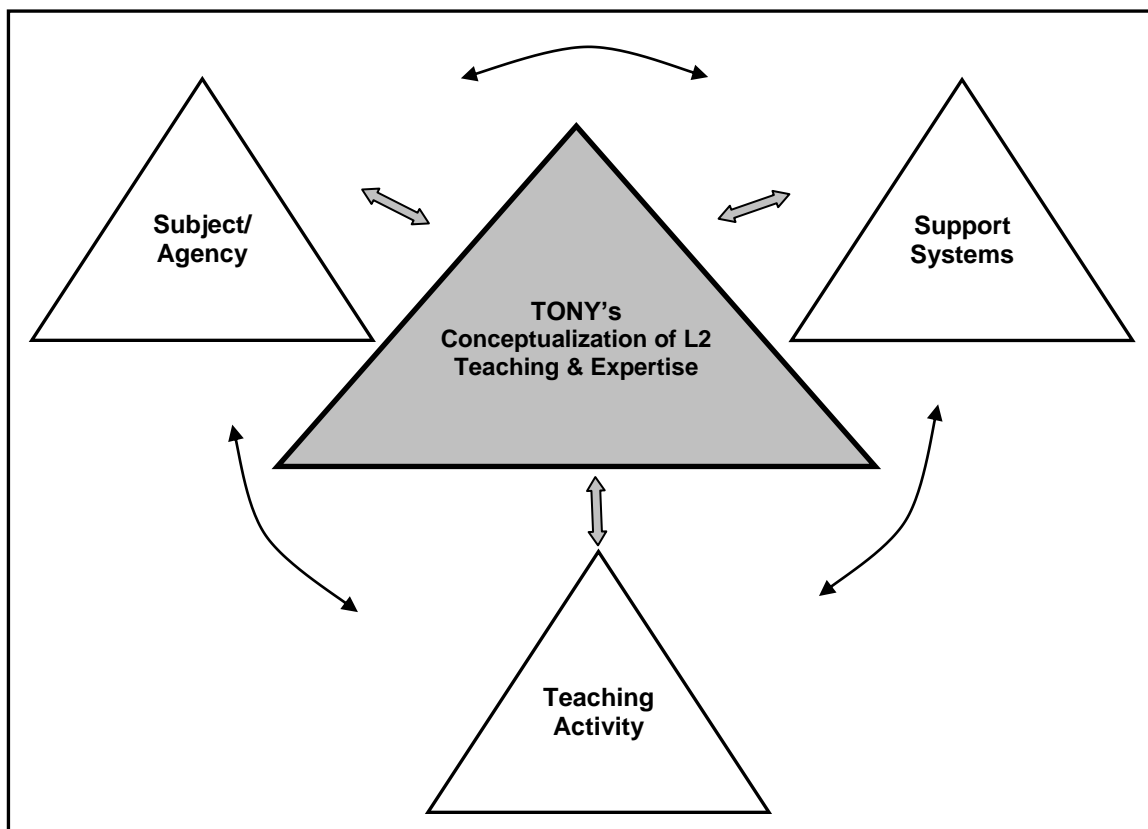


Figure 13. Activity systems mediated by Tony's conceptualization of L2 teaching and expertise.

Overview of the Chapter

The chapter begins with an examination of Tony's conceptualization of L2 teaching and continues with a description and analysis of an important activity system, his language learning and instructional history. This activity system provided an

understanding of the foundation on which his conceptualization was built. The second half of the chapter explores two additional activity systems, his support systems and teaching activity, and further illustrates how his expertise and the agency he exerted in each context regulated the interplay of his activity systems reinforcing rather than reorganizing his conceptualization of L2 teaching.

Tony's Conceptualization of L2 Teaching

Tony's conceptualization of L2 teaching evolved through almost 15 years of learning and teaching experiences in the United States and overseas. The data indicated that his most influential experiences were also his most recent, working internationally as an English teacher trainer and language institute director. In both of these L2 educational contexts, Tony's clients were adult learners enrolled in programs focused on English for specific purposes. Tony's conceptualization of L2 teaching developed largely through these teaching experiences, and he described his belief about language teaching in the following excerpt:

The main drive is a communicative function. What things do I need to do?

And I think most learners are like, well that's the way I was, and I think a lot of people are like that, just thinking about how they're going to use the

language.

(Interview #1, 9/8/05)

As he searched for the words to externalize his conceptualization, his thinking process became visible. He started broadly by noting that motivation to learn a language emerges from how a learner wants or needs to use it. Then he considered his own language learning experiences, affirmed his initial statement that people learn language to be able to communicate and concluded with the following philosophy of language teaching:

So my philosophy of teaching is I need to provide them with these very specific things that they need, whether it's recitation skills, something like that kind of skill, or it's just making arrangements, or making reservations, or persuading, or apologizing, or whatever. (Interview #1, 9/8/05)

Within his explanation, Tony described his role in the process as meeting the “**very specific**” needs of his learners. In a later conversation, he added another dimension to his conceptualization, the role of the learner in the process: **Learning takes place when students are doing the most cognitive work** (Observation #2, 9/21/05). Taken together, Tony’s conceptualization of L2 teaching focused on the communicative function of language as defined by the goals of the learner. For Tony, the role of the teacher was to create meaningful activities that addressed the learners’ goals, and the role of the learner was to do the work.

Throughout both semesters, this conceptualization of L2 teaching not only guided Tony’s teaching activity, it was supported in his graduate coursework and the philosophy of the professional development program and reinforced through his experiences. At the end of the year, Tony explained that his conceptualization of L2 teaching had not changed nor had his teaching approach:

I wouldn't say my approach to language teaching has changed. I've always felt that I can only provide opportunities for my students to learn; they have to take responsibility for their own learning...

(Follow-Up Interview #2, 5/15/06)

The data corroborate his words and indicate that his conceptualization of L2 teaching guided his teaching throughout both semesters. The remainder of this chapter analyzes

how Tony's conceptualization mediated the level of engagement he chose to have with each activity system as well as how it was reinforced rather than reorganized over time.

Activity Systems

Subject/Agency

As the subject of his teaching and learning activity, Tony's affective volition or desire to learn and develop as a teacher and language learning and instructional history mediated how he engaged with his new context. It was the latter that had the strongest mediational effect on his conceptualization of L2 teaching his level of teaching expertise and gave him a sense of agency in his new context.

