

Policies and Practice in Language Learning and Teaching: 20th-century Historical Perspectives

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1. VALORIZING PRACTICE IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TEACHING

Sabine Doff & Richard Smith

Building on exchanges among scholars in different countries which have been developing in recent years in the field of History of Language Learning and Teaching (HoLLT),¹ this book brings together studies from Georgia, Germany, Italy, Japan, New Zealand, Poland, South Korea and the UK which explore links between policy and practice in language teaching in the 20th century. The book sets out to expand the remit of ‘grounded history’ within the field of HoLLT by focusing on 20th-century language teaching policies and linking these to practices and to contexts, situating policy formulation in particular contexts on the one hand, and exploring the relationship between policy and practice on the other. In this sense, it shows how the theories, policy pronouncements, curricula, textbooks and overall teaching approaches which tend to be focused on in most histories of language teaching emerge always from particular, researchable contexts, and, in the other direction, are interpreted and responded to in practice, again, in particular contexts.² In this way, we hope to contribute a context-based perspective which highlights diversity of practices, in opposition to received views that language teaching methodology is ‘universal’ and context-free.

Reconsidering the value given to theory and policy in the history of language education

In editing this volume, we have therefore had four main goals in mind:

Firstly, we would like to continue to help build international, interlingual, intercultural and interdisciplinary perspectives in developing the field of HoLLT by bringing together specialists from a range of different countries, languages and disciplines. A second aim is to develop an enhanced appreciation of the role that context has played in the formulation of policy in the 20th century history of language learning and teaching, and in the success or otherwise of policy implementation. By doing so, we hope, thirdly, to help bring about a shift towards greater valorization of the great diversity of practices in the history of language learning and teaching, as a complement to prevailing universalist accounts of the history of ideas on language learning

¹ HoLLT.net, *AILA Research Network for History of Language Learning and Teaching*.

² Cf. Smith, ‘Building “Applied Linguistic Historiography”’, 82.

and teaching. Last but not least, we hope to pave the way for systematic comparative research which takes account of various dimensions of practice in the history of language education.

Why, though, this focus on context and on pursuing histories of practice as opposed to top-down, ‘methods-based’ or ‘programmatic’ history? Theories of learning and teaching, and of syllabus and curriculum, as well as the question of how these relate to one other, have been investigated rather thoroughly to date, with works devoted to such aspects tending to dominate in the fields of applied linguistics and language education. Historical work, especially, perhaps, that published in English and/or in relation to the teaching of English as a second/foreign language, has tended, accordingly, to be based primarily on charting the development of theories of how languages should (ideally) be learned and, especially, taught, under the rubric of ‘methods’.³ However, the limitations of universal proposals for language teaching have, at least since the 1990s, been continuously exposed.⁴ The importance of contextually appropriate methodology⁵ and post-method pedagogy⁶ is correspondingly well established, at least in theory.

In reality, nevertheless, teachers and learners continue to be exhorted to teach and learn, respectively, along lines which are set down by theorists and policy-makers. Recent decades, in particular, have seemed, in some ways, to witness a growth in prescriptivism with regard to language learning and teaching as governments and other agencies (for example, the Council of Europe and the British Council), not to mention ‘global’ publishers (for example, Pearson, OUP, Macmillan) and testing agencies (for example, Cambridge Assessment) have become more active and have extended their reach. Academic research into language learning and teaching has become widespread and continually seeks new outlets for impact, while, with the development of mass education during the twentieth century, government policy on language teaching became more and more far-reaching (see PIREDDU and DANIELS⁷).

Thus, even though, as is nowadays quite clear, top-down impositions of theory via policy tend to have limited effect and a more plausible approach to improvement is to develop teachers’

³ For example, Howatt with Widdowson, *A history of English language teaching*, or Hüllen, *Kleine Geschichte des Fremdsprachenlernens*.

⁴ For example, by Phillipson, *Linguistic Imperialism*, Holliday, *Appropriate methodology and social context* and Pennycook, *The cultural politics of English as an international language*.

⁵ Holliday, *Appropriate methodology and social context*.

⁶ Kumaravadivelu, *Understanding language teaching: From method to postmethod*.

⁷ Names in capitals refer to chapters by authors in this volume.

agency to understand and to innovate appropriately in their own contexts, theory and abstract policy still tend to gain more concentrated attention than practice-based insights or contextual considerations within teacher education and reform interventions. Partly, we feel, this is because the stories that are told and that we tell ourselves about our profession mainly concern past theories which have been proposed as universally relevant, and not past practices in particular contexts. As an antidote, and as a source of possible cases for integration into teacher education in different contexts, we have proposed the notions of ‘grounded histories’ – that is histories based on analysis of particular contexts – and of ‘valorizing practice’ – that is, taking the position that it is worth attempting to uncover past practices within those contexts, indeed that equal value should be attached to the work of practitioners as to decontextualized theories or policies of language learning and teaching.

