

# EDITORIAL

## WHO'S EDUCATING THE TEACHER EDUCATORS? THE ROLE OF SELF-STUDY IN TEACHER EDUCATION PRACTICES (S-STEP) IN ADVANCING THE RESEARCH ON THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF SECOND LANGUAGE TEACHER EDUCATORS AND THEIR PEDAGOGIES

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*“While we are making gains in building that specialized knowledge base for teacher preparation and professional development, we have neglected the study of teacher educators. The assumption that a good teacher will become a good teacher educator is prevalent in the field but has not been systematically examined.”*

(Knight, Lloyd, Arbaugh, Gamson, McDonald & Nolan, 2014, p. 268).

The assumption that Knight and her colleagues share should sound familiar to many second language teachers. A long-standing popular myth that requires constant debunking is the superiority of the native-speaker in second language teaching and learning. Decades of scholarship, both empirical and conceptual (e.g., Braine, 1999; Davies, 1991; Phillipson, 1992) have effectively discredited the assumption that proficiency in the target language (native speaker or not) is all that is required to be a good language teacher. Have we done enough to challenge this assumption as it applies to second language teacher educators? The words of Knight and her colleagues (2014) are from a special issue of the *Journal of Teacher Education*, and were addressed to the general teacher education research community —across all disciplines. In this brief essay, I wish to raise this call specifically for second language teacher education (SLTE). I provide a short rationale and argue that self-study in teacher education practices (S-STEP) offers one strong yet under-utilized response.

### The professional development of second language teacher educators

The collection of articles in this issue of *Íkala*, dedicated to SLT professional development, is testament to the valuable role that SLT educators, professionals who work at the nexus of theory and practice, play in contributing to the knowledge base and in improving classroom practice. It is true that teacher learners

often rely heavily on the ways in which they were taught when developing their own practices (Lortie, 1975), but their knowledge of theories, methods, and policies are also mediated through their teacher education programs and instructors. Despite the critical role of teacher educators, we lack robust scholarship on how second language teacher educators develop —as scholar practitioners, as researchers and the implications for teacher learning (Borg, 2015; Percy & Sharkey, forthcoming; Wright, 2010). Over the last fifteen plus years, publications on SLTE, whether handbooks (e.g., Burns & Richards, 2009), reviews of the research (e.g., Wright, 2010) and/or approaches to SLTE (e.g., Freeman, 2016; Johnson, 2009; Johnson & Golombek, 2016) highlight issues, processes, conceptual frameworks, and typical practices (e.g., reflective practice; classroom inquiry; peer collaborations), etc., but with little attention paid to the role of the language teacher educator.

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In their paradigm-shifting article of twenty years ago, Freeman and Johnson (1998) called for a reconceptualization of the knowledge base for second language teacher education (SLTE) placing teachers as learners and as learners of teaching as central to SLTE. A strong strand throughout the special topic issue of *TESOL Quarterly* that Freeman and Johnson edited, was the valuing of teachers' voices, perspectives and processes in their learning and articulation of their learning. We need to apply similar thinking to the professional development of SLT educators; to focus on second language teacher educators as learners and professionals who must often “blur the lines between analysis and action, inquiry and experience, theorizing and doing teacher education” (Cochran-Smith, 2005, p. 2) and whose scholarship of practice creates and opens for examination the pedagogy of SLTE.

### The role of S-STEP

Epistemologically and methodologically consistent with this view of teacher educators is

Self-Study in Teacher Education Practices (S-STEP), a type of practitioner inquiry undertaken by teacher educators with the dual purpose of improving their practice while also acknowledging their role in teacher learning and the larger project of preparing high quality teachers. S-STEP has its roots in action research and reflective practice, particularly from a critical, social justice perspective (Vanassche & Kelchtermans, 2015). S-STEP has been recognized as making an important contribution to the scholarship of teacher education pedagogies and practices (Loughran, 2014; Zeichner, 2007). To be clear, I am not claiming that S-STEP is the only research genre or the best one to address the call put forth by Knight et al. (2014) and others, but it is one I hope *Íkala* readers will consider as they pursue further research on SLTE professional development.

Internationally, S-STEP has gained legitimacy and acceptance as a research genre in the general education research community as witnessed by publications in influential, peer-reviewed research journals (*Review of Educational Research; Journal of Teacher Education of Australia; Teaching and Teacher Education; Educational Research; Journal of Teacher Education*); an expanding collection of methodology books (see, e.g., Lassonde, Galman, & Kosnik, 2009; Loughran, Hamilton, LaBoskey, & Russell, 2004); and, in 2004, the creation of a peer-reviewed journal, *Studying Teacher Education*, solely dedicated to S-STEP. However, S-STEP is relatively absent from the applied linguistics/SLTE journals and monographs (Percy & Sharkey, forthcoming; Sharkey & Percy, forthcoming). This absence is a bit surprising given the strong strands of reflective practice, critical literacies/pedagogies, teacher identity, the promotion of more inclusive, expansive research methodologies within SLTE, and the recent calls for more empirical research in SLTE (e.g., Barkhuizen, 2016; Canagarajah, 2016; Farrell, 2013; Johnson, 2015; Hawkins & Norton, 2009). It is beyond the scope of this essay to delve deeper into the rationale for this gap in

the SLTE literature but I encourage *Íkala* readers new to S-STEP to explore this area of research.

Readers may still be wondering what a S-STEP perspective adds to the research on or knowledge base of second language teacher professional development. One critical contribution is a line of questioning that accompanies interpretation of any empirical study or reflective essay that focuses on a particular practice or recommended intervention. A S-STEPer always raises questions regarding the role of the of the teacher educator when considering the purported impact of a focus practice or intervention (e.g., the effectiveness of a professional learning community; the practice of socializing teacher learners into a research incubator). If we acknowledge that the teacher educator mediates teacher learning, we need to consider who that teacher educator is, how his/her philosophy, ideology, experience, social identity, and pedagogical expertise, affect the implementation of a particular practice. Similar to Freeman and Johnson's (1998) focus on the role of the language teacher as a learner of teaching, teacher educators are learners of SLTE. S-STEP invites and values the teacher educator voice in these inquiries. Two examples from this issue include Ana María Sierra's study on the impact of a school-based professional learning community on one teacher, and José Vicente Abad and Linda Katherine Pineda's reflection on their mentor-mentee relationship. As a S-STEPer I would argue that Ana María's skill as a facilitator of a professional learning community (PLC) is an important factor in understanding the impact of the PLC on Marcela's development. In a similar vein, I see José Vicente Abad's mentoring style and abilities as crucial to Linda Katherine Pineda's experience in the *semillero*.

## Closing

Not every study on professional development requires or even benefits from a S-STEP perspective. Several articles in this issue provide valuable insights into teacher knowledge/beliefs of a particular topic or area (e.g., Frank Giraldo's needs

assessment on teacher's beliefs and practices in assessment). S-STEP does not replace or supersede other research genres. However, I hope that readers interested in the larger topic of professional development within SLT will consider S-STEP when they begin to address the crucial, necessary question regarding the professional development of SLT educators.

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**How to reference this article:** Sharkey, J. (2018). Who's educating the teacher educators? The role of self-study in teacher education practices (S-STEP) in advancing the research on the professional development of second language teacher educators and their pedagogies. *Íkala, Revista de Lenguaje y Cultura, 23*(1), pp. 15-18. DOI: 10.17533.udea/ikala.v23n01a02