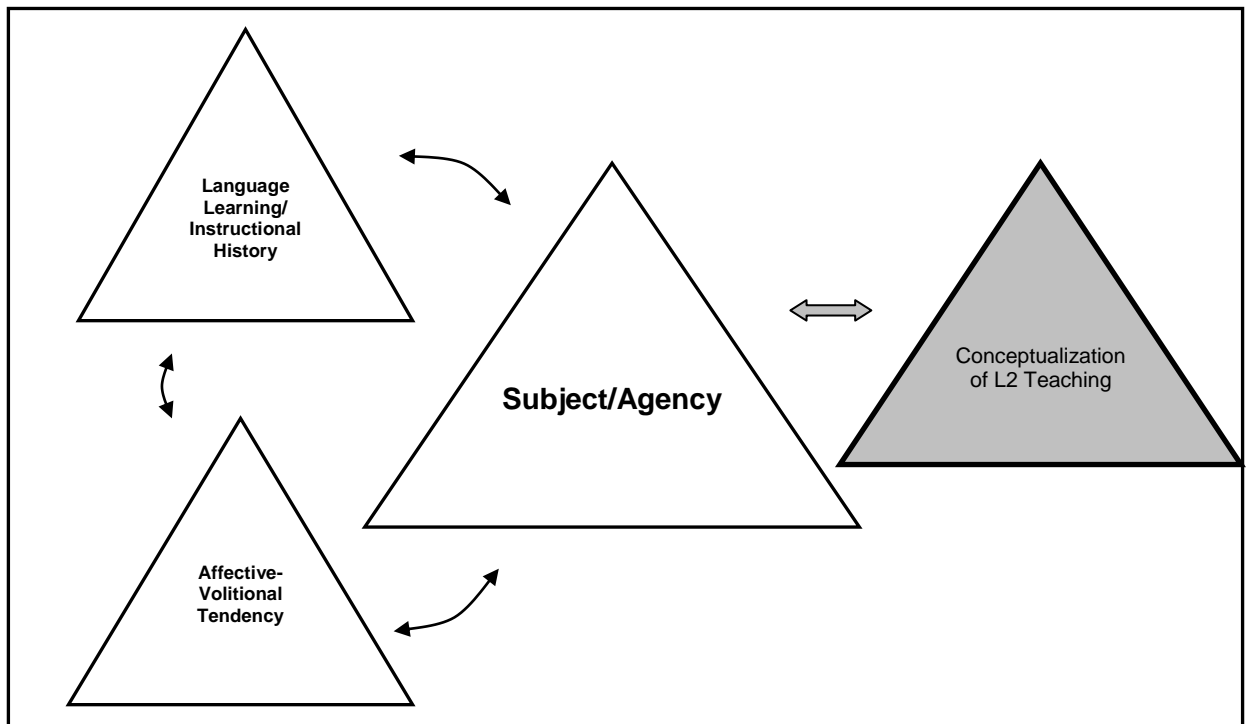


Figure 14. Tony as subject/agent of his activity.

Language Learning and Instructional History

Tony's intrigue with language began in high school Russian language classes which led to an undergraduate degree in Russian language and literature from an American university:

My undergrad degree is in Russian. It was very grammar-based. I don't think we actually spoke Russian in class. It was pretty bizarre...It was just all straight lecture and grammar. We took notes. I think we did some drills and things like that. (Interview #1, 9/8/05)

After completing his undergraduate degree in what he described as a grammar-based language program, he earned his master's in TESOL and linguistics, also from an American university. His master's program was steeped in theory which he knew was important, but he explained that his interest in English language teaching piqued when he took the methods course through his program and was able to explore the application of theory. Through this course, he began to make a connection between language theory and language use:

It [the methods class] was so new to me and interesting. It was the most practical course also. We're doing SLA and syntax and all these courses where you think, "Oh, okay. I can see why it's important, but how do I do it?"

(Interview #1, 9/8/05)

As Tony considered the course, he noted that the professor's words followed him to his first teaching experience and still influenced him today:

Really it's funny, but **my methodology class** that I had at the university, **I still have like flashbacks of [my professor] telling me what to do for certain things or things to remember to be careful of.** So that has been **a really important source for my teaching early on**, which is kind of odd. **He really made an impression.** (Interview #2, 10/7/05)

When he completed his master's program, Tony traveled overseas for one year as an English teaching fellow and taught intermediate and advanced level high school students. That opportunity opened the door for him to return a short while later to the same country to teach and work in various contexts and roles related to English language education. Over a period of 11 years, Tony taught business English with adult learners, served as program director for an English language institute, owned and operated an English language school, and immediately prior to enrolling in his Ph.D. program, worked for two years as a trainer in an intense English teacher training program.

Each opportunity instilled confidence and added another dimension and level of expertise to his understanding of L2 learning and teaching, but the most influential was his last experience as a teacher trainer, **“I learned everything from that”** (Interview #2, 10/7/10). He specifically referred to the influence of the two people who ran the teacher training program:

So these guys had all this experience, so I learned a lot from them. And I know from their teaching that you have to show that you ‘practice what you preach’. (Interview #2, 10/7/05)

The adage, **“practice what you preach”** was a concept from his experience as a teacher trainer, and it was clear from the data that he internalized and used that notion to guide his teaching. In the following excerpt, Tony recalled what it was like to prepare for and work in that intense teaching context and how that adage kept him focused:

I taught twenty-one, 120-hour intensive courses in two years non-stop...First, it was just the challenge of, “All right, I've got 90 minutes to teach my students about reading. What words am I going to say? What could I do? And so it's

all so practical so that every single thing you have to re-examine and say, "Do they need this"? (Interview #1, 9/8/05)

From this experience, he learned the importance of approaching his teaching from the perspective of the learners, to consider the language skills they needed for their purposes, and to provide practical yet meaningful learning experiences that would address their needs. The influence of this experience on his conceptualization of L2 teaching was reflected in the following interview excerpt:

Well, if I'm the end user, if I'm the language learner, I see myself using this language, and I'm going to look for things that I can directly apply to whatever my context is. You know, if I'm doing survival English, I need to know how to talk to the doctor or ask for medicine. **So I'm really going to be focused on those things like, "How do I do this"?** (Interview #1, 9/7/10)

He positioned himself as the language learner, **"if I'm the end user, if I'm the language learner...I'm going to look for things that I can directly apply to whatever my context is"**, and considered his teaching approach from that perspective. Through his experience as a teacher trainer, Tony came to know that English language learning starts not with the language but with an understanding of the learner and the learner's goals. That experience combined with his previous language learning and instructional history shed light on the origin of two key aspects of his conceptualization of L2 teaching: **"the main drive is communication"**, and his role is **"to provide them with these very specific things that they need"** (Interview #1, 9/8/05). Tony's language learning and instructional history mediated how he thought about his teaching and provided a foundation through which he made sense of his professional development experience.

