

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

Richard Donato
University of Pittsburgh

Beginning at the end: Acknowledgement

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University of North Carolina, Charlotte

Donato, R. & Davin, K. (2018). The Genesis of classroom discursive practices as history-in-person processes, *Language Teaching Research*, 22(6), 739 – 760.

Donato, R. & Davin, K. (2018). History-in-Person: Ontogenesis and the professional formation of language teachers. In J. P. Lantolf, M. E. Poehner, & M. Swain (Eds.), *Handbook of sociocultural theory and second language learning* (457-471). New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group.

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

Goals of Presentation

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

An observation

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

Agree?

Talk-in-Interaction is hard to change

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

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

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

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

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

The quality of this **discursive mediation** is **consequential** to what learners can and cannot do.

Why is talk-in-interaction **hard to transform**?

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

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

Talk-in-interaction requires having **a theory of learning** that goes beyond input and output.

Previous Language Learning Experiences...

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

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

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

At the crossroads in teacher education



An observation that resonated

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

The (research)question is however...

IF...

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

THEN...

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

The Concept of History-in-Person

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

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

(Holland & Lave, 2001)

History-in-person as a dialectical process

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

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

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

History in Person

Enduring Struggles, Contentious Practice, Intimate Identities



School of American Research Advanced Seminar Series

Edited by Dorothy Holland and Jean Lave

Contributors Begoña Aretxaga, Steven Gregory, Dorothy Holland, Michael Kearney, Jean Lave, Daniel T. Linger, Lisa H. Malkki, Debra Skinner, Kay B. Warren, Paul Willis

The Theoretical Model

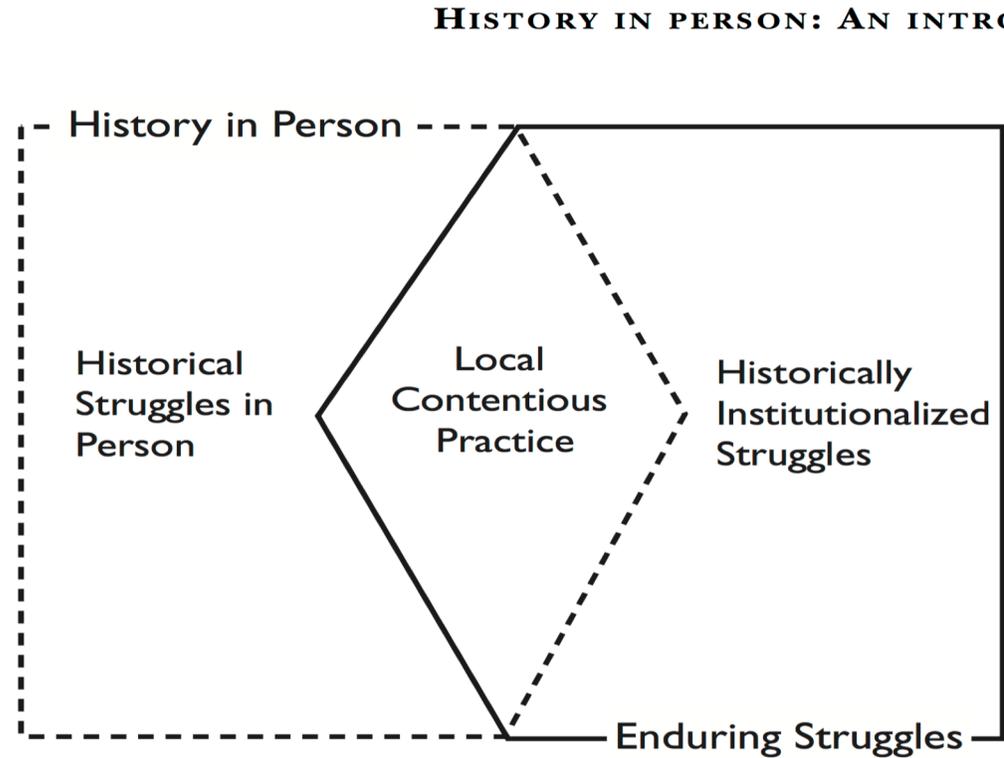


FIGURE 1.1.

