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BOOK REVIEW



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Karen E. Johnson, Paula R. Golombek, and Jacob Rieker (2025). Transformative L2 Teacher Education Innovations: Insights from Vygotskian Sociocultural Theory. New York: Routledge. ISBN: 9781032825649

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The book entitled *Transformative L2 Teacher Education Innovations: Insights from Vygotskian Sociocultural Theory* by Johnson Karen, Golombek Paula, and Jacob Rieker, is a 2025 Routledge volume of empirical studies grounded in Vygotskian Sociocultural Theory (VSCI). Across 11 chapters, contributors from diverse international contexts document praxis-centered innovations into which L2 teachers are intentionally led via conceptual tools, goal-directed activities, and responsive mediation. Chapters are organized sequentially to trace how receptive mediation, conceptual tools, and goal-directed activity foster transformative professional growth.

In chapter 1, Johnson and Golombek emphasize how VSCT-informed research in SLTE goes beyond mere description of teacher learning; it intentionally designs interventions that encourage cognitive-emotional growth through organized mediational spaces. To take into account the divergent empirical studies in the volume, the authors introduce a tripartite framework: Innovation (purposeful changes to instructional practices), Intentionality (the theoretically grounded rationale behind design choices and receptive mediation), and Intervention (the dynamic process of teacher learning). This framework bridges theory and practice.

Chapter 2 by Alonso and Casal explores a VSCT-informed Concept-Based Language Instruction (C-BLI) intervention within an 11-week TESOL methods course. The authors provide scaffolded workshops, practice-teaching rehearsals, and stimulated-recall sessions in accordance with Galperin's five phases of concept internalization, through the "C-BLI wheel" to link theory to practice via example cohesion lessons. The chapter highlights how structured and theory-driven mediation equips novices with adjustable pedagogical strategies for unseen contexts.

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Golombek's Chapter 3 introduces "tiny talks"—organized peer dialogues following teaching sessions—as a method to reveal novice teachers' cognitive and emotional processes in real time, contrasting with retrospective reflection journals. Grounded in Levinasian ethics and Vygotskian collaborative learning, these short discussions aide surface teaching "dramas" and enable peer scaffolding. The chapter summarizes replicable protocols for integrating tiny talks into teacher education, highlighting their capacity to gain immediate post-teaching experiences. However, scalability challenges arise in large groups, as Golombek renders no tangible strategies for systematically analyzing numerous dyadic interactions, risking anecdotal application.

Chapter 4 by Jacob Rieker, explores a novice English teacher's conceptual and identity-based growth through a Vygotsky-inspired concept-based language instruction (C-BLI) intervention. Using microgenetic analysis, stimulated recall, and restoring interviews, Rieker frames teacher development as cognitive-emotional *perezhivanie* within a designed social situation of development, arguing that learning involves conceptual shifts and identity renegotiation, not just skill acquisition. While appreciated for methodological rigor and theoretical coherence, the single-case design raises questions about generalizability, and reliance on advanced Vygotskian terminology may limit accessibility.

In Chapter 5, Worden-Chambers and Yazan present the Grammatical Profile Project (GPP), a pedagogical intervention grounded in Vygotskian Sociocultural Theory and cognitive grammar, aimed at confronting pre-service teachers' prescriptive views of grammar. Adopting three scientific constructs—meaning, variation, and prestige—as instruments, the semester-long project makes it possible to redefine grammar as socially embedded and meaning-making tool. As variation and meaning successfully reshaped candidates' ideologies, prestige, though rooted in sociopolitical hierarchy, was less susceptible to internalization and needed more sociohistorical contextualization. The study advocates for sustained and programmatic efforts to embed ideological clarity in curricula.

Chapter 6 by Agnoletto and Dellagnelo introduces a cyclical dialogic model of language teacher education that combines reflective writing and synchronous dialogue among novice teachers and their educators in the Brazilian EFL classroom. This model enables critical reflection of teaching activities and allows teachers to question pedagogical assumptions as well as address academic concepts, especially in grammar teaching. Through the emphasis on social interaction and reflective cycling, the model supports ongoing professional development in that it encourages teachers to revisit and solidify their beliefs. However, the chapter requires addressing practical implementation barriers such as time constraints, limited resources, and institutional assistance.

Amory in Chapter 7 discusses the transformative impact of VSCT-informed interventions on novice MA TESL teachers, encouraging shifts toward student-centered and dialogic instruction through intentional educator-designed activities. While emphasizing how these practices promote pedagogical reasoning and instructional change, the chapter overlooks challenges for actual implementation in a variety of environments. A deeper exploration of contextual diversity and the interplay between teacher agency and systemic constraints would strengthen the analysis, offering a more holistic evaluation of the interventions' applicability and effectiveness across educational environments.

Chapter 8 by Teemant et al. evaluates a critical sociocultural coaching intervention to improve teacher practices and student performance in multilingual classrooms. Drawing on Vygotsky's and Freire's work, the study utilizes a mixed-methods approach, demonstrating significant improvements in teacher practices and student achievement. The intervention emphasizes dialogic, contextualized learning environments that foster both teacher and student agency through

continuous reflection and adaptation. A deeper exploration of how power shifts in classroom dynamics would also strengthen the argument for systemic change.

Doyle in Chapter 9 presents a professional development program for adult ESL tutors and introduces the concept of language as social practice (LSP), aimed at enhancing their tutoring practices. Grounded in Vygotskian sociocultural theory, the program helps tutors move beyond prescribed materials to engage learners in meaningful social practices. The study shows that applying LSP improves tutoring practices and learning outcomes by making abstract concepts more tangible. Further longitudinal studies would be useful to assess the lasting impact of the program.

In Chapter 10, Barahona et al. examines the use of dialogic feedback in Chilean EFL teacher education, focusing on a self-study by teacher educators who shifted from directive to reflective and collaborative feedback. The study emphasizes the importance of reflective practice in developing preservice teachers' (PSTs) pedagogical reasoning. It shows that dialogic feedback enhances PSTs' autonomy and professional growth but highlights challenges in balancing support with independent reflection. The study suggests dialogic feedback can lead to more agentive teaching experiences, fostering ownership over professional development.

Chapter 11 by Meredith Doran and Jacob Rieker, presents a faculty development program for English-Medium Instruction (EMI) faculty in Taiwan, prepared to enhance pedagogical innovation using Vygotskian sociocultural theory. The program involves personalized coaching to aid faculty reflect on and innovate their teaching practices, emphasizing imagination in pedagogy. The study demonstrates the effectiveness of this approach, showing how it encourages engaging and reflective teaching. However, it lacks emphasis on the direct impact of these changes on student learning outcomes.

To sum up, this volume is an essential, theoretically grounded resource for applied linguists, TESOL practitioners, and bilingual education scholars seeking to implement and study transformative, VSCT-informed teacher education innovations. Yet its reliance on small-scale or single-case designs limits broader applicability, and it stops short of linking teacher growth to measurable student outcomes or tackling the practical challenges of scaling up such programs. Going forward, longitudinal studies that explicitly connect teacher mediation strategies to learner achievement, pragmatic models for sustainable, resource-sensitive implementation, and user-friendly expositions of advanced VSCT concepts are needed—an agenda echoed in Sherman, Teemant, and Prada's (2025) work on dialogic coaching and Kushki and Nassaji's (2024) dynamic assessment studies.

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