Affective-Volitional Tendency

From a sociocultural theoretical perspective, uncovering the motive behind an activity helps to understand the individual's participation in the activity and the eventual outcome. As such, it was essential to explore Tony's affective volition to understand how his graduate school and professional development experiences mediated and were mediated by his conceptualization of L2 teaching. Two dimensions of Tony's affective volition were important to consider; first, his motive for enrolling in a PhD program, and second, why he chose this particular graduate program with its focus on the professional development of L2 teachers given that he had such an extensive language teacher training background.

Why Graduate School

At the beginning of Semester One, Tony briefly mentioned his motive for enrolling in an applied linguistics graduate program:

I wanted to see how the research worked out...because after I did the teacher training, **I thought I could train teachers at a higher level**, so I need that [research]...**I could do something as a program coordinator also.**

(Interview #1, 9/8/05)

While his motive was not clearly stated, it appeared that he was considering language teacher research and university-level teaching as potential future career goals. By the mid-point of Semester Two, he stated his goal more clearly: "**T'd like to do something with ESL teacher education**" (Follow-Up Interview #1, 3/20/06).

Why a Teacher Professional Development Program

Because Tony received a teaching assistantship through his graduate program, he was required to participate in the professional development program for L2 teachers, so his motive for participating in the professional development portion of his graduate program was determined for him. At the same time, he was quite confident in his second language teaching ability, was motivated to do well, and had success with his students. He did not express a need for mediation or support for his teaching, in fact, he had a tremendous sense of agency in this context because it was so familiar:

I don't feel like I'm lacking anything in terms of my development as a teacher. [My supervising professor] observed me. She never gave me notes on it though... You know, at this stage, I feel like, "Ah, sure there are other things that I could learn". And you want people to observe you and say, "Try this or that". **But no, there's really nothing** [that I need to learn].

(Interview #2, 10/7/05)

Tony expressed no concern with his teaching nor did he indicate that he needed to develop further as a teacher. He referenced his many years of teaching experience in the phrase, "**at this stage**", and indicated that at this point in career, he believed he had the knowledge and understanding of language teaching that he needed to help his students be successful. Understanding the level of confidence Tony has in the context is helpful for explaining the level and manner of engagement he chose to have with the support systems afforded him as part of his professional development program.

Support Systems

The data indicated that Tony did not choose to seek assistance beyond what was mandated by the professional development program nor did he articulate a need for

pedagogical or emotional support as he progressed through his first year. Nonetheless, a discussion Tony's interaction with his support systems illustrates how his teaching expertise and confidence led his teaching and learning activity and his opportunities for growth and development as a teacher. Tony mentioned the following support systems at different points in the data:

1. graduate courses and journals (required by the study)
2. weekly meetings - with his supervising professor who is the 'expert other', and another instructor

Each support system is described and analyzed in the following sections and provides evidence that Tony's engagement with them was quite different from both Mark and Daniel's in spite of the fact that the support systems were very similar.

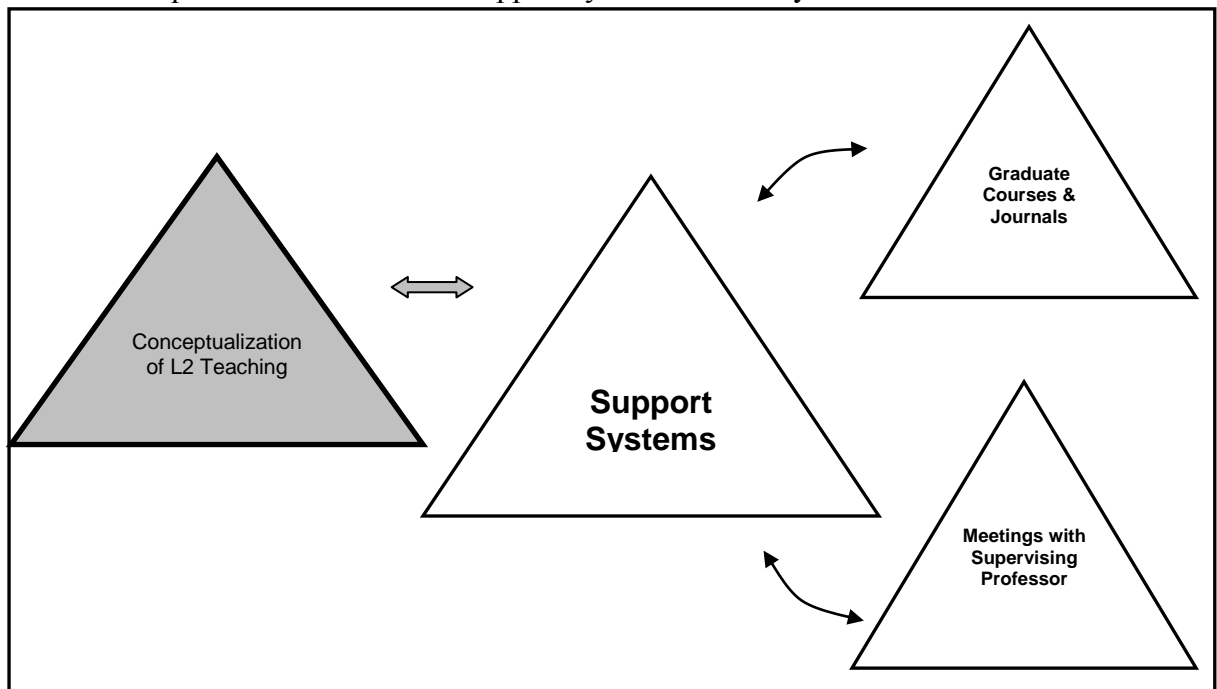


Figure 15. Support systems reinforcing Tony's conceptualization of L2 teaching.

Graduate Courses

Tony was enrolled in nine graduate credits each semester. With the exception of the following excerpt, he did not talk about his graduate courses, so it was difficult to note if and in what way they may have mediated how he thought about his teaching:

I did just read one thing that did tie in, actually. It was written by a neuro-linguist who wrote this article...**He talked about implicit and explicit learning,** very detailed, and **how this could be applied to vocabulary learning.** So in one article, **I thought that's a cool shift.** And it was relevant, **what he talked about was relevant.** (Interview #2, 10/7/05)

When asked if he was able to connect this knowledge with his teaching, he said, “Well, **it didn't get as far as the classroom. It just connected to, ‘It's possible’**” (Interview #2, 10/7/05). Beyond these comments, the data provided no other references to his graduate courses.