Relations between history in person and enduring struggles.

Application of the theoretical model

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

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

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

FL/L2 Education: two histories intersect...

The **person history** – novice teachers' beliefs about language teaching abase don their own learning experiences (+/-)

plus

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

results in

Local **contentious, debatable, or transformative** ways of thinking and acting.

The study: research question

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

Participants and Setting

| Pseudonym | Language | Degree | Setting | Level |
|------------------|-----------------|---------------|-------------------|--------------|
| Brian | French | Graduate | Urban High School | AP French |
| Sue | Spanish | Undergrad | Urban High School | Spanish III |

Data sources linking past to present

Thought-based Data Sources

Autobiographic account of language learning experiences.

Practice-based Data Sources

Four video-recorded lessons

Brian

Studied in France after 6 years of language study.

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

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

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

Brian: Thought-based data

Feelings of Frustration and Humiliation

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

Brian: Practice-based data

B: Il et elle (5.1)

S: soit

B: soit (3.1) soit

S: soit (Imitating Brian) (Laughter)

B: oui (.) très *bon prononciation (.) très belle

...

B: ils et elles? aient:: (2.1) aient::

S: so you just don't pronounce the n and the t at the end? aient::

CT: oui (.) comme Fonzie

B: aient:: (falling intonation) ((laughter)) ((imitating a character from a TV series that aired from the mid-70s to the mid-80s))

CT: elles (.) elles sont sont trop jeunes

B: Vous connaissez Arthur Fonzerelli?

Ss: non ((choral response))

Brain: History-in-Person in Action

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

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

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

History-in-person in action

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

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

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

Sue

Third-year undergraduate majoring in Spanish.

Enrolled in methods course and student teaching.

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

Sue: Thought-based data

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

Sue: the past meets the present

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

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

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

Sue: contradiction and compromise

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

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

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

Sue: local contentious practice

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

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

Brian and Sue: contrasting cases

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

Brian's school-based experience provided **affordances** that allowed his historical challenges learning French to be addressed in his present clinical circumstances.

So what can we do as Teacher Educators?

Re-visit the **past** to **transform** the **present**

Bring the past into the present

Freeman (2002) states that“...teachers’ mental lives are storied or narrative webs of past and present experiences”



Why embrace (unplug) the (hi)story?

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

Reflecting on historical learning experiences along with **current or future practice** is a way for teachers to improve their own practices, discursive or otherwise, by investigating their **own lived experiences** as learners.

What's the (hi)story?



Harnessing the power of the past

Beliefs formed in **one's past and brought into one's present** provides a **powerful source of teacher learning** (Phipps & Borg, 2009) and a recognition of contradictions (Golombek & Johnson, 2004).

The history-in-person essay

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Negative (hi)stories

Zero speaking

All fill-in-the-blank activities

Drill the rule, nothing more - “a big junk of information”

Dated materials

Teacher never cracked a smile

No consideration of student difficulties

Only corrected workbook exercises in class

Writing was reduced to following MLA formatting and grammar

Class was only ‘a proof’ about how much we had learned at home.