Four curricular layers: Cuban’s model as a reference point across book chapters

To help authors consider practice independently of or interdependently with theory and policy, and to enable comparisons to be made across contexts, we have suggested that they refer to the multi-layered curriculum model developed by the American educationalist Larry Cuban.⁸ This views learning and teaching on four layers which are closely connected with each other. While authors have tended to consider several layers at once in their chapters, we note here authors’ names in cases where there has been a particular focus on one level.

The first, ‘top’ layer, or ‘**intended curriculum**’, consists of official documents that describe learning and teaching as these should be and/or are designed in guidelines, curricula and other sources with official character. As Cuban says: “In the real world [...] the official [that is, ‘intended’] curriculum too often sails above the clouds loosely tethered to what happens in classrooms. How can that be? The answer is in the other layers of the curriculum structure”.⁹ These are the layers which have been neglected in past historical work and which we set out to valorize with the contributions in this volume:

The ‘**taught**’ layer (teaching procedures) includes, for example, teacher knowledge, beliefs, decisions and reasons for them with regard to language classrooms (what?, how?, why?). This layer also takes into account the contexts within which teacher decisions are made and language teaching occurs (see DANIELS, KIPF, KOTLARSKA, UCHIMARU and WHYTE): “[T]he

⁸ Cuban, ‘The multi-layered curriculum’.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

intended curriculum and what teachers teach may overlap in the title of the course, key topics, and the same textbook, but can differ substantially in actual subject matter and daily lessons”.¹⁰

The **‘learned’ layer** (learning procedures) includes, for example, ideas learners have acquired in language classrooms and what they do with them, as well as learner interactions with teachers and other learners, and the contexts of learner decisions and language learning (see PFINGSTHORN and PIREDDU): “[T]he taught curriculum overlaps with but differs significantly from what students take away from class [i.e. the learned layer]”.¹¹

The **‘tested’ layer** (test formats, test procedures) consists of, for example, test formats, results and consequences; information and ideas contained in language tests and skills assessed by them, as well as contexts of language testing (see FOUSSER, GIESLER and REH). As Cuban says, “[W]hat students learn does not exactly mirror what is in the tested curriculum”, and thus it is an additional area of practice to consider.¹²

As the papers in this volume show, Cuban’s model has provided a good basis for identification and valorization of various contextual factors and practices, thus helping to fulfil our second and third aims above. Thus, while many historical studies to date have primarily been concerned with theoretical foundations of language learning and teaching along with textbooks, curricula and other official historical sources, the contributions in this volume have a different focus: investigating the history of language learning and teaching with a focus on practice, they shed new light on how language learning and teaching have been carried out rather than how these should or could have been. In referring to Cuban’s model more or less explicitly, several of the chapters trace processes of ‘recontextualization’¹³ of the rather well researched ‘top’ or ‘intended’ curriculum layer’ into the other three curricular layers. Thus, the different chapters are united in valorizing practices of language learning and teaching by taking into account a layer or layers other than the intended curriculum. Indeed, Cuban’s model constitutes one way in which systematic comparison can be effected, with views from different contexts complementing each other. As the field of HoLLT seeks ways to effect comparison across languages and contexts, this model can serve as one useful framework.

¹⁰ *Ibidem.*

¹¹ *Ibidem.*

¹² *Ibidem.*

¹³ Fend, *Geschichte des Bildungswesens.*

Aside from exploring diverse ‘layers’ of language teaching and learning, the chapters focus on – and the book is structured according to – different *aspects* of policy and practice in the history of language education, specifically, those of the well-known ‘didactic triangle’ of ‘content’ (*What?*), ‘method’ (*How?*) and ‘aims’ (*Why?*), with the addition of a separate section on ‘context’:

Focus on content

Chapters in the first section of the book are focused mainly on the *what*, that is, the content of language education, here represented by various examples of literary content.

In the first chapter, Stefan KIPF shows that Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* are not only an important part of world literature, but have also been the subject of long-lasting and intensive pedagogical efforts in European schools. To this day, this text is an indispensable part of teaching Latin in Germany, a canonical text – a true school classic. Surprisingly, we are poorly informed about how the *Metamorphoses* were able to achieve this position. This chapter aims to provide a historical overview of the conditions under which this Latin text became canonical from the eighteenth century onwards lost this position briefly in the first half of the twentieth century.

Norman ÄCHTLER, in his chapter on Schiller’s *Wallenstein*, clearly demonstrates the importance of a history of practice in German classes. His essay deals with the question of how – with which methods, means and media – the German classics were taught in secondary schools of the German-speaking world during the nineteenth century. Using the example of the philological and didactical treatment of Friedrich Schiller’s drama trilogy *Wallenstein*, this is discussed from a discourse analytical perspective. Following Foucault and others, the German class is described as a ‘dispositive’, an intentional arrangement of specific discourses, discursive practices and media.