Journals

There was, however, sufficient data from his weekly journals to state that journal entries did not serve as intentional or unintentional mediational spaces in which Tony reflected on his teaching. Instead, his journal entries could be described as evaluations of his lesson plans that provided a window to his expertise and to understanding the confident manner with which he approached his teaching. The positive emotive language indicated ongoing connections between his mental image of the classroom and his actual teaching activity that reinforced his conceptualization of L2 teaching.

In the first journal entry of Semester One, Tony commented on the class flow and nature of his students: **Everything went according to plan...It's a good group of**

students; they'll be **easy to work with** (Journal #1, 9/2/05). He made a similar comment after the second week of the semester:

...**Everything went according to plan**, and the **students were responsive**. **I was happy** to see them discussing the issues raised in the chapter on the American university. (Journal #2, 9/9/10)

Both of these journal entries indicated his level of comfort and belief in his individual agency as a teacher. In the next excerpt, his confidence was apparent in yet another way as he tried to instill confidence in his students by giving strategies for how to approach their own teaching:

We reviewed what to do in the syllabus presentation, and I had them practice the first part, which was giving details about yourself to **make a connection with your students, acknowledging your ability in English (but not apologizing for it)**, and encouraging their students to ask questions. (Journal #3, 9/16/05)

He wanted his students to be prepared to acknowledge their language ability when they began teaching undergraduates but to do so with confidence in their ability and “**not apologizing for it**”. Through his own experiences in the classroom, Tony recognized that self-assuredness, a sense of agency, was an important attribute for a teacher and tried to encourage his students to believe in themselves by promoting their self-efficacy.

One journal entry that stood out as unique from the others because it captured a minor emotional moment and illustrated Tony's expertise in handling a challenging classroom situation. He began the journal by recounting a classroom visit in which six students representing the fraternities and sororities on campus came to speak to his students. As they finished their presentation, one of his students raised her hand and

informed the visiting students that their presentation was disorganized. Tony experienced a momentary emotional response:

I about crawled under my seat. The undergrads handled it well, but were nonetheless taken a little aback by the comment. **I tried to smooth things over without undermining the student, but I don't think I was successful. Oh well.**

(Journal #2, 9/9/05)

Tony was able to self-regulate in that moment and handle the situation. Even though he felt he was not totally successful at helping everyone save face, he determined that it was not something to dwell on and was able to let it go.

The journals served not as a space to mediate his learning and development but rather as a mechanism through which to 'see' his expertise and understand how his expertise and sense of agency in this context mediated his teaching activity. Through the positive language in his journals, it was apparent that Tony's conceptualization of teaching continued to be reinforced throughout the semester. He expressed satisfaction at the end of Semester One when all but one of his students received an "A" and passed the final exam.

Meetings with Supervising Professor

It was clear that Tony did not feel the need to seek assistance with his teaching, nonetheless, he was required to meet weekly with his supervising professor as part of his professional development program. Unlike the journals, these dialogues did provide a mediational space for Tony that again reinforced his beliefs about language learning and assured him that his approach was congruent with the beliefs of the department. When asked about the topics discussed in the meetings, he said, **"It's everything. It's anything**

we want to talk about” (Interview #2, 10/7/05). He appreciated the opportunity to check-in regularly with his supervising professor to get her approval for what he was doing since as he noted below, “she’s my boss”:

We do generate some ideas, and it's nice to hear, **it's nice just to have that connect**. I can hear what [the other instructor] is doing in more detail and [my supervising professor’s] perception of it. **She's my boss** in that sense, certainly. **So it's nice to hear her say, "Oh that's sound great, sounds like you know what you're doing.”** So **I don't have to worry about it rather than later in the semester have her say, “What the [heck] was that?”** **It's a nice touch stone kind of thing.** (Interview #2, 10/7/05)

Tony mentioned that aside from the weekly meetings, he sometimes went to her for suggestions about materials and answers to course-related procedural questions. In the same way, he communicated occasionally with the other instructor who taught the same course, but “**more out of curiosity, not because I need help**” (Interview #2, 10/7/05). Overall, the data indicated that Tony found the availability of both his supervising professor and the other instructor helpful and reinforcement that his approach was appropriate: “**I was pretty confident in what I was doing**” (Interview #3, 12/16/05).

Teaching Activity

The previous section provided an understanding of how Tony’s confidence and teaching expertise mediated his engagement with his support systems. This section will illustrate how that same expertise regulated his teaching activity. Because Tony taught a similar university-level ESL course in a prior teaching experience, his was confident in

his ability to teach the course, and his self-assuredness was apparent in the first interview of Semester One when he was asked about preparing for the course. He had to “**rethink some things**” which he acknowledged was a part of preparing to teach any new course because he had “**done this before**”.

I feel very confident. I mean it's a new course, and I, anytime you do something there are some, **I'm changing a lot.** So now it's a bit of, “**Oh god, I'd better be prepared**”, and **I have to rethink some things.** But **I feel like I've done this before, too.** (Interview #1, 9/8/05)

His previous experiences included teaching pronunciation as well as language teacher education courses and provided him with a sense of agency and control in this next context. He expressed enthusiasm about using his past experiences and the books for the course to lead his teaching:

I think that's why I like this course because there are all the different elements, pronunciation, presentation. **These are things I've done a lot of,** so I feel like **I can draw from all kinds of different things, experiences that I've had before.** **Certainly it's not all coming from my head though.** I'm looking, obviously **I rely heavily on the books** to structure what I'm doing because that's the connection with the class. (Interview #2, 10/7/05)

In addition to his familiarity with the course curriculum, Tony was comfortable with the course because the goals aligned with his conceptualization of L2 teaching, that language teaching should be communicative and focus on the needs of the students:

Everything we do on the final is also things we work on, and also **things that**

they have to do in real life. So I'm pretty comfortable with it.