Positive (hi)stories

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

The type of teacher I want to be: 4 themes

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

Themes connected to future learning

Concepts based on past experience

Communicative confidence

Be comprehensible

Establish a connection

Learn from students and monitor

Connect with student ideas

Future pedagogical concepts

Willingness to communicate

Learn through language use

Relational pedagogy

Dynamic Assessment in the ZPD

Meaningful interactions

One noteworthy comment

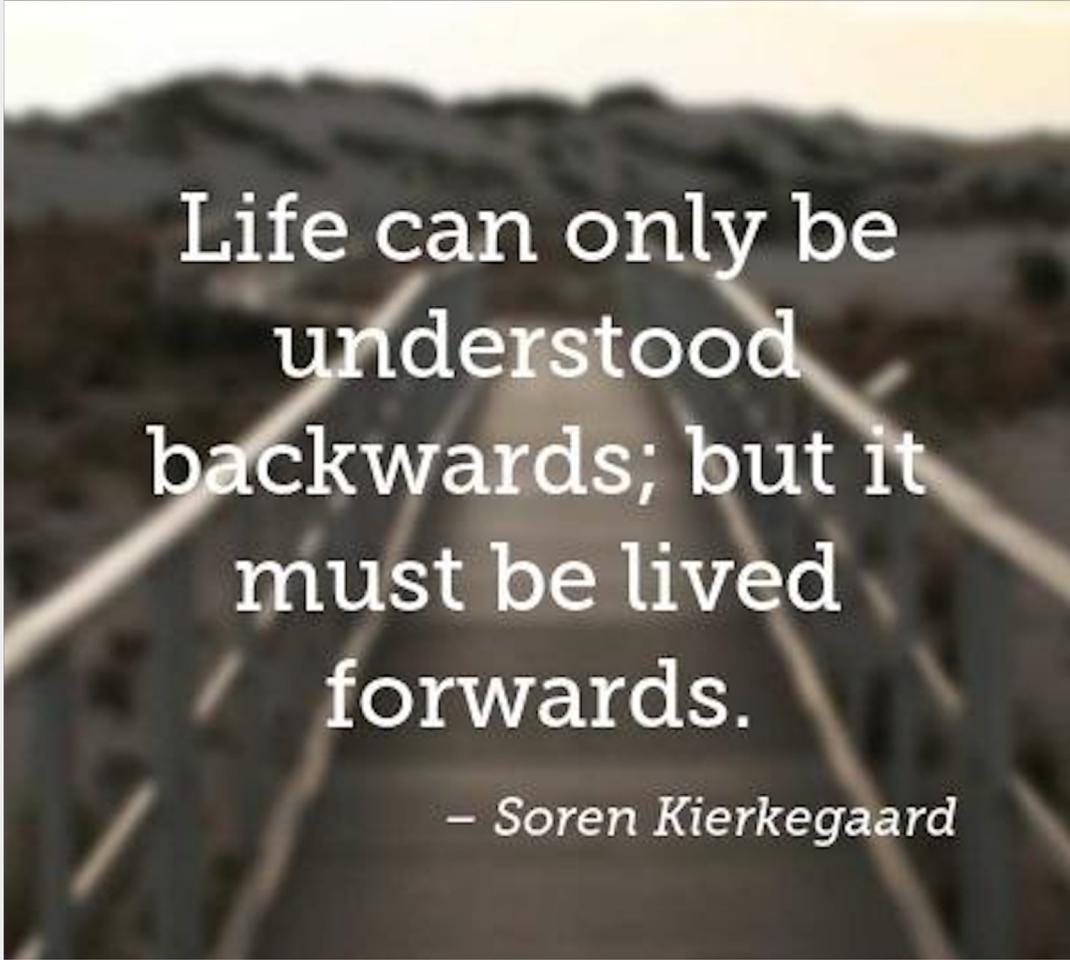
“Now, as I write this short essay about the consequences of positive and negative experiences on my teaching, I look even deeper into my memories. Those details that I had perhaps ignored now appear and make me think about what is good and what is not so good when it comes to teaching.”

Concluding comment

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

EXPLAINS their current **identities** as teachers, their struggles, and their practices, while, at the same time, remaining

ALIVE and **IN PERSON** and available as a **source** for transformation of their thinking and their work as teachers.



Life can only be
understood
backwards; but it
must be lived
forwards.

– *Soren Kierkegaard*

THANK YOU for listening

donato@pitt.edu