A third focus on content is provided by Sabine REH who takes a close look at teaching German literature in the French zone of occupation after World War II, using examination tasks for and papers written by learners – a type of source that has so far been neglected. In her chapter “Writing about literature”, she shows what new insights into mother-tongue teaching and its history can be gained by looking at practices, specifically the practice of testing and the artifacts analysed here, that is, student papers and teacher evaluations. Using student essays written as part of a competition and judged by teachers, the author is able to

trace how ideas about individual-authentic writing about literature in Germany came to the fore anew, despite the adoption of certain practices from France; that is, the chapter examines how practices change in their transnational migration.

Focus on method

The chapters arranged in the next section of our volume are centred around questions of *how* learning and teaching in language classrooms have been arranged.

In her chapter “Practice escaping an ideological grip”, Joanna PFINGSTHORN shows how the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) agenda slipped through the cracks of error taxonomies. Although it is widely assumed that learner errors are an integral part of the language learning experience, their exact conceptualization as a phenomenon and, by extension, the understanding of their role in relation to constructs such as language proficiency or communicative competence remained unclear in the course of the 20th century. The paper examines the degree to which error taxonomies that were developed in various foreign language education settings by practitioners in the heyday of the CLT approach accounted for and reflected the basic rationale of the CLT agenda, that is, the fostering of communicative skills that allow learners to express their intentions in a correct and appropriate way.

Tim GIESLER’s paper suggests a supplementary approach to normative sources by investigating attempts to align the intended and the taught curriculum in 1980s Bremen manuals for CLT. In the absence of sources that provide direct documentation of past teaching practice, he approaches 1980s English language teaching manuals from the northern German city state of Bremen by applying them as indirect sources that serve as windows into past practices. This can be done since the manuals’ authors – English experts hired to modernize language teaching in Bremen – not only propose how the new language teaching curricula should be put to practice but also scrutinize the teaching practice they observed and, at the same time, try to refute criticisms they expected from in-service teachers.

A first-hand account of CLT is offered by John DANIELS, who, in his chapter, looks to identify the role of communicative competence as an objective for language teaching through the different periods and methodologies which have marked language learning in England over the thirty-five year period in which the author was personally involved, as a middle school language teacher and researcher. The development of intensive language programmes

to supplement classroom language learning, a central theme for this chapter, demonstrates how teachers can respond to an identified problem, here the difficulty of developing productive language skills that are essential for communicative competence.

A complementary focus on receptive skills is provided by Laura PINNAVIA and Annalisa ZANOLA, who reconstruct how English writing was taught in the twentieth century, as seen through handbooks for mother-tongue speakers (MTS) and foreign speakers (FS). After providing a brief historical description of the rise of handbooks for MTS and FS, this work features analysis of the prefaces and contents of six handbooks – three addressed to MTS and three to FS – covering the periods 1820-1920 and 1920-1970 in order to see whether, despite their different theoretical and historical origins, similarities between the two text-types exist.

Focus on aims

The chapters in this section focus on *why* or *to what ends* languages have been taught and learned.

Silvia PIREDDU investigates the changing aims of English language teaching in Italian technical schools on the threshold of the 20th century. This paper illustrates the work of Luigi Pavia, who discussed the role and mission of the state school teacher and, in particular, the difficult task of matching the official requirements of the curricula and everyday classroom practice. He questioned the organization of these curricula and the methodology used to teach foreign languages, advocating a more flexible approach, and discussed the difficulty of educating prior to preparing the technicalities of grammar. Pavia had a holistic view of education and testified to the difficulties faced by a teacher facing teenagers at the beginning of the new century.

Kohei UCHIMARU focusses on Yoshisaburô Okakura and the practical value of the study of English in secondary schools in early twentieth-century Japan. Okakura was more concerned than his predecessors and successors with teaching English as a form of education. He is also well known for valuing reading for its practical value in the study of English. By closely examining his policies and teaching practice, this paper reveals that underlying his approach were contextual considerations on the purpose of general education in secondary schools.

In the next chapter, Shona WHYTE takes a critical look at “English for Special Purposes” in the 1970s. This paper examines the debate between advocates of general and specific purpose English language teaching from the early days of British ESP onwards. Drawing on

contemporary sources including memoirs and biographical notes as well as journal articles, book chapters and ESP textbooks, this chapter traces the influence of key figures who together influenced the development of the field of ESP in the UK in the 1970s. The author argues that their work is an example of a useful cross-fertilization of academic research and teaching practice and benefited from both unusually propitious circumstances and some quite remarkable individuals.

Focus on context

This final section acknowledges the salient role that context plays for all three dimensions of the didactic triangle represented by previous sections. The contributions in this section show how the language learning and teaching present is very much defined by contexts shaped in the (recent) past.