(Interview #1, 9/8/05)

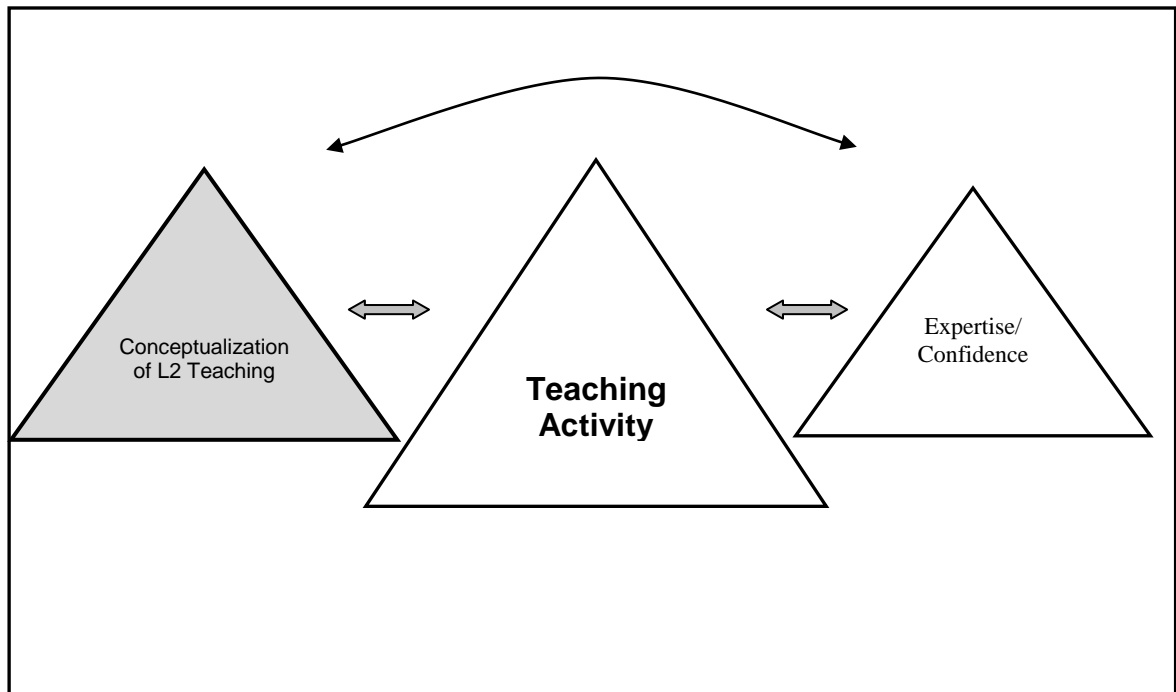


Figure 16. Teaching activity mediated by Tony's expertise and conceptualization of L2 teaching.

Tony's expertise was apparent in the way he managed his classroom. He articulated his expectations clearly, justified the learning activities he used, and easily engaged his students in group discussions (Observations #1-#5, 9/7/05-11/14/05). He concentrated on building rapport with his students early to create a classroom environment in which his students would participate freely. At the same time, he recognized that he was modeling classroom teacher behavior for them and preparing them for their own teaching contexts:

I wanted them to see that I was making an effort to get to know them, remember their names quickly and creating an atmosphere they would feel comfortable taking risks in with their English, questions about the class,

becoming a TA, because this is what I would expect from them when they start to give their presentation to the class. **It's important to practice what you preach.**

Everything went according to plan. (Journal #1, 9/2/05)

Again he mentioned the well-known adage he had learned through his teacher training experience, "**It's important to practice what you preach**", and indicated that it guided his teaching. This is noteworthy because he was doing more than parroting the words. He was making sense of and internalizing the concept and using it to regulate his teaching activity.

Toward the end of the semester, another principle learned through his instructional history emerged as guiding how he thought about his teaching. Following a classroom observation, Tony talked about the importance of justifying learning activities with students, a strategy he learned when he taught business English overseas:

It's [justifying activities] something I've done for a long time... It seems to me **if you give them the reason why, then they'll be more likely to do it. I think that came about when I taught business people [overseas]. They were very sensitive to why they were doing particular things**, because if you give them something that they perceive as being off task, they get really nervous.

(Stimulated Recall #2, 12/2/05)

It was apparent through classroom observations that Tony consistently provided his students with justifications for each learning activity. In doing so, he gave his students a motive or a reason for engaging fully in the activities of the classroom and increased their potential to learn. As was mentioned previously, the final exam was the gauge by which

each student's success was measured, and because all but one of his students passed, Tony believed his teaching approach was effective:

Well, it went well. I was very happy with that. Well, I guess you have to measure it in terms of who passes, don't you? Although that's not a good indication, but it's nice that most of my students, all but one student passed, so that was really good. (Interview #3, 12/16/05)

When asked if he would change his approach, his answer was simply, **"I don't think so...I'm right to approach it the way I do"** (Interview #3, 12/16/05).

Activity Systems in Semester Two

Tony's teaching context changed in Semester Two as he was asked to teach an ESL course on fluency. The weekly meetings with his supervising professor were not required this semester, so they met only a few times early in the semester. Beyond these interactions early in the semester, Tony chose not to seek mediation for his teaching:

[The supervising professor] and the other [teacher] were the obvious sources of support. I talked to [them] at the beginning of the semester and got some ideas about how to teach [the course]. But after that, I only met with [the supervising professor] once to go over what I was doing.

(Follow-Up Interview #2, 5/15/06)

In addition to these meetings, he **"did look at other syllabi"** (Follow-Up Interview #1, 3/20/06) for course ideas and gave no indication that the meetings or the other syllabi mediated the way he developed the course. He indicated that for the most part, he created the course by drawing on his previous teaching experiences with other ESL courses and

admitted that creating meaningful classroom activities for the fluency course did challenge him:

It's hard. We've done, you know, **just fluency practice activities** but again, we try to link it with other, **I try to link it with other things...and get students to interact with each other. That doesn't work as well as I thought it would.**

(Follow-Up Interview #1, 3/20/06)

Expertise is considered “unique to a specific domain of activity” (Palmer, Stough, Burdinski, Jr., & Gonzales, 2005, p. 15), and Tony did not have content knowledge specifically related to fluency instruction. As such, he struggled to create classroom activities that promoted student interaction and noted that **“it’s hard”** to teach fluency:

So because it’s fluency practice, **well, that's just getting people to speak.**

Hopefully it will have some kind of language focus also. **And it's really hard** because **I told my students many times**, now look, **this is very easy to do, but very hard to do well.**

(Follow-Up Interview #1, 3/20/06)

The tension Tony felt, however, was not strong enough to push him to seek mediation from others, and his sense of agency in the classroom and level of expertise to regulated his teaching activity throughout the semester. In the final interview of the semester, he admitted that he was uncomfortable with teaching the fluency course at the start of the semester but was eventually able to settle on an approach that worked for him:

I taught [the course] for the first time, so **it was definitely a learning experience.**

I was a little uncomfortable at first because the goal of [the course] is to improve fluency, and **I wasn't sure how to approach it.** But **as the semester went on, I felt more comfortable with the approach I took.**

(Follow-Up Interview #2, 5/15/06)

As an experienced teacher with a fully developed conceptualization of L2 teaching and expertise, the new course challenged Tony yet he did not seek help. In the following excerpt, he explained why:

I didn't seek them [his supervising professor or other instructor] out during the semester because I thought everything was going pretty well. Also, I wasn't sure what I would ask them. I first needed to get a feel for what worked (and what didn't). Now, I have a much better sense of where I would go with [the course]. So I'd probably meet with [the supervising professor] to talk about some of these ideas to get feedback.

(Follow-Up Interview #2, 5/15/06)

Tony noted that because “**everything was going pretty well**”, he did not have any questions and had to teach the course first before he could identify his concerns. Yet the final statement, “**I'd probably meet with [the supervising professor]**”, indicated that there was some residual discomfort with how he taught the course. At the same time, there was no urgency in Tony's language because he was pleased with the outcome of the course. The question that remains is whether or not mediation would have lessened the tension he felt at the beginning of the semester and changed the way he approached the course. Nonetheless, Tony's experiences during Semester Two point again to his ability to use his expertise to navigate a new teaching context and regulate his teaching activity.

Conclusion

Tony entered this new yet familiar teaching context with an extensive and varied L2 teaching and learning history through which he developed a conceptualization of

language teaching that mediated his teaching activity. His conceptualization mapped onto the philosophy of his professional development program and his department, and his experiences served to reinforce his pre-existing beliefs. Tony's expertise was dynamic, adaptive and apparent in the ease and confidence with which he approached his teaching, and he exerted a strong sense of agency in this context (Berliner, 2001). Support systems were available to Tony throughout both semesters, and while he appreciated their availability, he did not feel a need for assistance from them. Instead, his "self-regulatory processes" (p. 464) guided his teaching, and over the course of the academic year, his conceptualization of language teaching remained unchanged. It was reinforced through his teacher education program and served to regulate the interplay of his teaching and learning activity systems.

Chapter 7: Implications, Limitations, and Future Research Directions

Summary of the Findings

Using a sociocultural theoretical lens, this study traced the learning of three (3) second language teachers as they engaged in the activity of teaching and learning in an intensive, university-level, language teacher professional development program. The findings indicated differences in what and how the teachers learned even though they participated in the same professional development program. These differences were mediated by time, their individual language learning and instructional histories, the support systems that were part of their professional development experiences, and the agency each teacher chose to exert on the activity systems mediating his learning experiences. Teacher professional development programs can benefit by recognizing that inherent in the professionalism of teachers is the expectation of development. We use the term ‘professional development’ freely as a ‘catch-all’ phrases for anything related to teacher learning. In doing so, we sometimes forget to consider what we truly mean by development and to acknowledge that there are many factors that mediate a teacher’s growth. This study highlights the need for second language teacher educators to step back and take a moment to remember that teacher learning is a process that is unique to each individual teacher and mediated by time, by the significance of prior language learning and teaching experiences, and by the individual agency of teachers as they engage in particular contexts. As such, teacher education programs can think critically about the activities they expect L2 teachers to engage in and carefully consider a focus on meaningful activities that account for the individual nature of learning and afford strategic mediation across the course of the professional development experience.

A Sociocultural Theoretical Perspective and L2 Teacher Cognition

This study is situated in an historical moment when a sociocultural theoretical perspective is driving the research and thinking related to second language teacher learning. From this perspective, higher-level cognition is believed to be mutually constitutive of and by the activity of the social and mental worlds. Therefore, the focus of this study is to understand how this perspective on human cognition can make visible the nature of L2 teacher learning and development as it occurs in the activity of teaching. The teachers who participated in this study were enrolled in a L2 teacher professional development program grounded in a sociocultural perspective, and while the activity systems that emerged for each participant were similar, the way each participant engaged in them pointed to the differences in their learning and development.

At the macro level, an Activity Theory framework (Leont'ev, 1977) was used to locate and explain the activity systems mediating L2 teacher cognition (see Figure 17). At the micro level, Vygotsky's (1978) psychological constructs afforded both a conceptual framework through which to think about and analyze teacher learning as well as a language for articulating the learning process:

affective-volitional → *mediation* → *zpd* → *internalization* → *concept* → *transformation/*
tendency *development* *externalization*

Using these constructs, it was possible to locate the differences in the teachers' learning and make visible the complexities inherent in L2 teacher cognition.

Activity Systems, Themes, and the Nature of L2 Teacher Cognition

Together, Vygotsky's psychological constructs and Leont'ev's Activity Theory provided an analytical approach that answered the question, "What are the activity systems that mediate L2 teacher learning and development in an intensive in-service

teacher education program?” The activity systems that emerged as mediating the participants’ conceptualizations of teaching included the individual agency each chose to exert in the learning process, the support systems available to them through their professional development program, and their classroom teaching activity. In addition to those three activity systems, balancing roles and managing time emerged as an activity system unique to Mark, a novice teacher, yet critical for mediating his learning.

Mark	Daniel	Tony
Subject/Agency	Subject/Agency	Subject/Agency
Balancing Roles (time)		
Support Systems	Support Systems	Support Systems
Teaching Activity	Teaching Activity	Teaching Activity

Figure 17: Overview of activity systems mediating and mediated by the participants’ conceptualizations of L2 teaching.

A closer analysis of each activity system provided insights to the question, “What is the process of development in an intensive in-service teacher education program (i.e., microgenetic analysis)? It is clear that the process of development is complex and unique to each second language teacher, yet four overarching themes emerged and provide a broad understanding of the process. These themes included the acknowledgement that development is mediated by time, by individual language learning and teaching histories, by supportive and open relationships, and by a teacher’s sense of agency in the process. Individually and collectively, these themes suggest ways to think about and deliver meaningful language teacher education professional development as well as how to conduct research related to language teacher learning

The Notion of Time

Woven through each participant’s experience is the notion of time, one of the most significant factors mediating L2 teacher learning. From a sociocultural theoretical

perspective, this is not surprising as time is considered essential in the development of higher cognitive processes (Kozulin, 1986; Lee & Smagorinsky, 2000; Lee, Wertsch, & Stone, 1983; Newman & Holzman, 1993). The notion of time comprises several dimensions in this data including a teacher's ability to manage time, his age and maturity, the total number of years of L2 teaching and learning experiences, and the level of expertise developed over those years. For Tony and Daniel, their years of experience corresponded to their ability to manage their time and balance their roles as graduate students and language teachers effectively. They made time to handle their classes and their students' needs and still found time to focus on their own learning. On the flip side, for Mark, a novice L2 teacher, the feeling that there was not enough time to accomplish what was necessary created stress that stole time and focus from learning. L2 teacher educators can help novice teachers understand that learning to teach takes time and in doing so can remove some of the pressure they might feel to "get it" immediately. However, the public discourse surrounding the profession of teaching is garnered by common notions that 'teachers are born, not made' and teachers should 'get it' immediately. Challenging this discourse will take a concerted effort not just by teachers-in-training but by teacher educators who establish realistic expectations for their teachers' professional growth and development.