Irmina KOTLARSKA investigates sociocultural, political and educational aspects of teaching English in Polish schools in the interwar period (1918-1939), when the country regained its independence. This is the period when English first came into the curriculum in the developing school system. The main phenomena investigated are the links between teaching and learning procedures of ELT at state schools and the social, cultural, intellectual, and political context of foreign language teaching in interwar Poland. The analysis aims to ascertain how the purposes of English language education given in curricula are reflected in textbooks by means of a comparison between curricula and textbook content. To analyse the materials as comprehensively as possible, professional journal articles from the period are also considered.

The next chapter by Sharon HARVEY critically examines the introduction, reception and practices relating to intercultural language teaching policy in New Zealand between 2006 to 2018. Focussing the lens on practice, a critical review of the history and context of the policy introduction of intercultural language teaching is presented, alongside findings of evaluative studies. These show, among other things, the degree to which intercultural competence was or was not integrated into in-service language teacher education programmes aimed at upskilling New Zealand teachers. A profound disconnect is evident between the top-down globalized language and culture policy emanating from the Council of Europe and the ‘taught’ layer of the New Zealand curriculum’s Learning Languages area, and the suggestion is made that a new layer may need to be added to Cuban’s curriculum model: that of teacher education.

Robert FOUSER's chapter provides a different focus on context by investigating social attitudes toward 'school English' in South Korea from 1970 to 1999. As the South Korean economy developed rapidly in the 1970s, the perceived importance of English grew. This trend accelerated in the 1980s and 1990s with continued growth and the transition to democracy. The paper analyses a corpus of 49 selected articles on English education from four major South Korean daily newspapers. Results show that pushes to reform 'school English' originated from policy makers intent on linking English proficiency to economic and social development. Rather than reflecting popular attitudes, policy makers acted as drivers of public opinion.

The closing chapter by Ekaterine SHAVERDASHVILI and Nino CHKHIKVDZE about English as a foreign language in Georgia illustrates the importance of historical context for present-day language education. The authors explore the establishment of English as a foreign language in Georgia in the 1930s and its development to the present day. Their paper analyses the factors influencing English language teaching at different times in Georgia, before, during and after the Soviet period, and examines English language curricula and teaching materials. The chapter also offers the results of empirical research into the current state of English teaching and the impact of the Soviet period, based on focus group interviews which were conducted throughout Georgia.

New perspectives for a “history of the present” in language education

The importance of some of these chapters' *recent* contextual focus is signalled by Cuban, who states that

previous reforms create the historical context for the multi-layered curriculum and influence the direction of contemporary reforms. This historical context is like a coral, a mass of skeletons from millions of animals built up that, over time, accumulates into reefs above and below the sea line. Its presence cannot be ignored neither by ships nor by inhabitants. Yet many eager reformers in science education do ignore the coral reefs, pay little attention to the historical context for the new science teaching and learning that they champion.¹⁴

¹⁴ Cuban, 'The multi-layered curriculum'.

Compared to studies into the history of language learning and teaching which focus on earlier periods, the 20th-century history represented in chapters in this book seems, in many cases, to be relatively close to us and may have relatively direct implications – as implied by Cuban in the above extract with regard to science education – for language education policy-makers, but also for practitioners. The relative recency of some of the periods focused on may enable teacher trainees to find value in historical work in relation to current concerns like, for example, aspects of communicative language teaching (DANIELS, PFINGSTHORN) or intercultural language teaching (HARVEY). A focus on the relatively recent past may have implications, too, for the kind of historical sources which can be consulted, with new kinds of source becoming available, for example via video- and audio-recordings. Serendipitous discoveries of relevant source material can occur, too, as the chapters by GIESLER and REH show. Yet at the same time, with a focus on this fairly recent past it might be more difficult to keep a distance, especially in cases where the present (of language learning and teaching) still seems to be very much defined by the recent past, as the chapters in the final section of the book illustrate.

Overall, the volume offers a global view on language education that sees language learning and teaching theory and practice as complementing each other. The contributions in this book show how the rather well-researched history of theory and programmatic ideas in the 20th century can be complemented by histories of practice which provide a fuller picture of language learning and teaching in the past, including the recent past and the past-in-the-present. We hope that the book shows what can be gained from a view of language education which complements theory with considerations of context and practice, and that this approach can inform further research into the history of language learning and teaching, with benefits also for teacher education in the present day.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank all the authors for bearing with us during the publication process, Amsterdam University Press, in particular Louise Visser and the series editors of Language and Culture in History, the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) and the Hanse Institute for Advanced Studies (HWK Delmenhorst) for supporting our endeavour to promote grounded histories, and to Tim Giesler for his input into the conceptualization of the overall initiative.

Sabine Doff & Richard Smith, Bremen and Coventry, January 2022

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