Language Learning and Instructional Histories

Closely related to time is the role of an individual's language learning and instructional history in mediating cognition. L2 teachers enter a professional development context with pre-existing beliefs that have emerged through their individual language learning and instructional histories and mediate how they think about their

teaching. For example, Tony came to this professional development experience with a fully internalized conceptualization of L2 teaching and “self-regulatory processes” (Berliner, 2001, p. 464) that guided how he thought about his teaching. On the other hand, Mark had no ESL teaching history. Even though he participated in the same professional development program as Daniel and Tony, he experienced a series of psychological struggles as the beliefs he had developed about L2 teaching through his “apprenticeship of observation” (Lortie, 1975) were challenged in his new teaching and learning contexts. While L2 teacher education programs tend to give ‘lip service’ to the idea that individual learners have histories that influence their learning, they may not account for the individual nature of learning as a result of those histories. Language teacher educators can seek to recognize and acknowledge the different histories that have mediated a teacher’s thinking long before he enters a professional development program. At the same time, researchers can seek to understand how those histories have and continue to mediate teacher cognition and find ways to use language learning and instructional histories as tools to meet teachers where they are and push their learning and development.

Supportive and Open Relationships

Acknowledging the language learning and instructional histories of teachers is one way to determine where teachers are in their learning and development. Another way to determine how to meet teachers in their zpd is to cultivate supportive and open relationships as a way of creating trust. Through trusting relationships, teacher educators can work with teachers to develop intersubjectivity and determine the mediation needed for emotional support and/or cognitive growth. Emotions are mediators of cognition, and

fostering a trusting relationship affords a protected space in which teachers can acknowledge and attend to their emotions and recognize that learning is an emotionally-charged process that is unique to the individual teacher. A novice teacher like Mark may experience negative emotions that emerge out a disconnect between what he is experiencing in the classroom and what he had imagined it to be like. He may need emotional support to guide and encourage him as he learns to navigate the day-to-day activities of the teaching world. On the other end of the expertise continuum, an experienced teacher like Tony may find supportive and open relationships collegial but not essential because he has fully internalized a conceptualization of teaching and expertise to draw on for emotional and cognitive support. Yet if one were to delve more deeply, emotions are also driving Tony's learning but in a way that is quite different from Mark's experience. Instead of contradictions and negative emotions that spur learning, Tony can learn to recognize that positive emotive responses can indicate connections of concepts and help to solidify or reinforce understandings about his teaching. Someone like Daniel can have yet another experience that is nothing like Mark's or Tony's. As a teacher with some ESL instructional history, Daniel was ready for mediation and welcomed the supportive and open relationships provided by his supervising professor, teaching peers, and significant other. Daniel and his supervising professor had established a sense of intersubjectivity, and she understood where he was in his zpd. As such, she provided ongoing cognitive support through consistent, strategic mediation. To determine where teachers are in their learning, language teacher educators can create mediational spaces through blogging, journals, and individual and group meetings. These

spaces can make the mental worlds of teachers visible and provide opportunities to mediate their learning.

A sociocultural theoretical perspective, however, reminds us that “mediation is contingent” (Lantolf, 2000b, p. 81). L2 teachers have to welcome the opportunity to participating in collegial relationships and be open to the possibilities for learning and support that they can afford. Teacher receptivity to mediation speaks to individual agency which is of critical importance from a sociocultural theoretical perspective because it explains a teacher’s desire and motivation, “the last ‘why’ in the analysis of thinking” (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 252).

Individual Agency

A teacher’s agency determines his willingness and motivation and whether or not he will choose to learn in a professional development context. Agency can explain why a teacher welcomes or dismisses mediation that can push his learning and development, and as contexts and activity systems change, a teacher’s sense of individual agency can shift. Tony believed he had agency and was willing and able to exercise his agency regardless of the new and changing teaching and learning contexts. On the other hand, Mark’s experiences illustrated how agency can be influenced by context. By the midpoint of the first semester, Mark was developing a sense of agency with regard to planning and executing pedagogically sound lessons and was pleased with his approach. His confidence was mediated by interactions with his supervising professor. During the second semester, however, as his activity systems changed and the support of his supervising professor was no longer available, Mark used his agency to choose to

conform to the “chalk and talk” teaching approach of the other instructors in his new context.

L2 teachers have agency in their learning, and it is essential for L2 teacher educators to understand the role individual agency plays in mediating teacher learning. The experiences of these participants also illustrated that a learner’s agency can and will shift and function differently as activity systems and support change. This means that language teacher educators can be ready to adjust their own expectations of teachers as learning contexts change. Individual agency, the “last ‘why’ in the analysis of thinking”, sheds light on why the nature of language teacher learning is complex, changeable, emotionally-charged, and mediated over time in and through the activity of a teacher’s social and mental worlds.

Limitations

As with any research study, there are limitations. To begin, as this study suggests, development of a conceptualization of language teaching requires time. The length of the study, one academic year, was not opportunity enough to observe the process of fully internalizing a conceptualization of language teaching. However, because a great deal of the data was collected from each of these teachers in the initial months of their entrée into a new teaching and learning context, the data did capture their early struggles to negotiate and make sense of their new social world and may represent the most intriguing data regarding their learning. Another limitation of the study was that while the stories told in this research included real language from real language teachers gathered through interviews, journals, meetings and classroom observations, as the researcher, I selected the data to create their narratives. Some might argue that it was impossible to remain free

of judgment and avoid imposing personal and societal expectations as I interpreted and reconstructed their words to try to understand teacher cognition. Finally, this study was not in any way meant to judge the teaching styles or abilities of the participants but rather to capture the social and mental worlds of teachers to better understand the process of coming to know in the activity of teaching to mediate our own understandings of language teacher cognition.

Future Research Directions

Perhaps the most important point to take away from this research is an understanding of the power of a sociocultural theoretical perspective as a theory of mind for guiding research on language teacher cognition. From that perspective, several ideas for future research emerged from the findings of this study.

At the level of language teacher professional development programs, we can begin broadly and consider the role these programs play in mediating language teacher cognition by examining the etiology of existing programs. It may be most productive to encourage and support research that examines existing practices as well as the activities professional development programs expect language teachers to engage in to determine if and in what ways their practices and activities mediate language teacher cognition.

Through this type of research, we can determine how to build on and enrich professional development practices and activities in ways that mediate language teacher cognition thereby improving the efficacy of language teacher professional development programs.

The findings in this study illustrate the challenges in designing an effective teacher education program. Even when teachers were afforded open and supportive relationships, strategic mediation that met them where they were in their learning, and the

opportunity to learn in and through the activity of teaching, it was the language learning and instructional histories and the individual agency each teacher chose to exert on his activity that determined how the program mediated his learning. Their experiences remind us that students in language teacher professional development programs fall along a continuum from novice teachers whose conceptualizations of teaching are developing and changeable, to experienced language teachers with fully internalized conceptualizations of language teaching that serve as the tools through which they think about their teaching. As such, we can consider research questions that seek to open up mediational spaces that can lead to a deeper understanding of how individual agency and language learning and instructional histories mediate language teachers' assumptions about their students, their teaching contexts, and themselves as teachers and students of language teaching. We can also explore how those assumptions mediate the way they choose to engage in learning and teaching activity that mediates their conceptualizations of language teaching (Johnson, 2009).

Closing Thoughts

The goal of this research was to illustrate the power of a sociocultural theoretical perspective to make visible the process of cognitive development of second language teachers as they came to know through the activity of teaching. The data captured the psychological struggles of these teachers as they negotiated new teaching and learning contexts. Their experiences revealed that the nature of language teacher learning is complex and mediated over time by a teacher's language learning and instructional history, the activity systems that are part of a professional development experience, and the individual agency a teacher chooses to exert on his learning activity. Their

experiences also suggest that language teacher educators critically examine the activities of language teacher professional development programs that have historically been designed as 'one-size-fits-all'. The challenge for professional development programs is to move teachers beyond their individual learning histories and tacit notions of teaching and mediate the development of explicit conceptualizations of language teaching that are based on sound pedagogical theory and may become the psychological tools through which they think about and carry out their teaching. A sociocultural perspective affords a theoretical lens through which to understand the complex process of language teacher cognition which is the first step in addressing the challenge.

APPENDIX

Participant Interviews (IRB #34333)

Interview #1: Professional Life History and Teaching Beliefs

Time of interview: 1st and 2nd weeks of classes
Fall 2005 semester

Length of interview: 1 ½ - 2 hours

Interest in language/language learning:

1. Tell me about your formal and informal language learning experiences.
2. Which of these experiences has had the greatest impact on your interest in language?
3. Tell me about your formal education experiences/choices. How do these choices relate to your interest in language learning/teaching?

Philosophy about language learning:

4. How do you believe we learn a second language?
5. What has influenced your beliefs about L2 language learning?

Language teaching experiences:

6. Tell me about your L2 teaching experiences.

If participant has L2 teaching experience:

7. How did you become interested in second language (L2) teaching?
8. How do you think your beliefs have influenced your teaching?
9. If I were to look at your lesson plans, do you think I would clearly see evidence of your beliefs? Why or why not?
10. Do you think your teaching has changed since you first began teaching _____ years/months ago? If so, in what ways? If not, why?
11. How experienced a teacher do you consider yourself to be? What makes you say that?

If participant does not have L2 teaching experience:

12. How do you think your beliefs will influence your teaching?

Graduate program:

13. Why did you choose this graduate program?
14. What are your long-term goals both professionally and personally?
15. At this point, what are your research interests?
16. What courses are you enrolled in this semester?
17. What courses are you teaching as part of your assistantship?
18. How ready do you feel to teach in this new context? What are you confident about? What are you concerned about?
19. How do you feel about writing journals?
20. Do you have any other thoughts or experiences you would like to share?

Interview #2 and Follow-Up Interview #1: Support Systems and Learning to Teach

Time of interview: Fall 2005 and Spring 2006

Length of interview: 30 minutes - 1 hour

1. What resources do you find yourself using to support your teaching?
 - ✓ other instructors-workroom/individual conversations; observe their classes
 - ✓ professors
 - ✓ former teacher colleagues
 - ✓ graduate classes
 - ✓ articles/texts
 - ✓ the Web
 - ✓ textbook teacher guides
 - ✓ weekly meetings
 - ✓ previous language learning experiences
 - ✓ previous language teaching experiences
2. How do you decide when to use which support system? Example?
3. How do you communicate with other instructors, supervising professor? Face-to-face, email, chat, blog, phone
4. How frequently do you tap each support system?

If taught previously:

5. What support systems did you have and make use of in your previous teaching context?
6. What similarities and differences do you see between the types of support systems you access now and in your previous teaching contexts?

For all participants:

7. Are there any support systems missing that you feel could be of value to you? Why?
 8. How do you position yourself when you're planning lessons? As teacher, student, peer, other?
 9. What % of classroom activities you put in your lesson plans are other's ideas? Originate from you? Are some combination of ideas/suggestions/experiences?
 10. How have you learned/continue to learn how to teach?
 11. Do you have any other thoughts you would like to share?
-

Interview #3 and Follow-Up Interview #2: Memorable Moments of the Semester

Time of interview: Fall 2005 and Spring 2006

Length of interview: 1-2 hours

General Thoughts about the Semester

1. In general, how would you describe this semester of teaching?
2. What emotions would you attach to your experiences?
3. Compare and contrast how you felt about how you taught each class – all 3 participants taught 2 sections of the same course.
4. How did you change, if at all, your syllabus throughout the semester? Why?
5. What have been the most salient teaching moments for you this semester and why?
6. Do you think your teaching has changed since the beginning of the semester? If so, in what ways? If not, why?
7. How experienced a teacher do you consider yourself to be now? What makes you say that?
8. What courses will you teach next semester?
9. What types of things will you change about how you approach your teaching, and why? What types of things will stay the same?

Thoughts about Language Learning

10. Have your ideas changed about how you believe we learn a second language? If so, in what ways? If not, why not?
11. What semester experiences have led to changes in or reinforcement of your beliefs about L2 language learning?

Thoughts about your Goals

12. Is the graduate program meeting your expectations?
13. Have your long-term goals changed at all as a result of this semester?
14. Are your research interests still the same?

Thoughts about Journals

15. Now that you have written journals for a semester, how do you feel about writing journals?
16. Did you revisit any of your journals throughout the semester or before today?
17. Will you continue to write a journal or do some sort of reflective writing next semester even if it is not required? Why? Why not?
18. How do you feel about giving your journals to me now?

Thoughts about Support Systems

19. Of the support systems you mentioned in our previous interview (list them), which support systems did you continue to use throughout the semester? Why?
20. How did you feel about participating in this study?

Thoughts about the Study

21. Do you think participating in this study influenced your teaching in any way? If so, how?
22. Do you have any ideas about how I might have approached this study differently? Data I may have missed?
23. Do you have any other thoughts or experiences you would like to share?

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Childs, S. (May 2009). *Second language teacher learning: Concept development and transformation of teaching activity*. Presented at the 2009 Language Teacher Education Conference (LTEC). Washington, DC, May 28-30, 2009.

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